

Pragmatics of Refusal Speech Acts in Chinese and Ukrainian Languages: A Comparative Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This article conducts a comparative study on the use of refusal speech acts in Ukrainian and Chinese. The survey found that when conducting the refusal speech acts, Chinese people tend to use refusal strategies more indirectly, more vaguely and in greater quantities. These differences are related to the differences in social values between Chinese and Western cultures. Ukraine is a society that focuses on the individual, while China is a society that focuses on the group. This article conducts pragmatic analysis on the results of this survey within the framework of politeness and in combination with cultural background.

KEYWORDS

refusal speech acts; refusal strategies; social values politeness; cultural background

1 Introduction

In communication, communicators achieve their goals by speech acts. Language is the carrier of culture. The cultural factors contained in different social backgrounds are not the same, which leads to differences in the characteristics of speech act. When it comes to the implementation of refusal speech act in different cultures, the adoption tendency of refusal strategies are different. The purpose of adopting the refusal strategy is that the speaker strives to conceive the form and content of personal refusal from the other party's perspective so that the other party can easily understand and accept it. The choice of strategy is an "encoding" of the estimated offensiveness of the face-threatening act ^[1].

Refusal speech act is a speech act in which the communicator directly or indirectly denies the other party's intention when faced with the four speech acts of request, invitation, offer and suggestion. According to P. Brown & S. C. Levinson, "Face" is the "public self-image that every member of society wants to claim for himself, consisting in two related aspects: positive face and negative face." and refusal speech act is essentially a "face-threatening act". Thus, certain strategies is necessary to adopted to save it. However, people in different cultural backgrounds have different implementation scales for factors that affect speech act, such as social distance and power relations, etc. That is, "people in different cultures differ in which factor is shrunk or enlarged first and how it is shrunk or enlarged" ^[1]. Therefore, the refusal speech act in different cultural backgrounds bears the cultural imprint of the nation to which it belongs.

Since refusal strategies often have different manifestations in different cultural backgrounds, the appropriate use of this speech act requires strong language competences and high communication skills. If it is not applied or understood properly, pragmatic errors will occur, leading to communication failure. If it is applied or understood improperly, pragmatic errors will occur, leading to communication failure and even damaging the interpersonal relationship between the two

parties. Therefore, this article focuses on refusal speech behavior and use DCT (Discourse Completion Task) to conduct an investigation, to analyze the pragmatic characteristics between Chinese and Ukrainian refusal strategies combined with cultural factors.

2 Study Design

This survey adopted a written questionnaire with DCT as the main question form. With reference to previous studies, this questionnaire was carefully designed, including 10 scenarios close to life and taking into account the relative social status of the two parties in communication. The questionnaire used was formed in Chinese and Ukrainian versions, and a total of 120 valid questionnaires were collected. The subjects were college students, including 60 native Chinese speakers and 60 native Ukrainian speakers.

3 Theoretical background

Politeness as a universal phenomenon, it is inevitably involved in the study of the pragmatics of speech acts. According to B. Fraser, there are four main systems of research on politeness so far: the social norm, the conversational maxim view, the face saving view, the conversational contract view^[2].

The social norm points out that any society has a set of relatively clear norms to constrain people's behavior and way of thinking in a certain situation. If a behavior follows this convention, it is considered polite, otherwise it is considered impolite.

The conversational maxim view was proposed based on P. Grice's cooperative principle (CP), and its main representative is G. Leech's politeness principle (PP), which maximizes (other things being equal) the expression of polite beliefs; and minimizes (other things being equal) the expression of impolite beliefs. And under these two general requirements, there are six specific maxims as follows: Tact maxim (in directives¹ and commissives²); Generosity maxim (in directives and commissives); Approbation maxim (in expressives³ and representatives⁴); Modesty maxim (in expressives and representatives); Agreement maxim and Sympathy maxim^[3].

The face saving view is a politeness model proposed by P. Brown & S. C. Levinson^[4] based on Goffman's^[5] "face theory". It states that "a rational person with face needs" has two kinds of face, namely "negative face" and "positive face". The former means that one does not want others to impose on oneself, and one's behavior is not interfered with or hindered by others; The latter refers to the desire to be approved and liked by others. the conversational contract view.

The conversational contract view was proposed by B. Fraser, who pointed out that the emergence of politeness is a dynamic process. The two parties in communication already have some quasi-contractual obligations before the conversation. As the communication situation changes, the two parties may renegotiate the contract to make their speech act conform to the standards of social norms^[2].

1 Directives: Get the addressee to carry out some action. Such as: commands, request, dares, entreaties.

2 Commissives: Commit the speaker to some future course of action. Such as: promises, threats, vows.

3 Expressives: Indicate the speaker's psychological state or mental attitude. Such as: greeting, congratulating, thanking, apologizing.

4 Representatives: Represent some state of affairs. Such as: assertions, claims, descriptions.

4 Cultural Background

It is not difficult to see that Chinese and Western cultures both have special traditional cultures and values formed by their own unique historical development processes.

From the perspective of the history of the formation of Chinese cultural values, Chinese traditional social culture is mainly centered on family, clan, and is closely related to the ancestors' farming culture based on settled agriculture. In agricultural activities, the "collectivity" based on blood relationship plays a very important role, thus forming the traditional Chinese family-centered social values and the group relationship behavior orientation system.

Under the profound influence of Confucianism, traditional Chinese culture highly advocates the concept of "he" (harmony). China is a nation with a strong traditional thought of "he" (harmony), which advocates that "the use of etiquette, harmony is the most precious thing". The meaning of this expression is that to achieve the most fundamental requirement of "li" (property/ritual, approximating contemporary politeness), which is the social moral norms, by taking "he" (harmony) as the standard. Therefore, as the core values of Chinese culture, "collectivity" and "li" (ritual) have become important ways to achieve harmony in traditional Chinese culture. In Chinese culture, people emphasize "we" and "collective" rather than "I" and "individual"; "seeking common ground".

At the same time, the "collectivity" is constrained by "hierarchy" and "li" (ritual). "Hierarchy" as another core value of ancient Chinese culture refers to the emphasis on seniority and social relationships to construct social order. The principles established by Confucian ethics and maintained by "li" (ritual) regulates social interaction between people. Therefore, the concepts of "mian zi" (face) and "li" (ritual) play important roles in Chinese interpersonal relationships.

On the other hand, Ukrainian culture, as part of the most European cultural circle, belongs to the Western culture. "Western peoples, who are mainly nomadic, have long formed a society centered on the individual and with relatively weak blood ties" ^[6]. After thousands of years of cultural and historical development, individuality, equality and the rule of law constitute have become the important values of Western traditional culture and society. The concepts of individual freedom, freedom of speech, and equality for all, etc. proposed during the European Enlightenment were widely accepted by people and became the dominant cultural values in Western society.

In addition, religious culture in Western societies, as an important part, has a profound impact on people's lives. According to Christian teaching, life is created by God, so all people are born equal. Therefore, the core value of Western individualism dominates social interactions and behaviors among Western individuals. This is manifested in people's pursuit of freedom, individuality, etc.

Therefore, based on different cultural backgrounds, different speech behavior styles and characteristics are formed. Chinese people tend to be indirect and ambiguous in communication. People usually express their personal ideas indirectly through implicit euphemisms and roundabout strategies. The purpose is to leave a buffer zone for both parties in communication, so as to avoid interpersonal conflicts, protect the face of both parties and maintain harmonious interpersonal relationships. However, Ukrainians prefer directness and clarity in their speech acts. In communication, they like to get straight to the point. This "directness" is not only a reflection of pragmatism and efficiency, but is also seen as a manifestation of honesty and frankness. It requires people to be consistent in their words and deeds and in their appearance and inner thoughts.

5 Pragmatic analysis

After sorting out the questionnaire results, it can be found that the number of occurrences of "words expressing refusal" is 125 in Chinese and 224 in Ukrainian. That is, the use of "words

expressing rejection" in Ukrainian is nearly twice that in Chinese. This confirms the reflection of the above-mentioned cultural factors in speech behavior, that is, Chinese people follow the principle of "he" (harmony) and try to avoid using words which express the refusal clearly, in order to reduce the threat to the other party's face and maintain harmonious interpersonal relationships. However, The concept of equality and pursuit of freedom in Ukrainian culture make the relationship between people relatively simple, and people can express their ideas without any scruples. Also the "Frankness" of Ukrainian speech act is also a manifestation of sincerity and respect for the other party.

On the other hand, in terms of the total number of indirect refusal strategies used, there are 891 in Chinese and 804 in Ukrainian. It can be seen that compared with Ukrainian, the implementation of refusal speech acts in Chinese is more complicated and requires more strategies to be adopted. Because of the cultural background mentioned above, in the Chinese context, there are many factors that need to be considered when implementing the face-threatening speech act—refusal, such as differences in social status, order of seniority, and compliance with the requirements of "li" (ritual), etc. Therefore, in order to achieve the ultimate goal of "harmony", a combination of strategies is necessary.

There are great differences in the adoption of the sub-strategies of "avoidance", "false consent" and "ambiguous refusal". The number of occurrences of "avoidance" is 11 in Chinese and none in Ukrainian; The number of occurrences of "false consent" is 18 in Chinese and 8 in Ukrainian; The number of occurrences of "ambiguous refusal" is 27 in Chinese and 8 in Ukrainian. This also reflects the characteristics of speech act in the two cultural backgrounds of China and Ukraine. That is, it reflects the "ambiguity" and "indirectness" of Chinese culture and the "clarity" and "directness" of Ukrainian culture.

Moreover, in terms of sub-strategies such as "explanations", "thanks", "apologies", "praise", and "suggestions", there are great similarities in Chinese and Ukrainian context. It can be proved that both in Chinese culture and in Ukrainian culture, efforts to be polite are consistent. For example, "explanations" can make it easier for the other party to accept; "thanks" and "apologies" as highly polite speech acts can reduce the threat to the other party's face; "praise" and "suggestions" are also a display of a positive attitude towards the other party for conveying an effort to maintain friendship. In summary, these sub-strategies adopted are conducive to avoiding embarrassing situations and maintaining good interpersonal relationships.

6 Conclusion

In conclusion, by analyzing the survey data comprehensively, we can draw two conclusions: 1) Similarities: Chinese and Ukrainians both strive for politeness when implementing rejection speech behaviors, and try their best to reduce the threat to the other party's face and maintain harmonious interpersonal relationships. 2) Differences: Chinese people are more indirect than Ukrainians in using rejection strategies, and adopt more strategies. This phenomenon reflects the essential characteristics of the politeness connotations of Chinese and Western cultures.

Refusal is an essentially impolite speech act, while it is a common phenomenon for people who use different languages and live in different countries. It is necessary to adopt remedy strategies and perform this kind of face-threatening speech act politely and appropriately. This article briefly explores the refusal strategies adopted by people in Ukrainian and Chinese culture through survey analysis, and conducts pragmatic analysis and discussion on the survey results in combination with cultural background, and obtains some valuable findings. However, it is impossible for this article to cover all aspects of refusal strategies in two cultures, and research on this topic still needs further

investigation and exploration.

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