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A CONTRASTIVE STUDY OF COMPLIMENT RESPONSES IN ENGLISH AND CHINESE

The paper represents a compliment as a special speech act that is broadly used in interpersonal communications. Compliments serve as the tool of the society, which is widely used in interpersonal communication. Under the historical background of economic globalization and during the course of collision and fusion of different cultures, it is undoubtedly being an art to use the responses to compliments. Due to ethnic and cultural difference, different languages have their own cultural characteristics. This paper reveals different responses to compliments in Chinese and English to make a specific study on the different cultural characteristics of the two nationalities. It is beneficial to decrease and avoid the misunderstandings, embarrassment and the confusing situations that may occur in intercultural communications.

Key words: Compliment response, intercultural communication, difference.

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Ағылшын және қытай тілдерінде мархабат айтуды салыстырмалы түрде зерттеу

Мақалада қошемет ретінде тұлғааралық коммуникацияда ерекше қолданылатын сөйлеу актісі ол кеңінен қолданылады. Қошеметтер тұлғааралық қарым-қатынаста қоғамдық құрал ретінде кеңінен қызмет етеді. Тарихи алғышарттары негізінде экономикалық жаһандану мен әр түрлі мәдениеттер қақтығысы және тоғысында айтылған қошеметке дұрыс жауап беру де өнер болып табылады. Этникалық және мәдени айырмашылықтарына байланысты әр түрлі тілдердің өзіндік мәдени ерекшеліктері болады. Аталмыш мақала қытай және ағылшын тілдерінде айтылған қошеметтерге берілген жауаптардың айырмашылығын екі елдің өздеріне тән түрлі мәдени ерекшеліктерін қарастыра отырып арнайы зерттеуге арналған. Зерттеу мәдениаралық қарым-қатынас барысында түсінбеушілікті болдырмау және жағымсыз жағдайлардың туындауын азайту үшін тиімді.

Түйін сөздер: қошемет жауап, мәдениаралық коммуникация, ойын-сауық.

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Контрастное исследование ответов на комплименты в английском и китайском языках

В статье рассматривается комплимент как особый речевой акт, который широко используется в межличностной коммуникации. В условиях экономической глобализации и в ходе столкновения и слияния различных культур, несомненно, искусство адекватно отражать ответы на комплименты играет существенную роль. По причине этнических и культурных различий каждый язык имеет свои культурные особенности. Данная статья выявляет различные ответы на комплименты в китайском и английском языках с целью проведения выявления культурных особенностей двух

стран. Исследование носит прагматичный характер для избежания недоразумений, неловкостей и неприятных ситуаций, которые могут возникнуть в акте межкультурной коммуникации.

Ключевые слова: комплимент, ответ, межкультурная коммуникация, различия.

Introduction

Communicating with speakers of other languages is a complex behavior that requires both linguistic and pragmatic competence. Language is the main method in intercultural communication, while the responses to compliments is one of the most important and complex questions. Due to the difference of ethnic and culture, there are respectively vivid cultural characteristics among different languages. Therefore, it is of great significance to definitely understand and correctly use the compliment responses for intercultural communications.

Politeness is an important concept in everyday interactions, while it has also become increasingly popular as a focus of study in pragmatics and other disciplines in the past few decades. Compliments serves as the lube of the society, which is widely used in interpersonal communication. Being a pairing construction, compliments co-occur on the form of compliment-response to compliment. Using compliments and responses to compliments can make the social communications go on wheels, shorten the distance between each other and it is beneficial to maintain good interpersonal relationships. Under the historical background of economic globalization and the course of the collision a mutual fusion of different culture, it is undoubtedly being an art to use the responses to compliments. Different nationalities and the people with different cultural background use the different responses strategies for the same compliment.

Main part

Brown & Levinson's Face theory (Brown and Levinson 1987), Leech's (Leech 1983, 2003) Politeness Principle and Chinese scholar Gu Yueguo's politeness maxims that are based on the Chinese culture provide the theoretical foundation for compliment response (Gu, 1992).

There are some theoretical foundations for the compliment response study. The definitions of compliment response given by famous scholars are rare. Nelson (1996:411-432) has given a definition of compliment response: "A compliment response is a verbal acknowledgement that the respondent of the compliment heard and react to the compliment" (Nelson, 1996:413). It can be said that compliment response is the first reaction of the complimentee to the complimenter. Compliment response is a kind

of positive politeness strategy which should also mention the politeness principle. Actually, many linguists mention the maxims concerning compliment response in their politeness principles, just as Leech's six maxims and Gu Yueguo's maxims. Politeness principle can also be observed in complement speech act, especially in the responses to compliments for avoiding face-threatening act (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 95). Then, we are going to explain two famous scholars' theories in detail: Leech (1983)'s six maxims of Principles of Pragmatics (PP) and Gu Yueguo's maxims (1992, 10-17) Leech (1983, 132) pointed six maxims of the PP as follows: Tact Maxim. It means minimizing cost to other people and maximizing benefit to other people. That is to say, when one expresses his or her opinion, he or she should decrease the harmful expression to others as far as possible, and say more ideas which can do the most benefit to others.

Generosity Maxim. It means minimizing benefit to self and maximizing cost to self. According to it, one should express less opinion that benefits him and express more opinion that benefits others. Approbation Maxim. It means minimizing praise of self and maximizing praise of other. One should compliment others more instead of detracting others.

Modesty Maxim. It means minimizing praise of self and maximizing dispraise of self. One should praise himself less and dispraise himself more.

Agreement Maxim. It means minimizing disagreement between self and other and maximizing agreement between self and other. Sympathy Maxim. It means minimizing antipathy between self and other and maximizing sympathy between self and other. You have to avoid the emotional conflict as far as possible.

Gu Yueguo (1992, 10-17) modified and extended Leech's PP and put forward to five maxims on Chinese politeness, which he claimed to be very characteristic and almost unique to Chinese culture. They are as follows:

The Self-denigration and Other-elevation Maxim: It is a special maxim in Chinese. Denigrate and deprecate self in self-referring or referring to things related to self; elevate and respect other in other-referring or referring to things related to other. It is the common situation when Chinese people communicate.

The Address Maxim: To address the interlocutor with an appropriate address term, just as "Mr.",

“Doctor”. The Refinement Maxim: In this case, you have to use refined language, euphemisms to avoid straight-forward talk. For example, though the guest does not like the food, he should also say “thank you for your dinner, I enjoy it”, but not “the food is terrible”. The Agreement Maxim: In order to seek agreement and harmony with interlocutor.

The Virtues-Word-Deeds Maxim: To minimize cost and maximize benefit to other at the motivational level; maximize benefit and minimize cost to self at the expressional level. It is just like Leech’s first and second maxims.

Brown & Levinson’s “face theory” and Leech’s “politeness principle” are enlightening in communication to the languages of teachers and students, among them “Tact Maxim”, “Approbation Maxim”, “sympathy Maxim” with strange profit are particularly important.

Politeness theory is the theory that accounts for the redressing of the affronts to face posed by face-threatening acts to addressees. First formulated in 1978 by Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson, politeness theory has since expanded academia’s perception of politeness.

Brown and Levinson propose “face” (self-esteem) theory had been explained the politeness phenomenon and the relationship between politeness and “face” in *Universals in Language Usage: Politeness Phenomenon* (1978). Later they revised the original framework, *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage* in which they give further illustration of the view of politeness. Yet the main idea about politeness phenomenon almost has not been changed. They define “face” as follows: “the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself” (Brown and Levinson, 2003, 562). In their view, “the face is something that is emotionally invested, and that can be lost, maintained, or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to in interaction” (Brown and Levinson, 2003, 563). The participants in communication all have “face” wants, which are their basic needs. Brown and Levinson also (2003, 563) state “We treat the aspects of face as basic wants, which every member knows every other member desires, and which in general it is in the interests of every other member to partially satisfy”. According to Brown and Levinson, everyone’s face depends on everyone else’s being maintained or enhanced, so the participants should consider each other’s face in communication. “Face” consists of two specific constituents: negative “face” and positive “face”. The former means people want to be approved of praised or complimented; the latter means the

basic claim to freedom of action and freedom from imposition. Brown and Levinson think that some acts by their nature threaten the “face” wants of the speaker or hearer, such as advising, promising, criticizing etc. Complimentary responses are governed by two contradictory conditions that must be met simultaneously, according to Pomerantz.

Agree with the complimenter. Avoid self-praise. While trying to meet one condition, the complementee will inevitably conflict with the other. A review of previous studies concerning compliment responses.

The researchers just begin to study the topic of compliment responses. The scholars (Pomerantz, 1978; Manes and Wolfson, 1981; Wolfson, 1983) try to analyze the different types of compliment responses as a search for the theories. The empirical studies are limited. The researches in this period make the foundation of the future studies.

Pomerantz is the first researcher who draws attention to the topic of compliment responses. She claimed that in American English the recipient of a compliment faces two conflicting conditions that pose a dilemma when responding to it: (A) agree with the speaker and (B) avoid self-praise. For example, the recipient agrees with the speaker by accepting the compliment (Condition A), it violates Condition B in that the response goes against the speaker’s sociolinguistic expectations. On the other hand, when the recipient does not accept the compliment in order to follow Condition B, the response can be considered far threatening since it violates Condition A. Recipients of compliments use various solutions to mediate this conflict, categorize by Pomerantz as (1) Acceptance, (2) Rejection, and (3) Self-praise Avoidance. Pomerantz analyzed compliment response types and mechanisms for avoiding self-praise.

Building upon Pomerantz’s idea, Downes (1984) sees a compliment as a supportive action akin to offers, gifts and congratulations, which sequentially imply an acceptance or rejection as second pair part. According to Downes, there is a ‘preferred’ response, namely acceptance, particularly by means of an appreciation token like ‘thank you’. There is an affiliation between acceptance and agreement (assessment action). This means that a compliment can also be accepted through the expression of agreement with its content. This is a secondary way of accepting compliments. Downes also argues that sequentially, if both positive responses occur, they do so in the order, accept and agree. This can be seen from the following example taken from Pomerantz.

Many English learners have known that in English, the right answer to other's praise and compliments is "Thank you", which is different from Chinese self-effecting answer. However, "Thank you" is only one kind of answer; the situation is more complex in real communications. It will discuss the differences between English and Chinese praise and compliments from the sentence patterns of praise language, usage modes and concerned topics, respond and social functions, as well as social causes of cultural differences.

A: Why, it is the loveliest record I have ever heard.

B: Well, thank you.

Because of the affiliation of accept/agree and reject/disagree, just as one can accept through agreement, one can reject a compliment through disagreement with the truth of its content, as shown in the following example:

A: You did a great job cleaning up the house.

B: Well, I guess you have not seen the kids' room

According to Downes, this is the preferred method of rejecting a compliment, because it avoids explicit rejection, which is the dispreferred response to supportive actions. In fact, as owners said, it could be argued that the preference for implicitness in acceptance leads to the preference for explicitness in rejections.

Pomerantz and Downes's studies give an initial analysis of compliment responses. Pomerantz researches compliment responses in the taxonomic way, which gives the implication to the future studies. However, her approach gives no indications of the relative frequency of the various compliment response types. Distributional facts are essential to a satisfying treatment of compliment response behavior, i.e. taxonomy of forms is merely the prerequisite to sociolinguistic analysis.

Results

Herbert (1986 & 1990) gave a three-category, twelve-type taxonomy of compliment response by speakers of American English upon which the present research is conducted. Compliment responses are classified as connoting agreement and non-agreement (Lewandowska-Tomaszzyk, 1989). Compliment responses are divided into three category: agreement, non-agreement and other interpretations. In addition, under each category, there are one or more sub-categories.

A. Agreement

Explicit Acceptance

1) Appreciation tokens

The complimentee accepts the compliment by saying "Thank you", "Thanks" or something like that, or by nodding or smiling.

2) Comment acceptance

The complimentee accepts the compliment and offers a relevant comment on the appreciated topic. For example, "I think so." "I'm glad to hear it."

3) Praise upgrade

The addressee accepts the compliment and asserting that the compliment force needs further upgrading. For example, it can be seen in the answer "Really brings out the blue in my eyes, doesn't it?"

Implicit Acceptance

Sometimes people do not show their acceptance directly, so they show it in an implicit manner. This category consists of Comment History, Return and Reassignment. In Comment History, The force of the compliment is transferred into something or someone else—past time or place that connected with the complimenter. While the force of the compliment goes back to the complimenter in Return and to another person in Reassignment.

4) Comment History

The respondent uses the sub-strategy to offer some background information related to the item praised, which includes statements or comments that either explain why the object of the compliment is good or he/she bought the object of the compliment.

For example:

a. "What a nice dress."

b. "I bought it for the trip to Arizona."

5) Return

In this type of response, a compliment is returned with praise, usually similar to, or even more generous than what has been given. The example is as follows:

a. "You look beautiful in it!"

b. "So is yours!"

6) Reassignment

When responds to a compliment, the respondent mentions a third party as responsible for the excellence of the object of the compliment. Actually, the respondent is indicating the message that the respondent agrees that the object is indeed good, meanwhile, she or he cannot take credit for it. It's can be seen in the example:

"That's really a great paper!"

"My supervisor gave me a lot of advice."

Non-agreement responses

The strategies that connote non-concurrence to the substance of the compliment belong to Non-agreement category. Indirect rejection. It consists of Downgrade, Question and No acknowledgment.

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