



The Influence of Thinking Differences between English and Chinese on Cross-cultural Communication and its Countermeasures

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Abstract: This paper aims to explore the impact of the differences in thinking patterns between English and Chinese on cross-cultural communication and put forward effective coping strategies. First of all, this paper analyzes the concrete manifestation of the differences in thinking between English and Chinese. Then, it analyzes the cultural roots of the differences, including individualism and collectivism, concreteness and abstractness, directness and indirectness. Then, it probes into the misunderstandings and conflicts caused by these differences in business negotiations, educational cooperation and daily communication. Finally, this paper puts forward countermeasures such as improving cross-cultural awareness, strengthening language ability training and adopting adaptive communication strategies, which provide theoretical guidance and practical suggestions for cross-cultural communication practitioners to a certain extent, so as to reduce cultural barriers and enhance international understanding and cooperation.

Keywords: Differences in thinking between English and Chinese, Cross-cultural communication, Cultural barriers, Communication strategies

1. Introduction

In the context of globalization, cross-cultural communication has become the norm. As the carrier of culture, the thinking differences behind language have a profound impact on the effect of communication. The cultural roots of thinking differences between English and Chinese are mainly embodied in individualism and collectivism, concreteness and abstractness, directness and indirectness. These differences not only affect the way of expression of language, but also profoundly affect the effect of communication between the two sides. Misunderstandings and conflicts caused by differences in thinking between English and Chinese are not uncommon in business negotiations, educational cooperation and daily communication. Therefore, understanding and adapting to these differences is essential to improve the efficiency and effect of cross-cultural communication. This paper aims to analyze the cultural roots of thinking differences between English and Chinese, explore their specific manifestations in cross-cultural communication, and put forward effective countermeasures to reduce cultural barriers and carry out cross-cultural communication more effectively.

2. Theoretical basis

2.1 The relationship between language and culture

2.1.1 Language as a reflection of culture

As a bridge of human communication, language is a reflection of culture. Every language bears the unique cultural background of a nation or race, carries the mark of the culture, and embodies the values, ways of thinking and living customs of the culture. Language is an important part of culture, as well as the carrier of culture, the tool of cultural transmission and continuation. It can even be said that there can be no culture without language ^[1]. The vocabulary and grammar in a language are deeply imprinted with the mark of culture. Under different cultural backgrounds, people may have significant differences in their cognition and expression of the same thing. The development and change of language are influenced by culture, and the progress of culture also drives the progress of language. At the same time, language also deeply affects culture, and the development of language promotes the development of culture. The two complement and restrict each other.

2.1.2 Interaction between language and thinking

The relationship between language and thinking is inseparable. Language is not only a tool of communication, but also a way of expression of thinking. Whorf (1956) ^[2] believed that the structure of language affects our world outlook and way of thinking, and language determines people's thinking to a large extent. On the other hand, the way of thinking also affects the use of language. The production and use of language cannot be separated from the guidance and construction of thinking, and thinking activities provide a steady flow of power for the development and change of language. Mode of thinking not only affects the way of expression of language, but also promotes the continuous development and change of language.

2.2 Cross-cultural communication theory

2.2.1 Hofstede's cultural dimension theory

Hofstede (1980) ^[3] first proposed the cultural dimension theory to explain the cultural differences between different countries, which is one of the important theories for the study of cross-cultural communication. This theory puts forward five major cultural dimensions, including power distance, individualism and collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity and femininity, and long-term orientation and short-term orientation, which are helpful for us to understand and compare cultural differences between different countries.

2.2.2 Oberg's cross-cultural adaptation model

Oberg (1960) ^[4] divided the acculturation process into four stages: honeymoon period, depression period, recovery period and adaptation period. This model pays more attention to the changes of individual psychological satisfaction in the process of acculturation, and the changes in these four stages show a "U" shaped curve. The model emphasizes the influence of individual differences, environmental factors and cultural contact experience on cross-cultural adaptation.

2.2.3 Seven-dimension model of cross-cultural communication

Kim (1988) ^[5] proposed seven dimensions of cross-cultural communication, including verbal and non-verbal communication, individualism and collectivism, rights and status, relationship and emotional expression, concept of time, direct and indirect communication, self-awareness and shared responsibility. This model attempts to provide a comprehensive theoretical basis for cross-cultural adaptation, integrating concepts and empirical evidence from anthropology, communication, psychiatry, psychology, sociology, sociolinguistics and other related disciplines to form a unified theoretical framework and provide a multi-dimensional and interdisciplinary theoretical perspective for the study of cross-cultural adaptation.

2.2.4 Theory of cultural Intelligence

Earley and Ang (2003) ^[6] believe that individuals need to possess cultural intelligence, that is, the ability to

understand and adapt to different cultures, in cross-cultural communication. Cultural intelligence includes four aspects: cultural value concept, cultural perception ability, cultural interaction skills and cultural learning willingness. The theory provides a new theoretical framework for understanding and managing the success or failure of people working and managing in a foreign culture, and fills a gap in management and psychological theory regarding the level of cross-cultural work and management. It helps individuals and organizations to communicate and cooperate more effectively in a multicultural environment.

3. The concrete manifestation of thinking differences between English and Chinese

3.1 Language structure and expression

3.1.1 Differences in vocabulary and syntax

The differences of thinking between English and Chinese are obvious in vocabulary and syntax. At the lexical level, English tends to be specific and precise, often using specific words to express concepts and describe things. Chinese tended to be abstract, paying attention to parataxy, and using abstract words, metaphors, and symbolic means to convey deep meaning (Lian Shuneng, 2010).^[7] For example, "spend money like water" in English and "spend money like water" in Chinese express similar concepts, but the former is more specific and clear, while the latter is more symbolic. In terms of syntactic structure, English sentences tend to be rigor structured, pay attention to hypotaxis, formal integrity and logical coherence, and express logical relations clearly through connectives. Chinese, on the other hand, attaches more importance to parataxy and has a flexible sentence structure to convey information through context and context.

3.1.2 Comparison of language styles

English tends to be direct and clear, paying attention to objective description and logical argument, while Chinese pays more attention to implicit euphemism, and is good at using metaphors, symbols and other rhetorical devices to enhance the expression of language (Gu Yuguo, 1992) ^[8]. For example, when expressing a refusal, English may directly say "No, I can't do that", while Chinese may use euphemisms such as "I'm afraid I can't" to diplomatically refuse.

3.2 Communicative style and politeness principles

3.2.1 Differences in politeness principles between English and Chinese

English culture emphasizes individualism and the principle of equality, and polite expressions tend to focus on directness and sincerity, such as "Please" and "Thank you", which are often used to show respect and gratitude to others. While Chinese culture pays more attention to collectivism and reveres harmony, the polite expressions tend to be subtle and euphemistic, such as "sorry" and "thank you for your trouble", to maintain harmonious interpersonal relationships (Lian Shuneng, 2010).^[7]

3.2.2 The influence of communication style on communication

In English culture, a straightforward communication style helps to convey information quickly and reduce misunderstandings and ambiguities, but in Chinese culture it may be seen as too blunt and inconsiderate. In Chinese culture, the implicit and euphemistic style of communication helps to maintain harmonious interpersonal relationships and avoid direct conflicts and awkward situations, but it may be seen as vague and elusive in English culture (Hu Wenzhong, 1999)^[9]. Therefore, in cross-cultural communication, it is essential to understand and adapt to the communicative style of the other party.

3.3 Differences in nonverbal communication

3.3.1 Body language and facial expressions

Nonverbal communication is also an important aspect of thinking differences between English and Chinese. In terms of body language, there are significant differences between English and Chinese cultures. For example, nodding your head indicates agreement and shaking your head indicates disagreement in English culture; While there are regional differences in Chinese culture, some regions may use shaking head to indicate agreement and nodding to indicate

disagreement (Lian Shuneng, 2010).^[7] In terms of facial expression, English culture emphasizes sincerity and openness, while Chinese culture pays more attention to introversion and implication.

3.3.2 Concept of personal space and time

The concept of personal space and time is also an important reflection of the difference between English and Chinese thinking. English culture emphasizes the protection of personal space and privacy, and is more sensitive to physical contact and distance. While Chinese culture pays more attention to group harmony and intimacy, and is more relaxed about physical contact and distance (Hu Wenzhong, 1999).^[9] In terms of the concept of time, English thinking tends to have a linear view of time, focusing on the accuracy and planning of time; While Chinese thinking pays more attention to the circular time view, emphasizing the flexibility and flexibility of time.

4. The cultural root of the difference between English and Chinese thinking

4.1 Individualism and collectivism

4.1.1 Individual and collective in English and Chinese culture

In English culture, individualism is dominant, emphasizing individual rights, freedom, independence and self-realization. In this culture, the individual is regarded as the core of the society, and individual achievement and independent thinking are highly respected. Chinese culture, on the other hand, is more collectivist, emphasizing the harmony and unity of family, group and society, as well as the individual's obedience and contribution to the group. In this culture, people pay attention to "harmony is the most valuable" and pursue harmonious coexistence, often putting individual interests after collective interests, and individual behaviors often need to obey collective interests (Xu Xingyan, 2004).^[10]

4.1.2 Influence on cross-cultural communication

Individualists tend to directly express personal opinions and feelings, while collectivists pay more attention to maintaining harmony and avoiding direct conflicts. In cross-cultural communication, Westerners may feel that Chinese people are too implicit and vague in their expressions, while Chinese people may feel that Westerners are too direct and inconsiderate of others' feelings, leading to misunderstandings and communication barriers. English speakers may wonder why Chinese people often seek consensus when making decisions, while Chinese people may feel that Westerners are too individualistic and lack team spirit (Hu Wenzhong, 1999).^[9] Therefore, understanding and respecting these cultural differences is crucial to promoting effective communication.

4.2 Concreteness and abstractness

4.2.1 Concrete expression and abstract expression of English and Chinese

English tends to use specific and direct language to express ideas, pay attention to details and accuracy, sentence structure is often rigorous, logic is clear, and many forms are used. Chinese, on the other hand, is more inclined to use abstract and implicit ways to express the meaning between words. The structure of Chinese sentences is flexible, and it emphasizes parataxy rather than hypotaxis. Context and context are often used to convey deep meaning or implication.

4.2.2 Differences in communication

In English culture, people like to express their views and needs directly and expect the other side to do the same, while Chinese people like to express their emotions and intentions through implicit and implied means, such as metaphors, euphemisms or symbols. This can be elusive for those unfamiliar with Chinese culture, adding to the difficulty of communication. For example, when declining an invitation, a Westerner might say "No, thank you" directly, while a Chinese might gently decline with words such as "I may be a little busy that day" (Gu, 1992)^[8].

4.3 Directness and indirectness

4.3.1 Direct and indirect Strategies in English and Chinese communication

In terms of communication strategies, English culture tends to be direct, encouraging to get straight to the point and

express opinions and needs directly. This strategy helps to convey information quickly and reduce misunderstanding and ambiguity. On the other hand, Chinese culture is more inclined to indirectness, paying attention to euphemism and implicativeness, often using euphemism and roundabout ways to express opinions or requests. This strategy is conducive to maintaining harmonious interpersonal relationships and avoiding direct conflicts and embarrassing situations (Lian Shuneng, 2010).^[7]

4.3.2 Influence on communication effect

In cross-cultural communication, direct communication strategies may make Westerners feel efficient and direct, but may make Chinese feel too blunt, rude and inconsiderate of others. On the contrary, indirect communication strategies may make the Chinese feel polite and reserved, but may make the Westerners feel unpredictable and think that the communication object's expression is vague. Therefore, to understand and adapt to the communication strategies and habits of the other party is very important for the establishment of good interpersonal relationship and the improvement of communication effect.

5. The influence of thinking differences between English and Chinese on cross-cultural communication

5.1. Challenges in business communication

5.1.1 Negotiation strategy and contract understanding

In business negotiations, English thinking tends to be direct and frank, emphasizing "not looking at people". Chinese thinking, on the other hand, pays more attention to establishing and maintaining relationships, pursues the concept of "peace is the most important", and emphasizes "not looking at people". This difference is also reflected in the understanding of contracts. English contracts usually have clear and logical terms. While Chinese contracts may focus more on overall intent and mutual trust, with relatively flexible terms and sometimes less precise descriptions of details (Gu, 1992).^[8] Such differences may lead to disagreements and misunderstandings between the two parties during negotiation and contract execution.

5.1.2 Misunderstandings caused by cultural differences

In business communication, cultural differences may also lead to misunderstandings in time concepts and decision-making methods. English culture emphasizes time management and believes that punctuality is a sign of respect for others. While Chinese culture also attaches importance to time, but pays more attention to flexibility and flexibility, and has a relatively relaxed concept of time (Hu Wenzhong, 1999).^[9] In terms of decision-making methods, English culture is more inclined to individual decision-making and attaches importance to individual ability; While Chinese culture is more inclined to collective decision-making, emphasizing team harmony and consensus. These differences may lead to misunderstandings between the two parties during cooperation.

5.2 Obstacles in educational cooperation

5.2.1 Teaching methods and academic evaluation

In terms of teaching methods, the educational concept of English culture emphasizes critical thinking and independent thinking, and the teaching methods mainly adopt interactive ways such as classroom discussion. While Chinese culture pays more attention to the imparting of knowledge, and the teaching method is mainly lecturing. In terms of academic evaluation, English culture pays more attention to originality, innovation and practicality, while Chinese culture may pay more attention to academic authority, inheritance and standardization (Lian Shuneng, 2010).^[7] Such differences may lead to conflicts of teaching concepts and inconsistent evaluation standards in educational cooperation projects.

5.2.2 Conflict and integration of educational concepts

The educational concept of English culture holds that education is the process of cultivating individual ability and

realizing self-value, and emphasizes personalized education. While the educational concept of Chinese culture pays more attention to collectivist education, emphasizing the cultivation of students' collective sense of honor and social responsibility (Hu Wenzhong, 1999).^[9] In the context of globalization, the conflict between English and Chinese educational concepts implies integration. The two sides are also trying to learn from and integrate each other's educational concepts, and jointly explore educational concepts and methods that are more in line with the needs of The Times, so as to promote the internationalization and diversified development of education.

5.3 Misunderstandings in daily communication

5.3.1 Understanding humor and irony

In daily communication, differences in thinking between English and Chinese often lead to misunderstandings. Especially when it comes to the use of humor and irony, the two cultures have completely different understandings and acceptances. Humor in English cultures tends to be direct and sharp; While in Chinese culture, humor is often implicit and euphemistic. This difference may lead to misunderstandings and conflicts between the two sides in communication, and one side's humor is misunderstood by the other side as offensive or disrespectful.

5.3.2 Personal space and social graces

English culture attaches great importance to the protection of personal space and privacy, and is sensitive to physical contact and distance. Chinese culture, on the other hand, pays more attention to intimacy and is relatively relaxed about physical contact and distance (Hu Wenzhong, 1999).^[9] There are also significant differences in social etiquette, such as salutations, greetings, and ways of giving gifts, which may lead to discomfort or embarrassment in communication between two parties.

6. Countermeasures and suggestions for cross-cultural communication

6.1. Enhance cross-cultural awareness

6.1.1 The importance of cultural awareness

Cultural consciousness means that an individual can deeply understand his own culture and at the same time accept other cultures with an open mind. In cross-cultural communication, people with different cultural backgrounds often have misunderstandings and conflicts due to cultural differences. By enhancing cultural consciousness, we can better avoid cultural prejudice and be more inclusive, so as to truly realize cross-cultural communication.

6.1.2 Cultivation of cross-cultural sensitivity

Cross-cultural sensitivity refers to an individual's ability to perceive, understand and respect cultural differences in cross-cultural communication (Chen Kuoming, 2009).^[11] To cultivate cross-cultural sensitivity, it is necessary to understand and learn other cultures from multiple perspectives, including history, religion, customs, values, etc. At the same time, one should also learn to see things from the perspective of others and try to understand their behavior patterns and ways of thinking, so as to reduce misunderstandings and conflicts caused by cultural differences.

6.2. Strengthen language training

6.2.1 Improving language skills

Language is the main tool for cross-cultural communication. In order to carry out cross-cultural communication more effectively, we need to constantly improve our language skills, including mastering basic language knowledge such as grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation, and proficiently applying basic language skills such as listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating. In addition, we should also understand the cultural connotation and pragmatic habits of the target language to avoid misunderstandings caused by improper use of the language (Hu Wenzhong, 1999).^[9]

6.2.2 Cultivation of cross-cultural communication competence

Cross-cultural communication competence refers to the ability to use verbal and non-verbal means to communicate effectively in different cultural environments. We can cultivate and improve intercultural communication competence in

various ways, such as simulating intercultural communication, making case studies of intercultural communication, observing and analyzing communicative behaviors under different cultural backgrounds, etc.

6.3. Adopt effective communication strategies

6.3.1 Adaptive communication strategies

In cross-cultural communication, we need to adjust our communication strategies and choose appropriate communication methods according to the cultural habits and personality characteristics of the other party. In this way, we can better adapt to the communication environment under different cultural backgrounds and improve the communication effect. For example, when communicating with people from cultures that value directness and efficiency, we can express our views and needs more directly; However, when communicating with people from a culture that values politeness and respect, we should pay more attention to the euphemism of our words and the modesty of our attitude (Gu, 1992).^[8]

6.3.2 Cross-cultural communication skills

It is very important to master some cross-cultural communication skills. First of all, learn to listen and give feedback, and respect each other's opinions and feelings. Keep an open and inclusive attitude in communication, and be willing to understand and accept different viewpoints and cultures (Gao Yihong, 2000).^[12] Secondly, avoid using words and expressions that may cause misunderstanding. When expressing your ideas, try to use simple and clear language, and supplement with appropriate non-verbal means such as body language and facial expressions to enhance the expression effect. Finally, learn to deal with conflicts and misunderstandings in cross-cultural communication. When we encounter conflicts or misunderstandings, we should keep calm and rational, and solve problems through communication and consultation.

Conclusion

Differences in thinking between English and Chinese not only affect the transmission and understanding of information, but also lead to misunderstandings and conflicts in cross-cultural communication. The differences in thinking between English and Chinese have a multi-directional impact on cross-cultural communication. In business communication, these differences may lead to differences in negotiation strategies and contract understanding; In educational cooperation, teaching methods and standards of academic evaluation may conflict due to cultural differences; In daily life, differences in understanding of humor and irony, personal space and social etiquette may lead to unnecessary misunderstandings. The existence of these differences requires the participants in cross-cultural communication to have higher cultural sensitivity and adaptability. This paper puts forward countermeasures and suggestions aimed at improving the effectiveness of cross-cultural communication, which not only help to reduce cultural barriers, but also provide support for multicultural communication in the context of globalization.

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