



Politeness Principles Difference in Appellations Between English and Chinese

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Abstract

Appellation plays a very important role in people's daily communication and it is necessary to abide by certain principles of politeness in the choice of address forms. This paper mainly studies the reflection of politeness principle in the appellations, the influence factors about using those address forms appropriately, as well as cultural difference between English and Chinese, which can provide some guiding points for people to perform interpersonal and intercultural communication smoothly and establish a good communication relationship.

Key words: Appellations; Politeness Principle; Influence Factors

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INTRODUCTION

The appellation is an important part of the language system, and plays a very important role in people's daily communication. In the process of communication, appellation is the first information passed to each other. Different address forms reflect the identities of people in the communication, their degree of intimacy and different social statuses. Proper appellations can make communication go smoothly, while inappropriate address forms will make the other feel unhappy, and thus may

result in an unsuccessful conversation. Therefore, in the process of communication, the speaker needs to follow the principles of politeness to choose appropriate appellation, according to the age, occupation, identity, status and relationship with each other as well as the context and situation factors. But, there exist many differences between English and Chinese appellation because of distinctive culture, then people should notice the difference there, follow the right politeness principle, and choose appropriate appellation during the process of cross-cultural communication. This paper mainly focuses on the politeness principle difference in appellations between English and Chinese. The study of politeness principles in address forms as well as the influence factors of using appellation appropriately can provide some guiding points for people to perform interpersonal and intercultural communication smoothly.

1. APPELLATIONS AND THE POLITENESS PRINCIPLE

1.1 Appellations

Address forms are the words speakers use to designate the person they are talking to while they are talking to them (Fasold, 2000, p.1). Different appellations not only reflect the social relations between the speaker and listener, the degree of intimacy and their social status, but also express the speaker's attitude and emotion towards the listener. Besides, according to the address form chosen by the speaker, the listener can understand his or her true intent and purpose to a certain extent. The appellations are mainly divided into kinship terms and social address forms. The latter is one used in social occasions compared with the former.

Because of cultural differences, English and Chinese have different appellations. English appellations include:

(1) general address forms, such as sir, madam, miss, etc. (2) job title, official title and professional appellations, including President, General, doctor, etc; (3) name, such as Helen, David, Tom, etc; (4) using the nickname or insulting words to address each other, such as honey, baby, idiot, etc. However, Chinese appellations are divided into: (1) kinship address forms, including “姑姑”, “姑父”, “姨”, etc; (2) special kinship address forms, referring to those used for people who is not a relative, like “uncle”, “aunt”; (3) the name, including full name, alias, nickname, etc. (4) general address forms, which can be widely applied to the members in the same social category, such as “同志”, “师傅”, “先生”, etc; (5) job titles; (6) zero appellations, which means to address people using his or her occupation, or the ongoing activity, such as “民警”, “骑自行车的”, “服务员”, etc.

1.2 The Politeness Principle

Lakoff R. T., America's famous linguist, thought that pragmatic criterions are clearness and politeness. The politeness principles include: (1) formality: don't impose / remain aloof; (2) hesitancy: give the addressee his options; (3) equality: act as though you and the addressee were equal/make him feel good (Lakoff, 1990, p.34). Geoffrey Leech, the famous British linguist, put the polite in rhetoric and stylistic frame to study, mentioning Politeness Principles in Principles of Pragmatics and putting it as “Minimize the expression of impolite beliefs; maximize the expression of polite beliefs”(Thomas, 1995, p.159). Leech's “Politeness Principle” includes the following six rules, and each rule also includes two sub-rules:

Maxim of Tact (in directives and commissives)

(i) Minimize cost to other

(ii) Maximize benefit to other

Maxim of Generosity (in directives and commissives)

(i) Minimize benefit to self

(ii) Maximize cost to self

Maxim of Approbation (in expressives and assertives)

(i) Minimize dispraise of other

(ii) Maximize praise of other

Maxim of Modesty (in expressives and assertives)

(i) Minimize praise of self

(ii) Maximize dispraise of self

Maxim of Agreement (in assertives)

(i) Minimize disagreement between self and other

(ii) Maximize agreement between self and other

Maxim of Sympathy (in assertives)

(i) Minimize antipathy between self and other

(ii) Maximize sympathy between self and other

(Leech, 1983, p.45)

In China, Gu Yueguo, based on Chinese culture about politeness, put forward in 1990 some politeness features, including respectfulness, modesty, attitudinal warmth, and refinement. According to Gu, “respectfulness” is self's positive appreciation or admiration of other concerning the latter's face, social status and so on. “Modesty” can

be seen as another way of saying “self-denigration”, which is unique in Chinese. “Attitudinal warmth” is self's demonstration of kindness, consideration, and hospitality to other. It bears a strong Chinese trait, for, according to Brown and Levinson, demonstrating kindness, consideration and hospitality, the speaker runs the risk of infringing on the hearer's negative face. “Refinement” which represents the normative character of politeness refers to self's behavior to other which meets certain standards (Gu Yueguo, 1990, p.239). In 1992, he further discussed the issue of politeness principle and concluded five items of politeness principles related to Chinese and Chinese culture. The politeness principles are as follows:

The self-denigration maxim

It means that people must denigrate himself or herself when talking about “self” or something related to “self”, while he or she must show the respect to the addressee when talking about the addressee or something about the addressee. For example, when talking about children with others, “小儿” “小女” are self-deprecating expression, while “令郎” “令媛” are honorific ones.

The address term maxim

This maxim means people address each other with an appropriate appellation. The change of address form implies the change of international relationship. But different speech acts and different situations also influence the address term.

The refinement maxim

If a person is equipped with elegant language, he will be considered as polite and elegant people. The refinement maxim still focuses on “using refined language and banning foul language; more euphemism but less direct language”.

The agreement maxim

This maxim is related to “lian (脸)”, “mianzi (面子)”. Gu believes that “lian (脸)” mainly refers to the positive social value matching up to one person's social status and position. If one's behavior agrees with the positive value, he or she will “gain faces”; however, if a person's behavior does not agree with the positive value, he will “lose faces”. “Agreement” means the addresser and addressee should maximize harmony and agreement and minimize disagreement to the utmost.

The virtues-words-deeds maxim

It means, in behavior, people should try their best to minimize others' price, but to enlarge others' benefits to the large extent; in the words, people should try their best to exaggerate the benefits brought by others to themselves, but minimize the price paid by them.

Based on the above two kinds of politeness principles, we find that there exist some differences under different cultural backgrounds. Western nations, emphasizing the form, consider “politeness” as the strategy of “avoiding conflict”, therefore, western people always pay attention to themselves and respect others. However, Chinese

believes that “politeness” embodies one person’s inner cultivation and moral sentiment. As a result, when showing “politeness”, Chinese people often place emphasis on using words to show morality, to show their respect (to others) and humility (to oneself), therefore, “the self-denigration maxim” and “the address term maxim” are regarded as two politeness principles which are most characteristic of Chinese national culture.

English and Chinese appellations should both abide by the politeness principle. In communicative activities, people should choose correct appellation based on the social status, degree of intimacy and so on, establishing appropriate interpersonal relationship.

2. THE REFLECTION OF POLITENESS PRINCIPLE IN THE APPELLATIONS

In daily communication, the speaker should select appropriate appellations to address each other according to the situation, the social relationship and degree of intimacy with the listener, as well as other factors. The choice of appropriate address forms reflects the politeness principle, which means that the speaker should choose correct appellations under the instruction of the politeness principle. Understanding the reflection of politeness principle in appellations help people in daily communicative activities to better understand and choose different and correct appellation in different occasions to address different listeners, thereby to establish appropriate interpersonal relationship and make a smooth communication. This paper mainly discusses the reflection of politeness principle in appellations from the kinship terms, social appellations, as well as polite and self-deprecatory appellations.

2.1 Kinship Terms

In China, addressing people pays attention to the concept of “respect for seniority” and “hierarchy is different”, that is, there are a large number of appellations among relatives, including “姑姑” “舅舅” “姨” “表兄弟” “表姐妹” “堂兄弟” “堂姐妹” etc. When addressing their relatives, people should use corresponding appellation, which follows the politeness principle, but also reflects the traditional Chinese culture. In addition, people often use kinship terms to call a friend or even a stranger in China, for example, people call a female friend and a male friend of parents respectively as “阿姨”, “叔叔”; When inquiring strangers in the street, people address the young as “阿姨”, “叔叔”, “大哥”, “大姐” and the senior as “爷爷” “奶奶”. All reflect the politeness principle. But, if people don’t address others like that, they will violate the politeness principle, making the listener unhappy and stopping the communication from developing smoothly.

However, there are a very small amount of appellations in English, and the reference is very wide, and semantics

is very fuzzy. Different from Chinese, there are not different address forms to different relatives in English. For example, in English, father’s sister and mother’s sister are both aunts; Father’s brother and mother’s brother are both uncles; all brothers and sisters except biological ones are cousins. Besides, people do not always use these terms to address relatives in English; instead they directly address each other's names on most occasions. This kind of behavior in English is consistent with the politeness principle. In addition, in English, people will not use “aunt”, “uncle” to address a friend or a stranger, otherwise, they will feel very strange, and this would violate the politeness principle. For example, A Chinese student studying in the United States addresses the landlady as “aunt” in order to show intimacy, while the landlady was very surprised, and told him not to call her like that for she was not his aunt. This story is a typical example in violation of politeness principle in English.

2.2 Social Appellations

2.2.1 Names

In Chinese, people often use the full name to call peers or junior, and Chinese people often add “小” before junior's name to be friendly and kind, such as “小李”, “小王”. However, full names are generally not used when addressing the superiors, instead of using “先生”, “小姐”, or adding “老” before the surname to show respect and prestige, such as “王先生”, “李小姐”, “老王”, “老李”. While, “old” in English is not equal to “老” in Chinese. They are different in usages, so “old” can not be used like “老” as above.

In English, people with similar age and status often directly address each other's names to show enthusiasm and intimacy. When addressing the elder and superiors, Mr., Miss, Mrs. and Madam are often added before the surname to express respect.

2.2.2 Job Titles

Job title is a symbol of power and status. Addressing people with the title can show respect for each other. In Chinese, almost any titles can be connected with name as appellation, such as, “张科长”, “李部长”, “温家宝总理”. Besides, people can directly address the titles, such as “部长”, “科长”. Those address forms are very common in daily life.

In English, a few of the titles can be used like this, such as Professor, President, and Captain etc. They may be used alone, and can also be used together with the name, such as Professor Smith.

2.3 Polite and Self-Deprecatory Appellations

Chinese embodies the modesty maxim completely for Chinese people possess the attitude of humility. Chinese Appellations consist of a large number of honorific and self-deprecatory expressions, with the latter including “寒舍”, “菲酌”, “薄酒”, “犬子”, “小女”, “敝人”, “贱内”, “在下” etc. And the former including “贵公子”, “令堂”,

“贤弟” etc. The second personal pronoun also includes the self-deprecatory expression “你” and the honorific one “您”. In communicative activities, people should use the honorific to address others, but use self-deprecatory appellation to refer to oneself, such as “您贵姓”, “鄙姓王”, “免贵姓王”, etc.

While the Western advocates individualism, confirms personal values, and emphasizes the realization of self-value. Therefore, honorifics in English are fewer than those in Chinese. Unlike Chinese, there is only one word “You” in English as the second personal pronoun, and “寒舍” in Chinese is just “my house” in English.

3. INFLUENTIAL FACTORS OF USING APPELLATIONS CORRECTLY

3.1 Solidarity and Power

Brown and Gilman (1960, p.255) define Power as “one person may be said to have power over another in the degree that he is able to control the behavior of the other.” For example, to children, parents possess positive authority; to employees, boss possesses positive authority. Solidarity refers to that both sides in the communication have something in common in a shared experience, community relations, common interest and affection. For example, the relationship between classmates can be regarded as solidarity. In Brown and Gilman’s study, the two semantic features are represented by the initial capitalized forms of the Latin words “vos” and “tu”, usually written as T and V. T indicates the amiable appellative form, which is analogous to “你” in Chinese. V represents the polite honorific, which is similar to “您” in Chinese. When parents and employers address their children and employees, they will use a T form; whereas children and employees should address their parents and employers with a V form. The relationship of power is non-reciprocal. However, solidarity is reciprocal, so classmates can address each other with a T form. In the communication process, the selection of appropriate appellation is influenced by solidarity and power, which means that people should choose the correct address forms according to the communicative relationship and social status between speakers.

Here is an example. We can say it is “power” between teacher and students in the class, and students should use honorific showing respect to address the teacher, like Miss Smith, Mr. Smith, 李 老师 etc. However, removing the teacher-student relationship after class, they are friends, then it is “solidarity” between them; therefore, students can choose the amiable appellative form to show intimacy. In English, students can call their teacher’s name directly, like John; in Chinese, students can address their teacher “李姐” to show a close relationship.

3.2 Contextual Factor

Contextual factors can be divided into two categories:

linguistic context and extra-linguistic context. The former usually means the context; the latter includes subjective contextual factors (age, occupation, status, identity, experience, personality, mood and so on) and objective contextual factors (time, place, occasion, topic and so on). Different appellations should be used to address the same people in different circumstances. Ignoring the contextual factors will cause the improper use of appellation. For example, a man called his wife Miss Li in the office, while he may call his wife “darling” at home. This example fully shows that if the situation is different, the appellation should be different. People should choose appropriate address form based on the context.

4.3 Cultural Factor

Due to cultural differences, English and Chinese Appellations are different in use. Chinese culture attaches importance to the value of community, takes collectivism as the principle, and follows the concept of “respect for seniority” in the appellation, while western culture values individual’s independence, taking individualism as the principle. In Chinese, children often call adults who are not relatives “uncle” and “aunt”, and people often use “小” or “老” before the surname to be respect. However, people directly address each other's names in English to show intimacy, and children will not call others aunt or uncle. Besides, it is not polite adding “old” before the surname to address others in English. For example, after a general manager from the United States and a Chinese employee introduced themselves, the general manager said: “Lili, you can just call me John.” While Lili immediately rejected him feeling embarrassment after listening to this: “No no Mr. Pye.” This dialogue fully demonstrates different usage of appellation as a result of cultural differences.

4. CULTURAL DIFFERENCE AND PRAGMATIC FAILURE

The reason why there are so many conflicts in the process of inter-cultural communication is deep-seated cultural differences are behind languages. Due to historical reasons, change of geographical environment, religion and other aspects, all nations in the world have formed their own unique cultural tradition, which was clearly reflected in the language.

Influenced by the traditional culture, Chinese attach great importance to consanguinity and patriarchal clan. “Generalization” of kinship terms is a reflection of this cultural feature, and people are willing to close the communicative distance through kinship terms. “The golden mean” of Confucian has far-reaching influence on the Chinese nation, which is why “less” and “over” are both refuted. The characteristic of Chinese culture appreciating authority is also reflected in the address

terms. Job title is generally used as appellation and that is a symbol of status and identity to the addressee and a way of showing respect and closing relationship to the addresser.

While in English, there is almost no self-deprecating appellation, and honorific title is less rich and complex than Chinese. This is because, English speaking countries are influenced by Christian culture, and in all kinds of literary enlightenment movements, people promoted human values, respected for human rights, and paid attention to the force of human being. They advocate the “equality”, believing all people are equal before God. In addition, English speaking countries enter into the industrialized society much earlier, and are more economically independent; therefore they build a form of small family with husband and wife as the core, rather than the large family with parents as the core in China. Compared with the Chinese, people in English speaking countries often lay less emphasis on family values, pursue personal independence, and form the value of individualism which is self-centered. Therefore, the choice of appellation in English depends more on the mutual familiarity and social occasions, but is seldom restricted by seniority, age and other factors.

CONCLUSION

Appellations are used very frequently and are also a very important part in daily communication activities. Due to cultural difference, English and Chinese have different appellations. Therefore, people should be aware of the differences of cultures and know to choose appropriate address forms according to distinctive situations,

social status, degree of intimacy etc. in the process of daily and international communication. If people ignore the difference between English and Chinese cultures and choose appellations without considering the above factors, pragmatic failure will appear and the communication cannot go smoothly. The choice of appellation should follow the politeness principle, and be influenced by solidarity and power, contextual factors and cultural factors. As a result, people must choose the suitable appellation under the instruction of the politeness principle and the consideration of various factors, which is of great significance for daily communication and intercultural communication.

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