



Will Foreign Language Proficiency Guarantee You a Good Date?

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Abstract

Foreign language proficiency is a key indicating factor of one's educational background, family background, economic condition and social status. This present paper tries to analyze the different role of good foreign language skills for single males and females in dating by studying video files of the dating game show *If You Are the One*. The study indicates that males with good language skills have great advantage over those who don't while females with good language skills do not have obvious advantage in the dating. And it has been found that the traditional Chinese spouse-selection standards "gifted male and beautiful female" and "men's work centers around outside, women's work centers around the home" still have great impact on the young people.

Key words: Foreign language proficiency; Males; Females and dating

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INTRODUCTION

A survey conducted by Matchmaking company Duo and English educational institute franchise YBMSisa.com, studied 242 single males and 315 single females and found more than 66 percent of males and 82 percent of females had the experience of being attracted to the opposite sex

who are with good foreign language proficiency (Bae, 2008). Both men and women thought that being able to speak other foreign languages was a basic attainment for everyone and made one feel eligible and competent in the dating (Bae, 2008).

In order to analyze the importance of foreign language proficiency in dating, we draw on the video files of the Chinese dating show *If You Are the One* to testify whether good language skills really matter for single men and women in the dating. This paper is structured as followings: We firstly introduce the most-watched Chinese TV dating program *If You Are the One*. And then we analyze the different role of foreign language proficiency for single males and females in the dating show respectively. Finally, we further explore the mate-selecting criteria in China and the traditional Chinese culture of family roles which may give some clues to this phenomenon.

1. IF YOU ARE THE ONE

If You Are the One (*Fei Cheng Wu Rao*, literally meaning "if not sincere, do not bother"), is the most-watched dating game show by Jiangsu TV in China. It is hosted by Meng Fei who is well-known for his humor and wisdom in the program. Two guest psychologists Le Jia and Huang Han are also present to put forward questions to further explore the single men and women's character and give comments and advice to them. This dating show is also famous for its provocative words, innovative design and controversial issues such as money worshipper, rich second generation, materialism and so on (Fei Cheng Wu Rao, 2011).

The game starts when the single man descends the "Love Lift" with the very vigorous and rhythmed music played in the background. After briefly introducing his name, age and living area, he secretly chooses his favorite girl from the 24 single women by pressing the key on a small machine. Then he tries to impress the single women

to keep their lights on with three video clips so that he could invite his favorite girl to have a date. The first introductory video is about the single man’s profession and hobbies. The second video clip is about the single man’s love experience and the ideal girlfriend he wishes to date. The third video is comments from the single man’s friends or family members in which the virtues or shortcomings are given. After these three videos, if there are more than two women keeping their lights on, the single man must turn off the lights of those remaining until there is left with two. Then he earns his opportunity to choose his favorite date from the remaining girls (Fei Cheng Wu Rao, 2011).

2. SINGLE MALES WITH GOOD FOREIGN LANGUAGE SKILLS

In this part, the role of good foreign language skills is studied by quantitatively analyzing the successful matching rate of single men. Yang Jian, one of the single men of the TV show *If You Are the One*, studied the success rate of matching according to the single men’s occupation and living region by sampling 236 single men’s video files. His study found that single men with overseas background (males either come from overseas or go aboard for the purpose of study or work) had the highest success rate 50 percent, the same rate as civil servants, a well favored career in China, followed by private enterprise bosses and white collars (Table 1).

Table 1
The Successful Date Rate of Single Men According to Occupation

Occupation	Number of single men	Number of successful dating	Percentage
Overseas	28	14	50%
Civil servant	2	1	50%
Private enterprise boss	39	14	35.9%
White collar	80	27	33.75%
Freelancer	21	6	28.57%
Institutions	49	11	22.45%
Information Technology	17	1	5.88%

Interestingly, Yang Jian’s study of matching rate according to living area also showed that the success matching rate of single men from overseas also ranked the first: 46.15 percent, which is much higher than that of other domestic cities such as Peking, Shanghai, Guangdong etc. (Table 2).

Table 2
The Successful Date Rate of Single Men According to Living Area

Living area	Number of single men	Number of successful dating	Success rate
Overseas	27	12	46.15%
Peking	47	16	34.78%
Shanghai	21	7	35%
Guangdong	17	5	29.41%

To be continued

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Living area	Number of single men	Number of successful dating	Success rate
Tianjin	16	6	25%
Jiangsu and Zhejiang	14	4	33.33%
North East	26	5	20%
Sichuan	15	6	42.86%
Shandong	14	3	23.08%
Dalian	11	2	9.09%
Other areas	26	8	30.77%

Yang’s study showed that single men with overseas background had great advantage over those who did not. The single male’s good foreign language skill, indicating one’s academic background, economic income and social status, was a great attraction to females and guaranteed the single males the high success of matching rate. Is this the same case for the single females with good foreign language skills?

3. SINGLE FEMALES WITH FOREIGN LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

We draw on the video clips of four single females in the dating show to analyze whether their language skills also guarantee them any advantage in the dating. All the four female guests’ names in this part are pseudonyms.

TY, 28 years old, was a lecturer in a Chinese university and she could speak six languages fluently and has worked for the Confucius Institute in eight different foreign countries. For many times, she was brave enough to keep her light on to show her willingness to have a date with the male guests. For many times, she was turned down by them even though she was very modest and had a well-respected job.

XH, who got her PhD degree from Brown University in America, found it was not easy for her to have a date in the show. Every time when she tried to communicate with the male guests from overseas in English, she would be judged as “flaunting”. Her English proficiency, instead of impressing the male guests and the audience, labeled her as “showing off”. She was turned down so many times that she was depressed and lost the hope of finding a match from the show and dropped out even though the program director tried to persuade her to stay.

The role of language proficiency for females is clearly shown in No. 41 Episode of *If You are the One*. The first single male guest, LK was born in China and raised in Canada. When describing the requirements for his ideal girlfriend, he pointed out that his girlfriend should be independent and be proficient at either English or French, “Because I have many foreign friends and when we are together I don’t want my girlfriend to feel isolated because she could not understand English or French.”

Many female guests competed with each other by showing off their foreign language skills. The scene was so hilarious that the host commented in a humorous way that this was like the conference of the United Nations. Finally,

two females with good language skills HXL and WMH confidently kept their lights on. They were independent, proficient at English or French and had good jobs. And they also tried to impress the male guest by emphasizing their independency and their good language skills.

HXL, 28 years old, was an international trade company manager. She showed her willingness to have a date by stressing that she could meet the man's two requirements for his girlfriend. She said she would respect the male guest's career and emphasized that she could speak four languages.

WMH, 28 years old, a regional representative for a foreign company, said:

I came back from Cario this March. I like traveling around the world. ... I am very proficient at languages. No matter which country you would go, I would learn the foreign languages and local culture soon. ... My parents are a happy couple and I hope we could live a happy life like them.

Surprisingly, LK did not choose either of them. With the risk of being rejected by his favorite girl who was not proficient at languages and leaving the show without taking a date, he grabbed the last chance to convince the very beautiful girl to have a date with him: "When I said my girlfriend should be independent, I did not mean you cannot be clingy. ... If you are not good at English or French, I could teach you in the future". His words completely contradicted with his description for his ideal girlfriend in the second video.

When interviewed later, he said "people may think I choose my girlfriend by judging appearance. That is not true". L K's choice confirmed the guest psychologist Le Jia's comment: I am one hundred percent sure that foreign language proficiency matters little for this relationship, not as importantly as he described. Language is only a stepping stone. The point is whether one could respect the other's private room. One can work hard to improve the language proficiency. But it is much harder to change one's character to be independent and respect the other's private space.

The above cases indicate that compared with males, females with foreign language skills do not have obvious advantages in the dating even though in some cases when language proficiency is preferred by the male guests. It seems that language proficiency does not guarantee the females great advantage in the dating. Why the role of language proficiency is so different for males and females in the dating? In the next part, we try to explore different mate-selecting criteria between males and females which may give some clues to this phenomenon.

4. DIFFERENT CRITERIA BETWEEN MALES AND FEMALES IN MATE-SELECTING

Many sociologists studied the different mate-selecting criteria between males and females in China. Han (2001)

analyzed the different criteria of males and females in choosing spouse based on the study of the advertisements on one magazine during the year from 1989 to 1999. His study revealed that females paid more attention to economic condition, profession, living area, while males paid more attention to the female's appearance and character (Han, 2001).

Xu's (1997) study of 911 young couples in Shanghai had similar results which also showed that when choosing spouse, females would pay attention to the male's academic degree, housing, career, maturity, responsibility and income while males pay close attention to the appearance and character (Xu, 1997).

Wang and Rong (2011) studied 344 single males' video files of the *If you are the One*, and found in their open-ended self-descriptions, the most frequently occurring attributes for males were, in descending order, "age", "occupation", "region", "temper", "hobby", "economic status", "academic background", "ability", "family background" and "lifestyle". While for the desired wife, the attributes, also in the descending order, were "tender and considerate", "filial", "kind-hearted", "outgoing", "elegant", "lovely", "beautiful", "mature", "dependent" and "smart".

Yuan's (2012) study showed that the young city men born after 1980s in the show *If you are the One* paid more attention to the females' character, temper, virtue, appearance and hobbies. The academic degree is the least mentioned attribute by the males.

All these studies demonstrate that there are differences on the mate-selecting criteria between males and females which could date back to the ancient Chinese principles of Three Obediences and Four Virtues, Nan Cai Nü Mao and Nan Zhu Wai Nü Zhu Nei.

5. TRADITIONAL CHINESE CULTURE OF FAMILY ROLES

The stark asymmetry originated from the traditional Chinese culture of the different roles for males and females in the family. In ancient Chinese Feudal Society, women were inferior to, and dependent on, men (Studying Chinese Women, 2011). Women were required to follow "the principles of Three Obediences and Four Virtues" (Ding, 2001). Three Obediences were "obedience to father before marriage, the husband during marriage and the sons in widowhood". Four Virtues were morality, physical charm, and propriety in speech and efficiency in household chores. Therefore women's duties were giving birth to babies and taking responsibility for the family clothing and meals. If the women cannot follow these principles, it would imperil their relationships and be abandoned by the husband.

Nan Cai Nü Mao (gifted male and beautiful female) which is closely related with the view that men are superior

to women, was the main spouse-selection standard in China. This principle refers to that talent is the most important aspect for men while beautiful physical appearance is the most important factor for women. From this principle, we could see the different family roles for males and females.

Another deeply ingrained principle of the family role is that Nan Zhu Wai Nü Zhu Nei, that is men's work centers around outside, women's work centers around the home. Despite the fact that with the feminist movement, the female's social status was greatly improved and their role was gradually shifted from the inside to the outside (Studying Chinese Women, 2011), in choosing spouse, males still pay close attention to the females' appearance and personality rather than their occupation and their economic condition (Zhong, 2003). It is the appearance that matters for females rather than good foreign language skills. While for males, good language skills, often associated with rich family background or better occupation, could guarantee the males great advantage in dating.

The items of the females' background information in TV program *If You Are the One* also reflected the emphasis on women's family role of being a wife. And it could be easily seen from Table 3 that among the ten items of women's background, four items fall into the categories of ancient Chinese principle of Four Virtues and become the most concerned issues of the males.

Table 3
The List of the Single Women's Background Information in *If You Are the One*

Category	Item
morality	Do you want to live with in-laws? Do you want to have kids?
Proper speech and modest manner	
Physical charm	Beautiful
Ability to do the needle work	Ability to do the household chores
Others	Do you mind notarizing the prenuptial property?
	What is the man's shortcoming you dislike most?
	Consumption idea
	Economic status
	Past romance experience Family background

Be filial to in-laws, having the descendants; be capable of doing the household chores and physical charm all belong to the categories of Four Virtues. Even though Three Obediences and Four Virtues were severely criticized and seemingly abandoned by the society, they still invisibly affect the criteria in choosing spouse. Men pay close attention to women's appearance, morality and hope the females' work centers at home.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, we analyzed the different roles of foreign language proficiency between males and females and

found males with good languages skills showed great attraction to females while females with foreign language proficiency did not have any advantage in the dating show program.

Then the different criteria between males and females in choosing spouse were analyzed. It has been found that men paid close attention to the females' appearance and character rather than their occupation or academic achievement, while females paid more attention to the male's career, economic condition and salary.

These differences originated from the traditional Chinese principles "Nan Cai Nü Mao" and "Nan Zhu Wai, Nü Zhu Nei", which to a great extent, had great influence on the young people in the mate-selecting. As foreign language skill is often an important indicator of a person's economic status, career, academic achievement, it makes sense that males with good language skills have great advantage in the dating while females with language skills do not have obvious advantages since their expected role in the family is being a wife rather than the bread-winner.

We hope with the feminist movement, women's social status would be further improved and the social inequality would gradually disappear and women would really have the equal rights as men in the dating.

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