

中西文化中性别对语言和互动方式的影响

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摘要: 本文在前人关于语言和性别关系的研究基础上, 探究了中西文化中性别对语言和互动方式的影响的异同。结果发现, 中西文化中的语言形式和女性交际方式展现出一定的相似点, 即都展现了对女性歧视的特点。同时也表现了不同特点, 即中国文化的恭维与回应则更强调信息评价功能。而西方文化的恭维和回应更注重交际作用。

关键词: 性别; 语言; 互动方式; 中西文化

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1. Introduction:

This section consists of the following aspects: research background, research purposes, research significance, and the structure of the study.

1.1. Research Background

A human being can be divided into men and women according to gender. While language is specific to humans, the relationship between language and gender has drawn the attention of researchers from many disciplines such as linguistics, sociology, biology, psychology, etc. Among them, linguistics mainly puts its focus on questions like Is different gender described by different language forms? Does different gender use different words and utterances or show different attitudes when they communicate with others? Language and gender differences have been the important research topics of sociolinguistics since the 1970s. The researches mainly involve two aspects: language form and language use. From the perspective of language form, researchers mainly explore how the forms of referring to men and women in language reflect gender discrimination in culture. From the perspective of language use, researchers mainly pay attention to the differences in the tendency of male and female speakers to use language. While most researchers focus on the study of language and gender in their own cultures without paying attention to comparison among cultures. Different cultures may have different social conventions that influence language use between men and women. Findings found in one culture may not apply to another culture. Therefore, this research will make a comparison of the relationship between language and gender between Western culture and Chinese culture to see whether gender plays the same role in the language in the two cultures.

1.2. Research Purposes

The purpose of this research is to explore how language forms referring to men and

women differ and how men and women use language differently when interacting with others. More importantly, the two questions are discussed within Western culture and Chinese culture to see whether they are the same situations.

1.3. Research Significance

Differing from most previous research, this paper will make comparison research between Western culture and Chinese culture in terms of language and gender, which enable us to see how culture influences language form and use between men and women. In addition, the discussion about language use in the two cultures also enables us to learn and know more about their cultures and can help us avoid misunderstanding and communication failure when interacting with people from the two cultures.

1.4 The Structure of the Study

Specifically, this paper will first make a review of studies on language and gender in Western culture and Chinese culture. Based on previous findings, specific examples will be given to illustrate the findings further. Then, the similarities and differences in language forms and use between men and women in the two cultures will be discussed. Furthermore, additional findings will be provided based on observations. Finally, a conclusion about the main content of the paper will be made.

2. Literature Review

This section will do a literature review of the relationship between gender and language both aboard and at home. Based on the review, the study will find new perspectives to study the influence of gender on language in Western and Chinese culture.

2.1 Researches Abroad

It is commonly accepted that there are three theories of language and gender aboard: deficit theory, dominance theory, and difference theory (Freed 2003:701).

1) Deficit theory

Jespersen is one of the linguists who were first aware of language and gender differences. In his book: *Language* (1922), one chapter was used to describe the differences between men's language and women's language. The rise of the feminist movement in the 1960s and 1970s inspired more researchers' interest in the relationship between gender and language. Under the background, Lakoff (1975) published her book: *Language and Woman's Place* in which several features of women's language were discussed in American culture. According to her observation, women tend to use more hedge, booster, and expletive in their word choice. Women often use rising tone in declarative sentences at the phonological level and they employ more formal, polite language forms at the syntactic level. Due to these features, women's language shows a

unique style: obedient, uncertain and powerless, etc. Lakoff (1975) pointed out that men's language is the standard form, while women's is a variant, which is inherently inferior to men. In a patriarchal society, men have more power to speak while women themselves are deficient.

2) Dominance theory

Dominance theory arose in the 1970s and its main representatives are D. Zimmerman, C. West, Spender, P. Trudgill, etc. They believe that women are in an inferior social position and are passive in communication. The differences in interaction styles between men and women result from men's dominance over women, which reflects men's superior social status. The experimental results of Zimmerman and West (1975) showed that men often interrupted women's conversations to control their turn of speaking for long. Women chose to be silent rather than regaining the initiative of discourse after they were interrupted. According to their views, men's interruption of women is a way of controlling women using their power. Brown (1980) and Holmes (1986) found that women's interaction styles are more euphemistic and polite compared with men. Fishman (1978) found that women asked questions more frequently. P. Trudgill (1974) pointed out that women use more standard language forms because they pay more attention to factors such as their image and social status.

3) Difference theory

Difference theory began after the 1980s and it thinks that the difference between men's and women's language is the result of the different sub-culture they are in. Maltz and Borker (1982) are representatives of the different theories. They analyzed the causes of language gender differences from the perspective of sociolinguistic sub-cultures and concluded that men's interaction styles have the characteristic of competition, while women's are more cooperative. Goodwin's (1980) survey found that the boy and girl groups in childhood showed different language styles. The boy group has a distinct hierarchy and they tend to use more imperative sentences. The girl group emphasizes the concept of equality and uses more sentences that express suggestions. Tannen (1990) believes that in the process of socialization, men and women have cultivated their characteristics of speech which are consistent with their respective social roles following social requirements and expectations. Men's status awareness is strong so they show a tendency to compete. Women focus more on maintaining good relations with others, showing a tendency to cooperate and communicate.

2.2 Researches at Home

Research about language and gender at home started relatively later, about in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Researches in Chinese culture are more scattered and are not as systematic and rich as research in Western culture. The research can be generally divided into two aspects: sexism in language forms and interaction style differences (Wu

2009: 289).

1) Sexism in language forms

Sexism in language forms is reflected in language asymmetry and this sexism mainly refers to discrimination against women. Research of this kind claim that language forms referring to men are the subject, while language forms referring to women are the subsidiary variant (Wu 2009: 289). Chen Jianmin (1999) discussed the asymmetry of the meaning of Chinese words and the phenomenon that words referring to men come first. Wang Zhiqiang's *Gender Discrimination in Chinese Appellations* (2000) introduces the existence of sex discrimination in the use of Chinese appellations. For example, there are many blanks in the Chinese appellations, that is, the asymmetry in language forms referring to men and women. Qian Jin (2003) analyzed gender discrimination in Chinese idioms and colloquialisms.

2) Interaction style differences

The study of gender differences in verbal communication is a new wave of linguistics in China. Many scholars start from daily communication discourse, analyzing the differences between men and women in terms of topic selection, the amount of discourse, ways of speaking, communication strategies, etc. Cao Zhiyun (1987) conducted a quantitative study on the use frequency of modal words in the oral record literature *Beijing Ren*. He found that women use “吗”, “呢”, “吧” and “啊” (Chinese modal words) in the interrogative sentences and imperative sentences more frequently than men. Wei (2001) found that men choose to talk more about achievements while women tend to talk more about clothing and appearance when it comes to compliments. Women are generally more euphemistic and polite than men in terms of requests, praises, and responses (Ding 2002). According to Zhang Qian (2005), in the heterosexual conversation mode, there is no significant difference between young men and women in terms of frequency of interjection, but men's interruptions of women are significantly higher than women in terms of success rate, and men can control topics more successfully after interrupting women. Guo (2002) believes that gender can indirectly affect interaction styles. He found that boys and girls have similar discourse interaction styles, and both have the characteristics of competition and submissiveness. However, children will also respond accordingly in different social situations.

3. Analysis of the Influence of Gender on Language and Interaction Style in Western and Chinese Cultures

This part will do a comparative analysis of the influence of gender on language and interaction style in Western and Chinese cultures to find out the similarities and differences.

3.1 Similarities of language features influenced by gender

1) Sexism in language forms

Some language forms referring to men and women reflect the idea of sexism. As said above, Wang Zhi-Qiang (2000) pointed out that there are many blanks in the Chinese appellations. For example, a male teacher can introduce his wife to his students as: “你们师娘”, but a female teacher cannot introduce her husband as “你们师爹”, that is, there is no appropriate appellation for students to call the husband of their female teacher. Like English, the word representing women like “女” (is equal to female, woman, or lady in English) is often added to words referring to occupations, like: “女医生”(women doctor), “女作家”(women writer), “女部长” (female minister), etc. According to Wang, the proportion of women in the world is more than 50 percent, while the pronoun “他”(he) outnumbers “她” (she) by four to one. In ancient China, sexism is more distinct in appellations of women by themselves when they speak to their husbands. Men often call themselves: “臣妾”, “妾身”, “奴家”, “奴婢” and even “贱妾”(words demeaning women).

Similarly, English language forms also have the idea of sexism. In English, for example, some words which end up with suffixes like “-or”, “-er” etc. can both refer to men and women, like an actor, waiter, etc. However, some suffixes like: “-ess”, “-ine” etc. are artificially invented to refer to women, like: “actor-actress”, “waiter-waitress”, “hero-heroine” etc. Some words that represent occupations of higher social status like the president, doctor, lawyer, etc. are added by words like: “woman”, “lady” and “female” in their front to refer to the female of that occupation, like: “female president”, “woman doctor” etc. In addition, the scope and frequency of nouns and pronouns that represent men are larger and higher than those that represent women. For example, “he” and “man” rather than “she” and “woman” will be used when there is an unknown person in a context, while “she” and “woman” can only refer to a known female. Furthermore, sexism can also be seen in word order with words referring to men coming before words referring to women, like: “Mr. and Mrs.”, “boys and girls”, “husband and wife” etc.

2) Similarities of women’s interaction styles

In both cultures, women’s speeches tend to have features of indirect, weak, euphemistic, and polite. In Chinese culture, women tend to use more modal words like “啊”, “啦”, “吧”, and “呢” to make their speeches more indirect and euphemistic (Cao 1987:43-45). According to Lakoff (1975), women tend to use more meaningless adjectives, like: “gorgeous”, “cute” etc.; tag questions like it’s delicious isn’t it; hedges to avoid direct conveying an idea like: “I think”, “as far as I am concerned”; overly accurate grammar and courtesy expression, etc. In addition, women are more polite in both cultures. Women tend to use more questions to express suggestions or requirements. For example, women would say: “could you close the door, please?” even when they speak with an acquaintance, while men will probably say: “Close the door!” when they speak with an acquaintance. Furthermore, women’s speeches tend to be interrupted by

men more frequently and successfully in both cultures. The experiment of Zimmerman and West (1975) showed that men often use delayed minimal responses to interrupt women's speeches when they are tired of them and replace women to become the talker of the conversation. On the contrary, women often serve as listeners and give positive responses to encourage the speaker to talk. Similarly, Zhang Qian (2005) found that men can control conversational topics more successfully after interrupting women's talk.

3.2 Differences in language Features Influenced by Gender

1) Complements and response strategies

According to Feng's (2003) study, there are some differences between complements and response strategies in Chinese and English. His study showed that the frequency of women praising men and men praising men in Chinese is much higher than in English, which suggests that people in English praise men less frequently to avoid threatening their faces. In addition, the two topics: appearance and performance are used roughly equal in Chinese compliments, while in English the former is twice that of the latter. It is claimed that compliments of performance like: "You are an expert on it!" is an affirmation of people's talents and achievements and have strong evaluation meaning; compliments of appearance like: "You are looking terrific!" are mostly out of courtesy compliments to lubricate social relations. Therefore, English compliments focus on their communicative function, while Chinese compliments pay more attention to their information evaluation function. In terms of response to compliments, women tend to thank people who praise them compared to men, while men prefer to refuse compliments in China. In English, both men and women chose to accept compliments.

2) Women's family name

It is commonly known that women still keep their family names after they married their husbands in China although they are called "the family name of her husband+太太 or 夫人" like: "李太太", "王太太" etc., which is just like: "Mrs. Smith" in English. On the contrary, women in Western countries will change their family names to their husbands' after they married the men. For example, "Mary-Johnson" will become "Mary· Smith" after Mary married Jack· Smith.

4. Conclusion

In both cultures, there exists sexism in language forms referring to men and women with discrimination mainly against women, as can be seen in words that describe occupations, and appellations. Words describing women often have a marked form by additionally adding affixes or words that represent women. Appellations of women often demean them to a low social status. Also, women's languages are weaker, more powerless, and are often interrupted by men, which shows that it is men who are in the dominant position to talk, while women often only serve as listeners in conversations.

These are consistent with dominance theory which claims that men are superior in social status, while women are passive in interaction. It is also found that women tend to be more polite and cooperative when interacting with others, while men are more competitive, which is explained by difference theory. Regardless of the different views of the theories of language and gender, they are not completely contrary to each other. All three theories can provide explanations for some language phenomena. In early society, there is no doubt that it is a patriarchal society with men taking the dominant position over women. At this stage, sexism and inequality would inevitably be found in language forms referring to men and women and their language usage. As society develops, people's awareness of equality is higher. The feminist movement also promoted the reformation of languages. Until today, women's languages have changed a lot. The differences between women's and men's language can largely be explained by difference theory which states that it is the different sub-cultures that result in men's and women's language differences. However, the factor of men's dominance cannot be excluded. Men's dominance over women had lasted for a very long time and some influences have become a kind of customs that are deeply rooted. Therefore, we should conclude that the language difference between men and women is so complex that many reasons are responsible for it. Besides gender, language context, psychological factors of the speaker, social factors, etc. can also influence language use. They do not function singly but function together making languages as they are used.

There are also differences in men's and women's languages in Western and Chinese cultures. English compliments focus on their communicative function, while Chinese compliments pay more attention to their information evaluation function. Both men and women chose to accept compliments in response to compliments in English than in China, which can be explained by cultural differences in the two cultures: Westerners focus more on relations keeping employing compliments and tend to accept praise from others, while Chinese often praise others' achievements and try to keep a modesty image when receiving praises. Whether women change their family names after getting married in both cultures can be traced back to their different traditions.

In sum, the influence of gender on language and interaction style in Western and Chinese cultures are largely consistent with each other. Some specific language usages like compliments are different due to cultural differences.

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The Influence of Gender on language and Interaction Style in Western and Chinese Cultures

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Abstract: Based on previous research on the relationship between language and gender, this study explores the similarities and differences in the influence of gender on language and interaction style in Chinese and Western cultures. The results show that the language forms and women's communication styles in Chinese and Western cultures show certain similarities, that is, they both show the characteristics of discrimination against women. At the same time, it also shows different characteristics, that is, the compliments and responses of Chinese culture pay more attention to the place more emphasis on the function of information evaluation; while the compliments and responses of Western culture place more emphasis on the communicative function.

Keywords: gender; language; interaction style; Chinese and Western cultures

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