

# A Comparative Study of Marriage and Childbirth Euphemisms in English and Chinese

Mingyun Chi<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Foreign Languages of Studies, Shandong Technology and Business University, Yantai, Shandong 264005, China*

## ABSTRACT

Euphemism is both a linguistic phenomenon and a social and cultural phenomenon. Since its inception, euphemisms have played a lubricating role in people's communication. Both English and Chinese languages have a large number of euphemisms. This article only explores the differences in marriage and childbirth euphemisms between English and Chinese from two perspectives: social values and ethnic cultural characteristics.

**Keywords:** *Euphemism, Social values, Ethnic cultural characteristics.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Euphemism, as a common social language phenomenon, can be traced back to ancient times. Western scholars have long studied the phenomenon of euphemisms. Euphemism can generally be divided into two categories: traditional euphemisms and stylistic euphemisms. Marriage and childbirth euphemisms belong to traditional euphemisms. Traditional euphemisms are a linguistic reflection of the social and cultural domains, and the characteristics of the social and cultural domains can be clearly reflected in euphemisms. Due to the different historical development, customs and moral standards of different nationalities, the behaviors and words that people in different countries taboo are not consistent, and the use of euphemism also presents different situations. There are many euphemisms about marriage and childbirth in English, and there are also many euphemisms about this in Chinese. Through the specific perspective of euphemisms, we can glimpse the psychological structure, thinking patterns, social behaviors, and value norms of a nation. This article compares marriage and childbirth euphemisms in English and Chinese, revealing different cultural traditions, lifestyles, values, and their impact on language.

## 2. DIFFERENCES IN MARRIAGE AND CHILDBIRTH EUPHEMISMS BETWEEN ENGLISH AND CHINESE

Euphemism is a reflection of people's social values and cultural characteristics. Social values have a crucial impact on language, as society constrains language and in turn serves society. What kind of words a country avoids can reflect its religious beliefs and cultural traditions. So, due to the differences in religious beliefs and cultural customs between Eastern and Western countries, the use of euphemisms also varies.

### 2.1 *The Influence of Social Values on Euphemisms of Marriage and Childbirth in English and Chinese*

Social values are beliefs that are universally accepted by members of society and have durability and stability in line with social culture. As a deep-seated factor of cultural composition, it persistently influences people's attitudes, needs, and behavioral patterns towards life. Nieman et al. pointed out that "social values influence language more than euphemisms. The huge differences in cultural values between Chinese and English, belonging to the East and the West, inevitably strongly influence the generation, development, and changes of

various euphemisms." Therefore, the huge differences in social values also directly affect euphemisms in marriage and childbirth. On the one hand, if the prominent feature of the Chinese people is the emphasis on "human relations", then the prominent feature of the Westerners is the emphasis on "freedom". The West emphasizes "individual" and "independence", often viewing the family as a bond. Therefore, 'marriage' is euphemistically referred to as 'to have gotten hitched/yoked', while 'unmarried man/woman' is an unattached man/woman. Chinese people have a strong sense of family. "Marriage" is also referred to as "lifelong" or "major event"; Only by getting married can one establish a family. On the other hand, Chinese people are more reserved than Westerners and often restrain their feelings. In terms of marriage and love, Chinese people like the "I love you" of British and American people can't say it. On the contrary, "I like being with you very much", "I like you", "Are you willing to create the future with me?" and "I want to be with you all my life" have become euphemisms for Chinese people to express such feelings. English and American people can also boldly confess their love by using phrases such as "I love you," "I'm dying to marry you," and "I want you to be my wife." Obviously, in this regard, English and American people are much more straightforward than the Han ethnic group.

At a young age, unmarried individuals are often referred to as "big boys", "big girls", or "older youth" in a very subtle way. It expresses that the Chinese people can not get rid of a "happy" word when they are pregnant after marriage, such as "entering/entering happiness" (pregnancy on the wedding day), "having happiness", "having happiness", "encountering happiness", "being happy" and other pregnancy reactions, which are called "bad joy", "having children" and "happy birthday", which are closely related to the traditional Chinese values of "having more children and more happiness". However, Westerners do not consider "pregnancy" and "giving birth" as a "blessing". Although they also say "a blessed event", they always use a sarcastic tone. Australian English openly claims that this is a "blasted event" (damn thing). Australian women sigh based on their experience of ranch life, 'It is not the bull they are afraid of it is the calf'. This to some extent represents the psychological state of the English speaking ethnic group when they are pregnant and have children. Due to different social values, marriage and childbirth euphemisms are vividly expressed in English and Chinese cultures.

## ***2.2 The Manifestation of Ethnic Cultural Characteristics in English Chinese Marriage and Childbirth Euphemisms***

British folklorist Malinowski once said, "Language is deeply rooted in social life. Without understanding the socio-cultural background of language, it is impossible to understand the exact meaning of this language." Every ethnic group in the world has formed its own unique national culture in the long process of evolution and development. Based on the historical accumulation of national culture, differences in cultural concepts such as living customs, thinking patterns, religious beliefs, and national psychology will inevitably be reflected in the form of language. Euphemism, as a type of "cultural qualifier," without exception, has been imprinted with the characteristics of national culture. Due to the fact that English and Chinese are two languages based on different cultures, there are differences in the use of euphemisms. Some euphemisms use cultural allusions such as religious myths, folklore, and customs to display their unique cultural characteristics. Although the euphemisms of marriage and childbirth have similar referential meanings in English and Chinese, their origins and cultural connotations are vastly different. The English words 'pregnancy' and 'baby birth' can be respectively euphemistically referred to as 'to ring the stork bell' and 'a visit from the stork'. Birth "is a mysterious taboo about" reproduction "that is religious and based on an ancient Western legend -" The stork brings babies ". This clearly illustrates the ancient belief that women would give birth as soon as they came into contact with the totem "stork" (stork). However, in Chinese, "pregnancy" is referred to as "carrying six armors" because ancient people believed that "six armors" were the day when heaven and earth were created; The term 'bear cobra' also originates from an ancient Chinese legend of giving birth to a child. In the Book of Songs, Xiaoya, Sikan, it is said: "The prosperity of men is represented by the presence of bears and the prosperity of women; the prosperity of women is represented by the presence of cobras and snakes." This means that seeing a bear in a dream is a sign of giving birth to a man, while seeing a snake in a dream is a sign of giving birth to a woman.

Some euphemisms related to marriage have a profound cultural heritage and are not only implicit but also very elegant. For example, those who call themselves engaged include Ding Geng (exchanging New Year's Eve messages for male and female engagement), Guo/Xia Cha (tea must be

included in the engagement and betrothal gifts), and those who call themselves married include tying hair (tying hair in a bun on the night of the wedding), flower candles (lighting candles with dragon and phoenix paintings during the wedding), and worshipping heaven and earth (the wedding ceremony is for the groom and bride to worship the parents of heaven and earth together).

### 3. CONCLUSION

American linguist Sapir wrote in his book "A Treatise on Language": "Language has a foundation... Language does not exist without culture." C. Kramshcher succinctly discussed the relationship between language and culture in three sentences: "Language expresses cultural reality. Language reflects cultural reality. Language symbolizes cultural reality. Different ethnic groups have different cultural backgrounds, and they have obvious differences in values, customs, and habits. As a form of language, euphemism has been closely linked to social culture since its inception (culture boundary). To understand euphemism, one must understand the culture of the corresponding ethnic group and society. Because only through culture can we understand and comprehend it more clearly and accurately. Master euphemisms. Undoubtedly, the marriage and childbirth euphemisms in English and Chinese are diverse and rich. The author has only made a simple comparison and analysis in a few aspects, revealing the deep cultural differences behind the English and Chinese languages. From the simple comparative analysis, it can still be seen that the cultural information carried by marriage and childbirth euphemisms is inexhaustible. It vividly and profoundly reflects the distinct and lively cultural personality of a nation, and enriches the language treasure trove of humanity with its unique expression. It is worthy of our in-depth comparison and research.

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