

A Comparative Study of Compliment Speech Behavior Between Chinese and Foreign College Students

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ABSTRACT

As a social communication language, compliment speech can not only shorten the social distance between communicators, but also maintain normal social interpersonal relationships. The research on compliments has been quite mature, but most of them are based on traditional pragmatic theories such as rhetoric and stylistics, which have some limitations. This study reviewed the compliments of Chinese and foreign college students in relevant research, found out the differences of the compliments between Chinese and foreign college students, and discussed the reasons for differences and how to cultivate the intercultural communication ability of college students. In addition, based on the review of the perspective of pragmatics for compliment speech behavior and comparisons of compliment speech behavior between Chinese and foreign college students, this study discussed differences between English and Chinese in the syntactic patterns of compliment speech, indicated that it should be appropriate to introduce pragmatics theory knowledge in cross-cultural teaching.

Keywords: Chinese and foreign college students, Compliment language, Comparative study.

1. INTRODUCTION

China and the foreign countries have maintained close bilateral exchanges and extensive exchanges and cooperation in the fields of economy, politics, culture, diplomacy and trade [1]. In recent years, many international students come to China to learn Chinese [1][2]. When Chinese teachers teach foreign college students, they are influenced by their mother tongue, cultural background, way of thinking, value orientation and other factors [3]. As a common polite language in communication, the speech behavior of compliment speech in foreign college students is obviously affected [3]. Compliment speech is a common and positive pragmatic speech behavior and is widely used in thanks, apologies, greeting, and opening a conversation [4]. Compliment act is that explicitly or implicitly indicates the speaker's appreciation of certain "good" things about the listener, including possessions, qualities, talents, or abilities [5]. By using compliments, the speaker can greet and encourage the other person, ease the tension between the two parties, improve the relationship

and so on. When foreign college students learn and use compliments, they often make practical mistakes. These pragmatic errors will cause communication barriers, lead to the interruption or failure of communicative behavior, and also cause difficulties in learning Chinese [6]. In the 1970s, more scholars also paid attention to the study of speech acts themselves, and then conducted a lot of studies on speech acts from the perspective of pragmatics [7]. Holmes [8] and Herbert [9] have made new achievements in this field. Holmes [8] and Herbert [9] emphasized the basic model of the theory of compliment speech behavior, and they provided the basic ideas and methods for the research of compliment speech behavior. Another study was carried by Wolfson and Manes in 1980 [10]. Through the study of 686 English compliments collected, it was found that 2/3 of these corpora were composed of three basic sentence patterns, so they are highly stylized in basic syntax and semantic composition. Many subsequent studies followed these practices. In recent years, some Chinese scholars have also begun to pay attention to Chinese compliments and

put forward their views on their research. The results showed that Chinese compliments were also formulaic. Chen Rong [11] found that British and American people were more likely to follow the principle of consent, while Chinese people were more likely to follow the principle of modesty when studying the polite behavior of responding to compliments in English and Chinese, which indicated the different embodiment of values between the two cultures. However, compared with the research on compliment speech acts abroad, the research in this field in China is relatively late and less [2].

Based on a detailed comparison of Chinese and foreign countries by the review of previous studies, this study reviewed the causes of pragmatic errors in the use of Chinese compliments by foreign college students from multiple perspectives and proposed corresponding solutions.

2. REVIEW OF THE PERSPECTIVE OF PRAGMATICS FOR COMPLIMENT SPEECH BEHAVIOR

On the basis of Austin's research [12] and a survey conducted by Wolff and Manes [10] on the daily use of compliments by 686 Americans, the conclusion is drawn that "there is a pattern to be followed for compliments in American English". Wolff and Manes revealed the following common patterns of compliment speech in America: (1) NP + be / look + ADV + ADJ (53.6%); Your dress is very beautiful. (2) I (really) + like / love + NP (16.1%); I really like your hair; I love your car. (3) the Pronoun + is (really) (a) + ADJ + NP (14.9%); That's really a nice dress; He's a very remarkable man indeed. According to the survey, "NP + be + ADV + ADJ" is the most frequently used in American groups. According to the current research, there are mainly three typical forms of compliment speech in China, and the frequency of using them is 48%, 22% and 9% according to the analysis of corpus. (1) NP + ADV + ADJ (48%); What a beautiful coat! (2) Second person pronoun + verb + ADV + ADJ (22%); You are so right! (3) Second person pronoun + verb + NP + ADV (9%); You speak English very well! In China, about 80% of the expressions of compliments belong to the above three syntactic patterns, although there are other expressions.

In many languages, the basic semantic syntactic patterns of compliment speech are either very different or very similar, such as "NP + be + ADV

+ ADJ", both play an important role in English and Chinese complimentary behavior. There are some differences between English and Chinese in the syntactic patterns of compliment speech. First, in English, "I (intensifier) + like / love + NP" is used 16.1% of the time and is used to express positive evaluation. In Chinese, people don't usually use this phrase to mean "compliment". It is often used as a euphemism for something like "I want to..." or "I wish..."[1][3]. The use of personal pronouns is also different in English and Chinese. In English, the subject of 16% of compliment speech sentences is the first-person "I", while in Chinese, the subject is rarely used. The majority of compliment speech sentences are "you" or "yours" in the second person, accounting for about 31% [2].

3. REVIEW OF PREVIOUS STUDIES ON COMPLIMENT SPEECH BEHAVIOR BETWEEN CHINESE AND FOREIGN COLLEGE STUDENTS

Compared with Chinese, the mode of compliment in American English is more syntactically stylized [1]. In another study on the comparison of the compliment speech behavior of Chinese college students and New Zealand international students in Wuhan [13], Shan Shuo found that New Zealand international students were more likely to use explicit compliment speech strategy, Chinese college students were also more likely to use explicit compliment speech strategy. The distribution of Chinese and New Zealand international students was relatively consistent. Students firstly focused on the affirmation of the quality of people or things, and secondly on the affirmation of the value of people or things. However, Chinese college students had more potential than New Zealand international students to use implicit compliments strategy and non-response strategy. In responding to compliments of Chinese college students, the frequency of words indicating judgment of meaning is the highest, followed by words indicating appreciation of meaning. In New Zealand international students, words expressing appreciation appear the most frequently, followed by words that express emotional meaning. More than 40% of students in China returned a compliment to respond to the compliment. About 36% of New Zealand international students choose to appreciate the compliment. Another research on the comparison of the compliment speech behavior in Chinese college

students and west Africa international students in Hangzhou indicated a similar result. Bao Siyuan[6] found that West African international students tended to use explicit compliment speech strategy. More percentage of Chinese students used implicit compliment speech than West African international students. A recent survey investigated the compliment speech behavior between Chinese college students and Russian college students [14]. Yang Yuening [14] investigated 80 college students in Dalian, China, 80 college students in Moscow, Russian and indicated that for Chinese college students, the most commonly used response strategy was explicit compliment response speech strategy (41.2%). However, the percentage of explicit compliment response speech strategy was less than Russian college students (52.8%). The results were also in accordance to previous research.

4. DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION ON THE DIFFERENCE OF COMPLIMENT SPEECH BEHAVIOR BETWEEN THE CHINESE AND FOREIGN COLLEGE STUDENTS

The difference in the use of different person in English and Chinese compliments reflects the linguistic expression and interpersonal communication rules in different social and cultural backgrounds [7]. Westerners tend to be more direct in their evaluation of things and can clearly express their feelings of giving priority to themselves. It is not just the western countries, Bao Siyuan [6] also pointed out that west Africans also had more unrestrained personalities than the Chinese. Therefore, in English compliments, the first person is often used. On the other hand, Chinese people attach more importance to the harmonious coexistence of interpersonal relations, and pay more attention to the feelings of the other party when speaking and doing things [2]. Therefore, the second person is often used as the subject in Chinese compliments. For Chinese compliments, you can see the indirect speech acts from the hidden compliments, and of course it has a very important relationship with their culture. Americans are pragmatic. They quickly cut to the chase in a conversation [1]. They usually avoid long greetings and farewells, preferring the shorter the better. In response to compliments, Americans directly express their pleasure [3]. In the face of a man's praise for their appearance, women are not embarrassed at all, but are happy to accept it and

express their thanks. Because they don't think it's rude, it's just polite. When they refuse a request, they don't beat around the bush, but say "No" very directly. In the eyes of Americans, being direct and to the point is the best way to communicate with others, while beating around the bush is a sign of insincerity. But Chinese people are reserved. They will be embarrassed when receiving compliments. This has a very important relationship with Confucian culture [2]. However, as development of the times, in recent research, the traditional Chinese compliment response based on implicit compliment speech is changing. Explicit compliment speech, especially thanks response strategy, is gradually becoming a new compliment response paradigm [13][14].

5. CONCLUSION

From this research, it is concluded that compliment speech, as a social communication language, can not only shorten the social distance between communicators, but also maintain normal social interpersonal relations. The basic semantic syntactic patterns of compliment speech are either very different or very similar. Such as "NP + be + ADV + ADJ", both play an important role in English and Chinese complimentary behavior. There are some differences between English and Chinese in the syntactic patterns of compliment speech. Because of social culture, different people have different understanding of the target language in the process of cross-cultural communication. Thus, some foreign students may have pragmatic failures in compliment speeches. Through this research, it should be appropriate to introduce pragmatics theory knowledge in cross-cultural teaching so that we can effectively improve students' cross-cultural communication ability. In the future, scholars can also further discuss how Chinese and foreign college students can use compliments well in international communication.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Dan Xu and Xinjun Fu designed the study. Dan Xu drafted the manuscript. Wenyue Liu and Xinjun Fu revised the manuscript. All authors have read and approved the manuscript.

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