

The Intercultural Comparative Study of Taboos and Euphemisms between English and Chinese

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Abstract: In the context of globalization, nations all around the world are now gradually integrated as one united global community. Among all social facilitators, intercultural communication can be seen as an indispensable part of enhancing the connectivity between countries. However, along with cultural integration, cultural shocks such as taboo words also cropped up due to the diverse cultural backgrounds in different countries. It is imperative to pay more attention to others' customs and conventions so as to avoid or decrease misunderstandings in cross-cultural communication.

1. Introduction

1.1 Physiological Phenomenon

1.1.1 Decease

Taboos refers to words or phrases that might offended native speakers, while most outcomers were unaware of the potential insult. All human beings stand in awe of decease, which means the terminal of one's life cycle. Since ancient times, Chinese sages have raised some conceptions according to their philosophy towards death. For instance, Confucius (551BC-479BC) had once said, "How can you know well about death before you figure out the purpose of living"; The local religion-Taoism, believed in immortality. Consequently, most Chinese attach great importance to current time and the mundane life of human beings but despise death, some superstitious beliefs regard 'Death' as a taboo word^[1].

In Western countries, people's terror toward death have strong connections with Christianity. The believers hold the ideas that if a person dies of a fatal sin without repentance and does not receive God's merciful love, then he will fall into hell and suffer from the punishment called "The eternal flame", that is, the eternal separation from God. In other words, the separation from God is far more painful than any physical torment for any loyal.

1.1.2 Disease

The trace of taboos on diseases in Western countries can be found in the Bible. Our ancestors, Adam and Eve, after listening to the devil's words and eating the fruit from the forbidden tree of good and evil, felt the coolness of the evening wind for the first time, indicating that human body lose the immunity to all potential diseases. Christian theologians developed the doctrine of original

sin based on the story of their transgression, then it is commonly believed that diseases originate from wickedness, which could not be healed by atonement. Ever since then, people don't want to refer to diseases as they are unwilling to recall their faults and doomed distress^[2].

In China, the sufferers will feel unpleasant when hearing some certain words forewarning their inevitable hours as some illness maybe fatal or incurable. Particularly when the leadership are critically ill, the executives would choose to hide the condition from the public so as not to provide panic. Apart from that, it will be impolite to mention others' sickness out of the courtesy, for some diseases could disgrace or embarrassed them, ranging from hemorrhoid to AIDS.

1.2 Epithets

1.2.1 Professional Titles

The earliest occupational taboos originate in priesthood. Owing to Western common belief in Christianity and people's piety to God, the relative words to God are all forbidden. This allusion comes from the Bible, that the LORD promulgated ten commandments to the Israelite, one of which is not to call God's name directly^[3].

In modern times, some people are only able to do some jobs with lower literacy qualifications according to their poor educational conditions. Meanwhile, these practitioners are sometimes ashamed of their job titles due to their ignoble social status, some may felt downtrodden or provoked by calling their professional title directly, which sounds derisively.

1.2.2 Disadvantaged Groups

1) The elderly

So far, the virtue of respecting elders and ancestors under the influence of the feudal hierarchy and traditional Confucianism have resounded among people all around the world. Modern Chinese inherited the fine tradition by means of setting courtesy seats on all public transports.

While in some Western countries, aging population are not seen as infirm or vulnerable, instead they both meant to be huge asset to the society for their rich experience and composed mindset when dealing with knotty problems. Thus, the elderly are both respectful in China and Western countries that they are not likely to be labeled as old but sophisticated.

2) Female

Gender discrimination has always been a hot-button topic worldwide, especially when it comes to female labors' rights. Despite the fact that both men and women are mainstay of social development, there is no equivalent opportunities for women to compete with men in their work fields. Most occupational titles are ended with the suffix -man, such as policeman, fireman, garbage man, postman, salesman, Congressman, chairman, etc, which deprives women participation in those fields.

3) The disabled

The social recognition and commitment towards the disabilities has always been struggled over decades ever since modernized civilization formed. In China, Confucius has emphasized that "People are benevolent", that is to say, one should always put personal care and obligations to others in the first place, and pay attention to individual behaviors according to moral codes. At the same time, the excellent tradition of collective humanitarianism, which has been inherited from China's thousands of years of history and culture, has also protected the human rights of all disadvantaged groups including ethnic minorities, women, children, the elderly and the disabled by means of addressing them respectfully.

Differ from China, Western countries emphasized on the equal participation of the disabled in all

kind of social stages, ranging from public transportation to employment. Thus they established public accessibility aim for people who experience disabilities. It can be learned that those people can not only benefit from the assistive equipment or social welfare, but they can also realize their own value and contribute to the society just as ordinary people.

2. The Alternative of Taboo Words--Euphemisms

2.1 Physiological Phenomenon

2.1.1 Decease

In China, people's reverence towards the moral of decorum led to the euphemistic terms for death like: "go west, pass away, depart one's life, wait for the day to arrive". While in western countries, god was venerated as the creator of humankind, thus the euphemisms often related to god: "go to meet one's Maker, in heaven, with God"

2.1.2 Disease

The euphemisms on diseases are used to please others whenever there are unavoidable references. People tend to use expressions like: "have medical condition, under the weather" to describe some common diseases. When refers to those terminal illness, more obscure expressions will be used. For instance, "the Big C" for cancer, "social disease" for AIDS; some capital letters can also replace those unspeakable sickness: B.O (body odor); V.D (venereal disease); TB (tuberculosis).

2.2 Names

2.2.1 Professional Titles

Since all practitioners has his/her own value in contributing a finer world, people have reach consensus that there is neither nobleness nor lowliness in different careers. Therefore, some seemingly inferior occupational titles are glorified: garbage collector /dust man turned to "sanitation engineer"; under-taker to "funeral service practitioner"; maid to "domestic help"; migrant worker to "seasonal employee".

2.2.2 Disadvantaged Groups

1) The elderly

Regardless of diverse cultural backgrounds, people tend to use the tone of esteem to address the elderly: senior citizen, experienced citizen, advanced in age. Besides, since the senior also have the willing of being vigorous and in well condition, they also name nursing home as "ever-green club", as if they are still be able to enjoy the fleshpots_[4].

2) Female

The protection of women's rights and interests must be elevated into the will of state. In response to crate an equal employment environment that empowers women to leverage their initiative and enthusiasm, most job titles with the end of "man" are now transformed into police officer, firefighter sanitation worker, letter carrier, Congressperson, representative, salesperson, chairperson.

3) The disabled

To ensure the equal treatment that the disabled received, we should place a priority on the protection of the rights and interests of them by avoid calling them with some insulting words which quite related to their physical disabilities. Instead, we can use some decent descriptions such

as: “Handicapped, crippled or physically challenged” to introduce them.

3. The Enlightenment of Using Euphemisms in Intercultural Communication

With the march of economic integration, the concept of multiculturalism is also gathering steam. However, owing to the complexity of diversified culture backgrounds, the potential of communication difficulties and even communication conflicts which are mainly caused by taboo topics persists. Therefore, we should pay attention to the avoidance of taboo topics by digging into historical or religious background in other countries.

On top of that, the ethic norms within also function in interpersonal communication. The social interaction between individuals embodies integrity, friendliness, equality and freedom so as to finally form a civilized and harmonious coexistence at the national level. There is no denying that use of euphemisms will play a vital role in eliminating misunderstanding in the bilateral communication of international community. In a word, exploring and studying euphemisms is undoubtedly of positive and practical significance to the effective cross-cultural communication.

4. Conclusion

An examination of the history of human society reveals that an open world economy flourishes. Ever since we have broke the language barriers with artificial intelligence, the whole world today is at a momentum where a new pattern of industrial and technological revolution is gathering steam. Furthermore, the advancement of each country is no longer a solitary priority of their own, it calls for solidarity of the whole globe since we are determined to establish a community of shared future for mankind. Based on this principle, we should keep an open and tolerant mind. That is to say, we should not only avoid mentioning other people's taboos, but also be inclusive to others' unconscious mistakes, so as to create an enabling atmosphere for countries to enhance communication, build up mutual trust and strengthen coordination and cooperation.

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