

Similarities, Differences and Changes of Tibetan and English Linguistic Taboos

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ABSTRACT

Taboo language, as a part of verbal communication, is not only a language phenomenon, but also a cultural phenomenon, which reflects the different values and customs of different cultures. This paper makes a comparative study of the taboos in terms of "appellation", "death", "disease", "vulgar language", "color", "number" and "religion" in Tibetan and English linguistic taboo, in order to help the relevant people have a better understanding of the cultural value behind the taboo phenomenon in the two cultures, so as to enhance the understanding between different cultures.

Keywords: *Linguistic taboos, Intercultural communication, Comparison between Tibetan and English, Change.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Since ancient times, people have consciously or unconsciously followed an unwritten communication principle in the process of verbal communication, that is, both sides of communication must know which words should be used, which words should not be used, which words should be said and which words should not be said. People call those words that are often avoided in communication linguistic taboos. Linguistic Language taboo is a universal cultural phenomenon and an important criterion of verbal communication. The word taboo comes from the Tongan language of Polynesia, which means "sacred" and "inviolable". Later, the word became a kind of culture in English and spread widely in English-speaking countries. However, In the *Book of Rites, Qu Li Shang* in China, there is a saying that "when entering a country, ask for taboos", which means that you need to know about their prohibition when entering a country. Therefore, both China and the West attach great importance to the use of linguistic taboos.

2. SIMILARITIES BETWEEN TIBETAN LINGUISTIC AND ENGLISH LINGUISTIC TABOOS

Although people of all races are scattered on all continents and have not met, linguistic taboo, as a unique language phenomenon, regulates people's language behaviour in social communication because of the many similarities in the natural environment. The taboos and avoidance of some things in the language expression of Tibetan and English cultures are also similar. The following is an analysis and explanation of the convergence of taboos in Tibetan and English linguistic.

2.1 Similarities Between Language Taboos of Gods and Saints

Religion and religious belief are an important area of linguistic taboos. Tibetans are a nation with more primitive worship. Due to the influence of Buddhism, Tibetans also have a variety of appellations for monks, such as living Buddha, Lama, etc.

Living Buddha: it is called "Zhugu (sprul-sku)", in Tibetan. It refers to a practitioner who has made

achievements in previous lives and will return to the world to save all sentient beings in this life.

Rinpoche is a transliteration of Tibetan “rin-po-che”, it means “treasure” or “fortune”, which is the most cordial and highly respected honorific title of believers to the living Buddha. When Tibetan Buddhists visit or talk about a living Buddha, they generally call them “rin-po-che”, not the title of the living Buddha, let alone their name directly. Among various appellations of living Buddha, “Rinpoche” is the only one widely used.

Lama, the Tibetan word “La” means supreme, and “Ma” means mother. In the early days, “Lama” was a respectful title for guru. Not every monk was worthy of the title of “Lama”. However, when it spread to the Han area, it gradually became a title for Tibetan Buddhist monks. Just like the word “monk”, it used to refer to monks with high moral integrity, but now it has become the general name of monks in the Han area.

English has accumulated rich cultural connotations in the long historical process of more than 1400 years. The language taboo in English is based on its culture, so it also has its own language characteristics in its taboos. European countries also have taboos on gods and saints, mainly in the category of religion. Christianity is deeply rooted in Western society and has a broad mass base. People who do not believe in Jesus are also reluctant to take risks to offend the church, and those senior believers fear God and dare not blaspheme. The “Ten Commandments” mentioned in the Bible: “do not take the name of the LORD God in vain” is one of them. It is believed that the name of God is holy and inviolable, and can only be recited in very formal and solemn occasions by priests after fasting and bathing.

2.2 Similarities of Linguistic Taboos on Blasphemy and Swearing

The so-called blasphemous language is to blaspheme saints and gods. It is related to God's religion and has religious meaning. Blasphemy, curse is an oral language taboo, the general prohibition of use. Once used, it will kill the other party [1]. The common oath and curse in Tibetan life can also be included in the category of language taboo. Swearing and cursing had become a custom feared by the nobility and lowliness in Tubo, and this custom was written into the legal provisions as the main basis for the final judgment. “Swearing and cursing” has irresistible binding force. Up to

now, the custom of swearing and cursing among Tibetan people is very popular. For example, some herdsmen in pastoral areas swear by the “Temple” “in the Tibetan faith as a guarantee, and some swear by their parents' flesh and blood. In addition, Tibetans will say words like “live a long life for a hundred years” immediately after others sneeze. In essence, they believe that language has a special magic, and they believe that it can relieve the danger caused by violating taboos.

In the West, Christians cannot casually mention God or God's name, because it is disrespectful to abuse God's name. So some people often use Gosh, Golly and Gawd instead of God, and Jeepers and Chriminey instead of Jesus. There is also a taboo in the West, that is, the name of the devil will not be mentioned casually. In people's concept, the devil can bring bad luck to people. Because of this fear, the word “the devil” is hidden and replaced by the words “the deuce, Old Nick” and so on. Due to the religious belief and worship of gods in China and the West, it has become a conventional way for people to ban profanity words from religions and gods. In Western countries, some abusive words, such as cows, pitches, pigs, etc..., are named by the names of chickens, cows, pigs and other livestock. Many abusive words are considered unsuitable for public use, such as cheeky, fascist, liar and so on. These words are very taboo.

2.3 Similarities Between Tibetan and English Linguistic Taboos About Life, Old Age, Illness and Death

“Birth, aging, illness and death” is a process of metabolism experienced by human beings, which is also a natural law and will remain unchanged forever. But as people have a desire to live a long and healthy life, to be free from illness and death, there is a sense of unease and fear about old age, sickness and death, so words involving these aspects are very taboo. Death is not called death in Tibetan, and the word 'death' is rarely used in verbal communication, especially in the presence of relatives of the deceased, and Tibetans often use various euphemisms in its place. Many places use the word “gone, went, finished” instead of “dead”. These substitute words bring people a completely different sense of the word “death”. There are many euphemisms about “death” in Tibetan. However, in many places, the use of such words is often affected by the social characteristics of the deceased. For example, different euphemisms are used in Tibetan due to the different age levels of the deceased. The

death of a child is called absence, the death of a young man is called helplessness, and the death of an adult is called death [2], both common words and honorific words express the speaker's nostalgia and respect for the dead, making the relatives of the dead feel warm and comforted. In the Tibetan society dominated by Buddhism, the thought of Buddhism will naturally be branded with Buddhism in the language. For example, in the ancient Tibetan language, one of the euphemisms of death is "to the other shore", "reincarnated to the happy land". The death of an eminent monk and a great virtue is called "the pure land of death". Such euphemisms as "the other shore, the paradise, and the pure land" are the residences of Buddha and Bodhisattvas, and the places where all sentient beings yearn for.

People in Europe and the United States do not like the word "old". They are more used to showing their young side, at least in the language. Even in their 60s, heterosexual friends like to call each other "boy or girl". It is also because of the fear of growing old and the taboo of age that people in Western countries have always tried to euphemize the concept of "old age" by using words with derivative meanings, such as: the mature, golden age club, etc... Both Tibetans and Westerners taboo disease, which is considered a symbol of misfortune. "The big C" and other words are used to avoid "cancer". People will feel pain and discomfort when they are ill. Therefore, the words "long illness" or "the big C" are usually used in English to avoid the word "cancer". In both eastern and Western cultures, death is the word that people are very reluctant to mention and avoid as much as possible. It is usually described by some common and unobtrusive words. There are more than 400 euphemisms for "death" in English language, with close links to Christianity, such as: be gone off, went the way of all flesh, went to his last home, etc.

3. DIFFERENCES BETWEEN TIBETAN AND ENGLISH LINGUISTIC TABOOS

Taboo is a kind of code of conduct that is well-known and obeyed by everyone, but has no written regulations. It is closely related to the living habits, cultural traditions and social production modes of the nationality and region. Therefore, taboos in English-speaking countries are very different from Tibetan language taboos. Let's briefly analyze the differences between Tibetan and English taboos from these aspects.

3.1 Different Linguistic Taboos of Color Words

In Tibetan and English, the number of color words is quite abundant. From the etymology, it can be divided into two categories: basic color words and color words expressing real objects. The words of the former category are basically the same or similar in various languages. At first, the words of the latter category were just the names of certain objects. Because these objects themselves have a prominent color, the names of these objects have a new meaning. These are words that represent not only real objects but also a color, that is, the kind of color that the thing itself has. Red (dmar po) in Tibetan has a long historical and cultural origin. Red is one of the favorite colors of the Tibetan nation. In Tibetan, "red" has implicit meanings such as meat, blood, nakedness, murderous nature, and omen. In Tibetan religious culture, red is a symbol of fire and a special color for religion. In Western culture, red is the association of "fire" and "blood". It symbolizes blood, bloodshed, evil and cruelty, which is similar to the metaphorical cognition of "red (dmar po)" in Tibetan. The Tibetan word for black (nag po) shares some of the same linguistic vocabulary as the English word for black [3]. For example, in the Tibetan language, a bad heart (bsam nag) is used to describe a person's evil intentions; Black market (nag khrom) refers to the market where illegal transactions are carried out in secret; In English, black lie means a malicious lie; Black market means that the goods prohibited by the government are secretly traded; In Tibetan, "mtshal" means "cinnabar" and also refers to red; "Gyu" means pine ear stone, and also refers to sky blue, emerald green, and so on. English "gold" also refers to yellow, which is synonymous with yellow; "Silver" also means white; "Violet", the flower name, also refers to purple. Color words have been used and tempered by the people for a long time, and their semantic meaning is very broad.

Through the description, people can find that the symbolic meaning of color in Tibetan language is full of mystery, which is caused by the deep-rooted feudal superstition. The symbolic meaning of color in Western culture is relatively rational, intuitive, less mysterious, and easier to associate. The symbolic meaning of color has become not only a linguistic phenomenon, but also a cultural phenomenon, recording the differences in social and historical development and the trajectory of social and historical development [4]. Therefore,

people should pay close attention to it in cross-cultural communication.

3.2 Different Linguistic Taboos of Numbers

In daily life and work, people tend to prefer some numbers and dates, but also avoid some numbers and dates. Although this is a superstitious idea, favors and taboos on some figures and dates are still common to all ethnic groups in the world. Tibetans are very particular about the use of numbers, and odd numbers are of great significance. In Tibetan culture, numbers such as 3, 9 and 13 are considered to be the luckiest numbers and auspicious. Even numbers are disliked, except 6, because it is multiple of 3. Important activities and ceremonies are held on odd days. Therefore, the principle of even numbers is taboo for those related to numbers. Therefore, they believe that the numbers three and thirteen are generally recognized as “auspicious numbers”. People usually associate numbers three with beautiful things. In the famous Tibetan epic *Gesar*, it is said that there were three gods, three Lord Buddha, three temples and three tribes in the ancient Lingguo. In the Bon Religion and other religious sects, 13 is a sacred number. People are told to tread carefully during this period, otherwise there will be danger and bring misery and pain to their lives.

In British culture, “13” is the most influential taboo number for religious reasons. According to the Bible, Judas, the 13th of Jesus’ 12 disciples, betrayed Jesus. Therefore, people use “Judas” to accuse people who betray or abandon their friends or countries. The number 13 symbolizes rebellion and lawlessness, which is generally considered an ominous sign. They avoid using the number 13 as much as possible. Similarly, Friday is also a taboo number for Westerners. People avoid getting married on Fridays, traveling. They avoid using the number 666, which is also a trite phenomenon in British culture. They believe that the number 666 is one of the most widely recognized devil symbols. It is said that it is used to refer to Satan. Just like the fear of the number 13, people also avoid using the number 666.

3.3 Different Linguistic Taboos Between Appellation and Name

The taboos of names and appellations are quite different between Tibetan and English. In the 7th century, Songzan Ganbu, the king of Tubo,

formulated the “Sixteen moral principles”, which had a far-reaching impact on the formation of Tibetan ethics. “Respect for parents” and “respect for elders” is the main part of this code of ethics. Many common names or monk names are closely related to doctrines, gods and magic tools of Buddhism or Bon religion, and have a certain religious coloration [5]. For example: Jiayang (vjam dbyangs: meaning Manjusri Bodhisattva), Maolan (vjam dbyangs: meaning praying), etc. Secondly, due to people’s different positions, studies, identities and social status, Tibetan names and titles also have different category characteristics. For example: Panchen · samwataya (pan chen snang ba mthav yas: referring to Panchen · limitless light), Zang · panchida (gtsang pan Tita: referring to post Tibetan · great scholars) and so on have the meaning of advocating, noble and popular fame. Therefore, a person’s name is also a symbolic that reflects a person's position, identity and personality characteristics.

In English speaking countries, especially in the United States, people believe that all people are born equal. Therefore, regardless of their origin, generation and age, people generally call them by their names directly to show that they are equal to each other without any gap. There is also a long tradition in the West that people like to name their children after their elders. If there is only one boy in each generation of a family, usually the grandparents, fathers and sons will be given the same name, that is, their first and last names are identical. If necessary, add an alias between your first and last names. For example, Erich Sutera’s family has three generations of grandparents and grandchildren, each generation has only one child, so their official name would be Erich Sutera, but the father's full name is Erich John Sutera, the son's full name is Erich Joseph Sutera, and the grandson's full name is Erich Butler Sutera. They share a receiving mailbox, so the name of the recipient must be clearly written. People familiar with the situation often mark “father” or “son” after the name on the envelope to avoid mistakes.

4. THE CHANGE OF LINGUISTIC TABOO WITH THE TIMES

Linguistic taboo is not immutable and frozen. With the progress of The Times and society, people's concept of taboo becomes more and more broad. Looking at the changes of taboo language, people will find that there are fewer and fewer religious superstitions in Taboos, After China’s

reform and opening up, communication and exchanges with the West has increased, and taboo customs of both sides have influenced each other, and similar elements are also increasing[6]. For example, the word “death”, in many cases, people are not as taboo as in the past, but become a mantra, always put the word “death” hanging in the mouth: laugh dead, tired dead, bored dead, pain dead, hate dead, funny dead... Another example is the taboo of names. Now, when elders name their children, they don't have to worry about having the same name as a great man. Instead, they try hard to find other words to replace them. Some parents even try to make their children's names similar to or homophonic with celebrities, in order to bring good luck to their children's growth or life.

In English, taboo language is also changing. With the passage of time, some words have lost their original meaning or even disappeared. Not only that, with the changes of the times, new taboos have emerged in both Tibetan and English linguistic. For example, euphemisms in the economic and political aspects: use contribution instead of income tax; Pre owned cars replace second hand cars, old cars and used cars; Use recession instead of depression. This kind of similar situation also exists in Chinese. For example: Generally speaking, the price will be adjusted when the price rises. The sale price of current, internal price, the processing price and wholesale price are all synonymous with “low price” under certain circumstances, while the bargaining price represents “high price”. Another example is to replace “unemployment” with “laid-off” and “unemployed”.

5. CONCLUSION

Tibetan and English linguistic taboos have their similarities, but the differences between them are also obvious. In cross-cultural communication, people should understand the differences between Tibetan and English language taboos, so a wealth of language and cultural background knowledge is indispensable, and everyone should always bear in mind the concept of “When in Rome, do as the Romans do”. In cross-cultural communication, people should try to use euphemism to avoid communication errors and embarrassment caused by language taboos [7] and have an objective and tolerant attitude towards other cross-cultural communication to avoid errors, so as to prevent cross-cultural communication errors.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

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