

Positive Face and Negative Face in Chinese and Japanese

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Abstract: This paper is based on the politeness theory of language application that Brown and Levinson proposed in 1987. Both China and Japan belong to the Oriental civilization, and there is a certain similarity between Chinese and Japanese. This paper studies how face theory is embodied in Chinese and Japanese. It can be concluded that the expression of positive face in Chinese and Japanese is roughly the same. For the negative face, although Matsumoto (1988) and Mao (1994) have made criticism. However, negative face does exist in Chinese and Japanese, but the revealed phenomenon is not regarded as the meaning of face in Chinese.

1. Introduction

Brown & Levinson's face theory, as an influential theory in expounding the phenomenon of politeness, is founded on the basis of Western cultures. Brown and Levinson define "face" as "a personal public image that every member of society intends to earn for himself" (Brown & Levinson, 1987:61)[4]. Through communication with others, this image can be damaged, maintained or enhanced. They believe that every communication participant has two kinds of face: positive face and negative face. Positive face is the hope to get others' approval, love, appreciation and respect; Negative face means that you do not want others to impose on you, your own behavior is not interfered with by others, and you have the freedom to choose your own actions (Brown & Levinson, 1987:62)[4]. Since British scholars Brown and Levinson proposed the politeness theory of language application in 1987, many scholars have questioned the universality of negative face in politeness theory. Among them, Matsumoto (1988) believed that the negative face in Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness does not apply to Japanese culture. She believes that the starting point of negative face in politeness theory is that "the basic unit of society is the individual", while Japanese culture emphasizes interpersonal relations, not the power of individual freedom of action without interference[3]. The author believes that it is precisely because Japanese culture emphasizes interpersonal relationship that the politeness theory is more applicable to Japanese culture. Meanwhile, Mao (1994) believes that negative face does not exist in the content of Chinese face[5]. However, the author believes that negative face does exist in Chinese communication and has an impact on communication, although the phenomenon it reveals is not regarded as the meaning of face in Chinese. This paper will discuss how negative face and positive face are reflected in the Chinese language and Japanese language, and the comparison of positive face and negative face in Chinese language and Japanese language.

2. Face Theory in Chinese

In Chinese culture, face is the expression of individual identity and ideal image requirements, and is the sum of individual social status, social value and life requirements. The behavior of the individual must conform to the requirements of this identity and image. In the Chinese cultural society, there are some recognized moral norms and ideal personality standards, which regulate the individual's words and deeds, such as the requirements of benevolence and justice, moral ability, loyalty and so on. Individual words and deeds in line with the general standards of society can earn face, against the general standards will lose face. Under this cultural background, Chinese face is different from the face concept Brown & Levinson's face theory. However, this is not enough to prove that the face theory does not apply to Chinese.

2.1. Positive Face in Chinese

In China, face is a symbol of human relations and interpersonal influence. The Chinese cultural society pays special attention to the harmony of human relations and interpersonal relations, and the affection is regarded as the scale of individual interpersonal influence and relationship harmony. In interpersonal interactions, giving face to the other party accomplishes the harmony of the relationship and gives the other party a heavenly face, and vice versa refutes the other party's face. This kind of face is broadly the same as the positive face requirements of Brown & Levinson's face theory.

In Chinese culture, the requirement of positive face to be accepted and appreciated is relatively sensitive and prominent. If the individual is not accepted and respected in the collective and society, it loses the foundation of the society. Therefore, the positive politeness derived from positive face has become the formal, important and common politeness content in Chinese culture.

As a speech act that infringes on the recipient's positive face, the type of negative evaluation of the listener's positive face summarized by Brown and Levinson is also a face infringement behavior in Chinese culture.

2.2. Negative Face In Chinese

Mao (1994) believed that face in Chinese refers to the good image that an individual can obtain in the group, which has two aspects. On the one hand, it refers to the prestige or reputation gained by success in life, or given to oneself by others. On the other hand, it refers to the respect that an individual receives from the group in which he or she lives because he or she adheres to the moral standards of the society. Mao points out that Brown and Levinson define face as "the self-image that people want to obtain for themselves" and emphasizes face-facing individuals[5]. However, face in Chinese has social orientation and is given to individuals by society. Secondly, face in Chinese does not have the content of negative face. The Chinese term "face" refers to the desire of the Chinese to make the public believe in their authority or reputation, rather than the desire of individuals to act without forced interference from others. In Chinese, to gain face does not mean to have the right to freedom of action, but to gain the respect of the group. The face is also different from the positive face, because the face has a strong moral connotation. Mao proposed Relative Face Orientation to explain the concept of face in Chinese and Japanese and the concept of face in Brown and Levinson. He believes that Chinese and Japanese face emphasize social recognition of individuals and interdependence among social members, and individuals pursue an ideal social self and maintain harmony with society. In contrast, the Anglo-American concept of face emphasizes the individual's desire or need to keep the individual's free space undisturbed, and the individual is the center of social communication (1994:471)[5]. However, the author believes that negative face does exist in Chinese communication and has an impact on communication, although the phenomenon it reveals is not

regarded as the meaning of face in Chinese.

When expressing causal inference and complex sentence relations in Chinese, it is customary to place reason before conclusion or central argument. She believes that an important reason for using this format is that the Chinese emphasize harmony, try to avoid friction between each other, and avoid imposing their own Lu burial and thus making each other difficult. This strategy for avoiding imposing or showing respect is precisely negative politeness.

3. Face Theory in Japanese

Similar to Mao's (1994), Mastsumoto's (1988) criticism of B&L is mainly about negative face. According to Mastsumoto (1988), the starting point of negative face is that "the basic unit of society is the individual", which is not a feature of Japanese culture. Japanese culture emphasizes not an individual's right to freedom of action without interference, but human relationships. This emphasis in interpersonal communication means that the communicator must understand his/her position in relation to others in society and acknowledge his/her dependence on others. What constrains social communication is not the maintenance of individual free space, but the recognition and maintenance of status in relation to others (1988:405)[3].

3.1. Positive Face In Japanese

Positive face in the theory of politeness proposed by Brown and Levinson refers to the desire to get approval, affection, appreciation, and respect from others. No predecessors have not questioned positive face, obviously positive face applies to all cultures, and Japan is no exception.

3.1.1. The embodiment of positive face in Japanese expression

Matsumoto (1988) mentioned that in Japan, when introducing oneself or introducing a person to another person, the expression of "petition (please pay more attention)" and its variations are often used. She believes that this politeness phenomenon is a negative face threat to listeners in Brown and Levinson's politeness theory [3][3]. The author believes that this polite phenomenon is not a threat to the other side's negative face, but to maintain the other side's positive face. In Japanese culture, speakers often place themselves in a lower social position to show respect for each other. Matsumoto(1988) believed the phenomenon discussed is that the speaker puts himself in a low social position to express the care of his listeners to show respect. She also mentioned that when the listener thinks that the other side is similar to their social status, for the "please give me convenience in the future(literal translation)", the listener may reply "no, nothing at all, I'm the one who needs your convenience in the future(literal translation)"[3]. Matsumoto (1988) believes that such a response helps to balance the status of both parties [3]. In this way, can we think that the obedient response is to protect their own negative face? In fact, the speaker and the listener in this phenomenon are subjectively in compliment to each other, maintenance is the other's positive face.

Similarly, there is another expression in Japanese(literal translation):

- a. How are you?
- b. Thanks to you I am in good health.

The expression of (b) is not the blessing of the other side that the health situation becomes better, but the pleasantry in interpersonal communication, indicating that the other side is a blessed person and maintains the positive face of the other side.

3.1.2. The embodiment of positive face in Japanese honorific language

The respectful language system of Japanese is complex and regular. There are three forms of

respect form, solemn form and humble form.

A sentence translated into English with exactly the same meaning will have completely different meanings when expressed in Japanese using different forms of honorifics. And in the face of different status of the listener, we must use the corresponding honorific language form. When both parties with equal or similar status, we can use the simplified form. When the listener is superior to the speaker or the two parties are not familiar, we must use respect form of Japanese language. When expressing the respect for the action subject and the listener, we must use the solemnly form of Japanese language. When reducing the speaker's own status to express respect for the destination, we must use humble form of Japanese language.

The honorific system in Japanese culture can express respect to the listener or even the subject of the action by changing the form of the verb, which is undoubtedly the embodiment of the positive face in the politeness theory proposed by Brown and Levinson.

To sum up, the positive face in politeness theory is not only applicable to Japanese culture, but also has a certain impact on the daily life of who speak Japanese .

3.2. Negative Face In Japanese

Negative face refers to not wanting others to impose on themselves, their own behavior is not interfered with and hindered by others, and have the freedom to choose their own behavior. Vague expression can maintain the negative face of the other party or oneself to a certain extent.

Fuzzy expression plays a very important role in Japanese, which can be heard and seen everywhere in daily life. The so-called ambiguous expression, refers to the ambiguous, ambiguous language, including ambiguity, omission, euphemism, etc(Zhang, 1999)[1].

3.2.1. Negative face in ambiguous expression

Ambiguous expression will bring a sense of specious ambiguity to the listener. For example(literal translation):

- a. It's delicious.
- b. Well, it is.

Similar to the above expressions, the listener often just conforms to the speaker, so that the other party will not fall into an embarrassing situation. Matsumoto (1988) believes that the restriction of social communication is not to maintain the free space of individuals, but to recognize and maintain the status of others. In order to avoid embarrassment, the listener chooses the ambiguous expression of negative face that threatens himself[3].

3.2.2. Negative face in elliptic expression

In Japanese culture, people generally do not reject others directly, they will use elliptical expressions to let the listener understand themselves; It can be said that if you do not get a positive reply from the Japanese, it represents reject. For example (literal translation):

- a. Shall we not go to see a movie together tomorrow?
- b. Well, though I'd like to go together, tomorrow is kind of...

The above reply uses the form of omission and does not say what is going to happen tomorrow or whether (b) is going to go at all, which is actually a Japanese way of saying no. It is protecting negative face by omitting expressions.

In addition, it is worth noticing that the above question uses a negative question. Here is the use of a euphemistic question method, as far as possible to ensure that the other side's negative face will not be threatened. The negative face in euphemism will continue to be explained in the next section, which will not be repeated in this section.

3.2.3. Negative face in euphemistic expression

In both Chinese and Japanese language, there is such a phenomenon that the speaker wants to express the real intention, but is unable or unwilling to express it due to environmental, cultural and other factors (Morimoto, 1988:60)[2]. This contradiction between subjective and objective causes euphemism in the languages of China and Japan. In fact, the expression of euphemism is common in the languages of all countries in the world, but it is particularly prominent in Japan, which is also in the Oriental civilization as China. In the daily life warning words, Japanese and English expressions are completely different. The following examples can prove:

(1) English: No photography.

Japanese: Please carefully consider photography here. (literal translation)

(2) English: No Speeding.

Japanese: You can not stop or turn corners in this speed. (literal translation)

(3) English: Do not forget anything.

Japanese: Please make sure there is nothing left. (literal translation)

None of the above Japanese expressions use commands or suggestions in a way that prevents the listener from feeling offended and preserves the negative face of the other person.

In addition, making noise while eating is considered impolite behavior in Japan. When a guest makes a sound while eating, the host family will not directly point out the impolite behavior, though the host family is dissatisfied. The host family prefer using vague expression methods to remind the guest: The food suit your taste. (literal translation) This situation is that the host family is reminding the guests to not eat too loud, does not remind the guests directly, maintaining the negative face of the other side. Such vague expressions are often found in Kyoto Japan.

4. Conclusions

From the above discussion, it can be concluded that positive face and negative face exist in Japanese communication and have an impact on both Japanese communication and Chinese communication. Japanese honorifics and some vague expressions can maintain the positive face and negative face of individuals. Moreover, Japanese culture emphasizes interpersonal relationships, so the listener will often use a negative face threat to reply, so that the other person will not feel offended. Due to the differences of the concept of face in cross-social culture, some scholars believe that negative face is not suitable for Chinese. However, this paper proves that both positive face and negative face does exist in Chinese communication and has an impact on communication, although the phenomenon it reveals is not regarded as the meaning of face in Chinese.

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