

A Comparative Study on English and Chinese Euphemisms from Cross-cultural Perspective

Rongqian Wang*

Yunnan Normal University, China

Abstract

Inevitably, awkward remarks are made in human interactions, and the appropriate use of euphemisms can be an effective solution to this problem. Not only is euphemism a common and widespread linguistic phenomenon, with a large number of euphemisms in both English and Chinese, but it is also a cultural phenomenon with deep cultural connotations. This article analyses the similarities and differences between English and Chinese euphemisms and the reasons behind them with the help of comparative analysis. The purpose of this paper is to make a comparative analysis of English and Chinese euphemisms, so that people can understand the differences and similarities between English and Chinese euphemisms, and master the correct communication strategies of cross-cultural euphemisms, so as to help people communicate correctly and effectively across cultures, improve the cross-cultural communication ability, and promote the communication and development between China and the West.

Keywords: English-Chinese euphemisms, comparative analysis, cross-cultural communication

INTRODUCTION

Research Background

Euphemism is an indirect method of expression used in communication, which is a universal linguistic phenomenon and exists in all languages of the world (Yu, 2018). People usually communicate with others in a calm or polite way to achieve the desired communicative effect. The use of euphemism can help people to achieve the purpose of communication in daily interactions, greatly avoid conflicts in communication, and harmonize interpersonal relationships. It is the “lubricant” (Xu 2007) and “catalyst” of interpersonal communication.

Euphemism is a linguistic phenomenon. Language carries culture. Euphemisms are a part of culture, reflecting the culture and customs of individual countries and nations. Euphemism is a symbol of culture, a cultural phenomenon. Euphemisms reflect culture, and at the same time, the development of culture also profoundly affects euphemisms. It is necessary to understand and use euphemisms correctly in Chinese and Western

intercultural communication, which is conducive to the smooth development of intercultural communication and the exchange and progress between different cultures.

Many articles on the study of English-Chinese euphemisms have been published, but some of them are not systematic, and some of them are vague in their classification of euphemisms (Wang, 2007: 133). Therefore, this paper takes a cross-cultural perspective to study the classification, characteristics, application principles and similarities and differences between English and Chinese euphemisms in a more systematic way and explore the cultural connotations behind them.

Significance of the Study

The existence of society is closely linked to language, and the development and progress of society cannot be achieved without the use of language. Euphemisms are a unique phenomenon in the use of language and play an unparalleled role in human communication. In interpersonal communication, people inevitably need to talk about taboo or indecent topics, and the use of euphemisms can avoid unpleasant and embarrassing situations, reduce friction in communication, make communication polite and pleasant, and help coordinate interpersonal relations. Generally speaking, the more civilized a society is, the more euphemisms are used, and euphemisms represent the civilization of a society to a certain extent (Yang, 2003: 125). With the passage of time and the advancement of civilization, the usage of euphemisms has grown increasingly common. The scope of euphemisms has expanded from the initial taboo language to the daily life of people and various industries. As a result, euphemisms must be studied.

Individuals will meet people from diverse cultural backgrounds as globalization progresses and exchanges and cooperation between China and the West increase, and cross-cultural dialogue will become more common. And English, being the world's most commonly spoken language, plays a significant part in people's lives. A comparative study of English and Chinese euphemisms can help people understand the cultural characteristics of euphemisms, realize the similarities and differences between English and Chinese euphemisms, and know the cultural differences behind them, so as to reduce or eliminate cultural barriers in communication, help improve the language communication ability of language users, and promote the economic and cultural exchanges and development between China and the West.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Euphemism

In interpersonal communication, euphemism is a language occurrence. The genesis of euphemism may be traced back to the use of taboo language. In ancient times, before the development of science and technology, people had a cult or fear of some mysterious phenomena in nature. So in the West, people attributed these phenomena to God, while in China they attributed them to the gods. People's reverence for God and the gods makes them afraid to call them by their names, and there are many taboos against both, so there are language taboos. Instead of using euphemisms while discussing language taboos,

individuals employ euphemisms. Euphemism is an indirect way of expression, which refers to the substitution of mild, euphemistic and nice words for abrupt and vulgar ones. Therefore, when people need to talk about something taboo, or something embarrassing or unpleasant during communication activities, euphemisms serve as a tool to effectively reduce the irritation and sensitivity of language in order to help people complete their communication activities smoothly and pleasantly.

Chinese Euphemism

The “Book of Songs” contains the first Chinese euphemisms. The aliases of euphemisms include 婉言 and 婉转. In China, Chen Wangdao, a linguist and educator, was the first to propose a definition of euphemism. In his book, *Introduction to Rhetoric*, he points out that “euphemism is a form of rhetoric, indirectly speaking of something, but using circuitous, implicit words and even metaphorical expressions to suggest and substitute” (Chen, 2008: 56). Shu and Xu (1995: 19) think:

The definition of euphemism can be understood from both the broad sense and the narrow sense. Euphemism refers to a technique of expression that is temporarily built with euphemism function by various means in the linguistic system in a wide sense. Such as language tools, phonetic tools (like light reading), grammatical tools (such tense, voice, negation, and so on), and discourse tools (such as text, etc.). Narrow euphemisms are words and phrases that have been formed by traditions and are recognized by people within a specific spectrum after being used for duration, such as the English euphemism “pass away” for “die”. Shu and Xu (1995: 19)

English Euphemism

The “euphemism” in English comes from Greek. Euphemism consists of the prefix “eu” (meaning good) and the stem “phemism” (meaning speech), so the whole word expresses the meaning of “good speech” (meaning nice words, pleasant words) (Gao, 2018). In the early 1680s, the English writer George Blunt coined the term “euphemism” and defined it as a good or favorable interpretation of a bad word (Liu, 2020). The Oxford Advanced Learner’s English-Chinese Dictionary (Hornby, 2018:726) defines euphemism as: “an indirect word or phrase that people often use to refer to something embarrassing or unpleasant, sometimes to make it seem more acceptable than it really is”. In *A Dictionary of English Euphemisms* (Liu, 2001:3), the definition of euphemism is: “euphemism is the use of metaphor, analogy, detour, abbreviation, harmonious rhyme and other techniques to express things in life that are embarrassing, unpleasant, disgusting and frightening.”

Cross-cultural Communication

Culture is everything and everywhere. Economic globalization has brought people closer together, and whether you like it or not, you will be thrust into contact with countless people, most likely from cultures very different from yours. And if you want to be effective in your interactions, you need to comprehend these cultural origins. In short, the act of people from different cultures communicating with each other is called intercultural communication, where the two parties may have different language and social

psychology. Nowadays, intercultural communication has become an important part of human life, permeating every aspect of human life and affecting the future and destiny of the world. To develop intercultural communication skills, it is vital to completely comprehend the distinctions and commonalities between English and Chinese euphemisms, as well as analyze the similarities and dissimilarities they include.

A STUDY OF EUPHEMISM

Classification of Euphemism

Euphemisms may be classified into several categories based on different angles.

Positive and Negative Euphemisms

In terms of emotional color, euphemisms can be divided into positive euphemisms and negative euphemisms (Rawson 1981: 1 cited in Zhao, 2018:24). Among them, positive euphemisms are also known as stylistic euphemisms, and negative euphemisms are known as traditional euphemisms.

Positive euphemisms make the thing being euphemized bigger and more important than it is by exaggerating and amplifying it. Positive euphemisms are widely used in occupational descriptions with the purpose of protecting workers' self-esteem. Thus, a chimney sweep is called a "chimney consultant"; a "blue collar worker" is a man who works in a factory doing physical labor; a barber is called a "stylist". Aerial workers who clean the facades of tall buildings are called "window cleaning engineers". Positive euphemisms are also commonly employed in commerce. For example, a mattress maker is called a "mattress engineer"; an eyeglass maker is called a "vision engineer"; a butcher is called a "meat technologist", and a furniture seller is called a "furnitor". (-or is a Latin suffix, meaning "actor", "worker", because it is often added after some more noble words, such as doctor and administrator. Thus English speakers consider -or to be more noble than their native suffix -er, so -or is often used in the creation of professional euphemisms (Liu, 2001:33). Positive euphemisms are also associated with politics, and their purpose is to embellish facts and hide the truth. Pro-racist, anti-racial integration policies are said to be "Wallaceism"; major accidents or disasters are said to be "events"; top secret documents are said to be "eyes only". Refugees are said to be "displaced person (DP)"; nuclear explosions are said to be "blip".

Negative euphemism is inextricably linked to forbidden language, and forbidden language's euphemism is negative euphemism. There are many taboo subjects in life, such as human organs and parts, sex, excretion, death, etc. In order to avoid direct mention of these things that are frightening, disgusting, embarrassing and angering, negative euphemisms have been created. "Altogether" is used to allude to being nude; "globes" is used to refer to women's breasts; "behind" is used to refer to ass; "house of joy" is used to refer to brothels. "Fallen women" is used to refer to prostitutes; "smell of gunpowder" is used to refer to farts; "be taken to paradise" is used to refer to die.

Conscious and Unconscious Euphemisms

From the point of view of specific usage, euphemisms are further divided into conscious euphemisms and unconscious euphemisms (Rawson, 1981: 3).

A conscious euphemism is one in which the original meaning is known and the euphemism is known, and both the speaker and the listener are aware of the reading beyond the lines. For example, when a person says "Excuse me, I must answer the call of nature." at a party of friends, everyone knows that he has to go to the toilet. Another example is when a girl is uneasy and her companion inquires, "What's up with you?" The girl replies, "I have a visitor." Her friend then realizes she is not feeling well since she is menstruating.

An unconscious euphemism is a euphemism that has been used for so long that almost no one remembers its original meaning and its euphemism has been assumed to be its original meaning. For example, the real meaning of "indisposition" is "inability to deal with things". It has been used for so long that people now think that minor illness is its real meaning without realizing that they have forgotten its real meaning.

Other Classifications of Euphemism

Euphemisms may also be classified into distinct sorts based on what they refer to. For example, in his book *A Dictionary of English Euphemisms*, Liu (2001) divides euphemisms into twelve categories. They are humans and occupations, parts of the body (verboten area), parts of the body (neutral area), diseases and disabilities, fatality and funerals, mucus secretion and byproducts, the 7 deadly sins and other misdemeanors, sex and procreation, crime and punishment, politics and war, divinities and evil spirits, oaths and swearwords. Liu (2001)

On the other hand, in his book *A Dictionary of Euphemism Applications*, Wang (2011:1-5) divides euphemisms into twelve categories: politeness-correspondence, motivation-praise, condition-situation, exhortation-criticism, time-object-naming, emotion- thought, human body-physiology, title-occupation, handling-field, nature-flaws, evaluation-appreciation, condolence-condolence.

Features of Euphemism

First of all, Euphemisms are cultural. Euphemisms, which have cultural meanings and are an intrinsic component of culture, are directly linked to language and culture. At the same time, as a linguistic phenomenon, euphemism also plays the function of language -- passing on culture, and euphemisms have an impact on culture. In turn, culture also influences the creation and changes of euphemisms. The development of culture leads to the development of euphemisms.

What's more, Euphemisms are regional. Varied geographical places have various customs and habits, and the world is diverse. This leads to the fact that each place has its own special taboos and naturally there are different euphemisms for different places.

Moreover, Euphemisms are ambiguous. When using euphemisms, people's psychological need is to avoid embarrassing and frightening topics and to avoid mentioning bad facts, so this determines that euphemism itself is not a precise expression, but a vague alternative. This is the way to make the words that people utter sound polite and pleasant.

In addition, Euphemisms are epochal. The creation, popularity and demise of euphemisms are inextricably linked to the evolution of society. Generally speaking, euphemisms often lose their euphemism after a period of time, either partially or completely. Then a new euphemism appears and slowly replaces it. For example, a poor and backward country is called “undeveloped country” at first, then “developing country”, then “third world country”, and then “the South country” (because most of the backward countries are in the South).

The Application Principle of Euphemism

The Principle of Distance

In the process of communication, people inevitably come up with taboo topics. Because of the consideration of self-respect and politeness, or because of people's inner fear, uneasiness and shame, people try to use an indirect way of expression to replace the taboo. Therefore, euphemisms are created based on the psychological distance between people. In order to avoid a direct equivalence between what is referred to and the taboo, people create a new linguistic sign to widen the distance between the linguistic sign and the object it really refers to, so that the direct expression of the taboo can be effectively avoided.

The Principle of Relationship

Although the greater the distance between a linguistic sign and the object it really refers to, the more euphemistic it becomes. But people cannot choose alternative euphemisms as they wish. Language is, after all, utilized to help communicate. If the distance between the language and the object it refers to is too great, it will be too vague. This would go beyond the listener's comprehension, leading to misunderstanding of the speaker by the listener and even to a break or failure of communication. Therefore, euphemisms should be related to the object they are intended to refer to and provide the listener with the right clues so that the listener can correctly understand what the speaker is trying to say.

The Principle of Politeness

A common purpose of using euphemisms is to demonstrate politeness. This is because being polite is good for maintaining interpersonal harmony and promoting interpersonal relationships in human interactions. This means that the speaker should be self-deprecating and eulogizing when speaking, and the speaker should respect the listener or the relevant object to meet the psychological needs of the other party, so as to ensure the normal progress of communication (Gao, 2018).

A STUDY OF CHINESE AND ENGLISH EUPHEMISMS IN COMPARISON

Euphemism is a widespread occurrence in human languages, and English and Chinese euphemisms share some commonalities. Euphemism is also a cultural phenomenon. Each nation and region has its own distinct culture. Furthermore, because English and Chinese are fundamentally different, there are numerous distinctions between English and Chinese euphemism.

Similarities between English and Chinese Euphemism

Expression of Euphemism

Some of the same expressions are used in both Chinese and English euphemisms.

The first is the use of metaphors. Metaphor is a kind of rhetorical device. Metaphor refers to the analogy of something as having the same characteristics as it. By means of metaphor, euphemism compares taboo things to things related to it, so as to achieve the purpose of euphemism. For example, in English, based on their similarity in shape, “balls and bat” are used to refer to male genitals, and “hemispheres” are used to refer to female breasts. Use “mouth-that-cannot-bite” as a metaphor for the vulva. In Chinese, 双峰, 莲, 宝宝粮仓 are also used as metaphors for women's breasts. When an important person or one who has made a great contribution to the country dies, people would say, 这是一颗巨星的陨落 (This is the fall of a star).

Secondly, both English and Chinese euphemisms use a roundabout way to express meaning. Euphemism is meant to be a roundabout expression, not a direct one. For example, in English, we use the phrase “I have two difficulties with regard to this plan” to say that I have two objections. And people replace “fat” with “rounded”, “full-figured”, “half-sizes”, “king-sized”. In Chinese, 发福, 富态, 圆润, 丰满, 体态丰盈 are used to replace 胖. And if a person's ability is very poor, people will tell him, 你还有很大的进步空间 (You still have a lot of room for improvement). In a class question, if a student gives a wrong answer, the teacher will say, 再仔细想想, 还有其它想法吗? (On second thought, any other ideas?)

Thirdly, both English and Chinese euphemisms use understated expressions. Understatement is an inadequate statement that deliberately understates the importance and seriousness of something. In English, the terms “adjustment center”, “Assembly Center”, “big house”, “bucket and pail”, and “control unit” are used to refer to “prison”. Use “air support” and “armed reconnaissance” instead of “bombing”. Use “exchange” to refer to a massive nuclear war. In Chinese, the words 抱恙, 不适, 不舒服, 欠安, 有麻烦 are used instead of 生病. Use 糊弄, 吹喇叭, 戴高帽 instead of 说谎.

Formation of Euphemism

There are many similarities in the composition of English and Chinese euphemisms, as reflected in the fact that both apply phonetic, lexical, grammatical and rhetorical devices (Bao, 2016).

1. Phonetic Devices

Both English and Chinese euphemisms use phonetic avoidance or inflexion to reflect euphemism. In the course of conversation, people avoid or adjust certain phonetics that irritate and embarrass people. For example, in English, the word “niggard” is not used when communicating with black people because it is similar to the word “nigger” in sound. “Nigger” is a word that discriminates against black people (Wang, 2007).

In Chinese, the ancient pronunciation of the word 徙 is similar to 死, and according to the law of pronunciation, the modern pronunciation should be sǐ, which is the same as 死. In order to avoid the unlucky pronunciation, it is pronounced as xǐ (Li, 2010:71).

2. Lexical devices

There are two main lexical devices: borrowing foreign words and vague words.

Foreign words can help to lessen unwanted connotations due to various cultural origins. Foreign words can expand the psychological distance between what people do not want to mention directly so that the language users can achieve euphemistic effect.

The majority of foreign terms borrowed in English euphemisms come from French and Latin. This is because throughout English history, England was conquered by France, and Latin was the official and ecclesiastical language. Therefore, Latin and French are traditionally regarded as refined languages in England (Shao, 2016:67).

For example, the word “libido”, a euphemism for sexual desire, is derived from Latin. The euphemism for pregnancy, “enceinte”, comes from French. In Chinese, people use the word “kiss” instead of 接吻 (GUO,2010). The purpose is to be more subtle and euphemistic.

The use of vague words can reduce the irritation of language and make expressions subtle and euphemistic (Shi & Sheng, 2011). For example, in English, people use “His wife is in an interesting state” and “She is anticipating” to describe a woman's pregnancy. Use “apparatus”, “gadgets” to refer to the male genitals. In Chinese, the word 有了 is used to indicate to pregnancy, and 那个来了 is used to describe to a woman's menstruation.

3. Grammatical devices

Negative statements and interrogative sentences are the two most common grammatical strategies.

Negative sentences can effectively take care of other people's face and self-esteem and make the language more euphemistic. In English, people use “I don't think this dress fits

you well” to euphemistically express that you look ugly in this dress. In Chinese, people use 你这样做不太好(It's not a good idea for you to do that) to express their opposition to others' behavior.

Questions can reduce the impact of words and weaken the tone of command, so that people's suggestions and requests can be expressed more euphemistically. For example, in English, “Would you mind turning off the TV?” is more polite and euphemistic than “turn off the TV”. In Chinese, 你可以帮我拿一下手机吗？好不好？(Can you take the phone for me? Okay?) is also more polite and euphemistic than 把手机给我拿过来 (Give me the phone).

4. Rhetorical devices

Rhetorical devices mainly include understatement, exaggeration and synecdoche.

Both English and Chinese euphemisms achieve euphemism through understatement. Generally speaking, understatement is used more often in English euphemisms in the fields of war, politics, education, etc. For example, the massive lives and property damage caused by war are said to be “mistake”; defeat is said to be “incomplete victory”, and students who do not work hard are said to be “underachievers”. In Chinese, death is simply described as 长眠, 走了; theft is described as 顺东西, and youths who commit crimes are said to be 失足青年 (Shao, 2016:64).

In both Chinese and English, exaggeration is a type of euphemism. This method is often used to address professions of lower social status to show respect and politeness and to protect the self-esteem of the practitioner. For example, in English, a cook is called “chef”; a garbage collector is called “garbologist”; a hairdresser is called “tonorial artist”. In Chinese, a nanny or maid is known as 阿姨, a driver is referred as 师傅, and a cleaning person is known as 保洁人员.

The third rhetorical device is synecdoche. It is an expression in which the name of someone or something is not directly stated, but the name related to it is borrowed instead. Synecdoche is used to create euphemisms in both English and Chinese. For example, English uses “afters”, “backparts” and “hind end” to refer to asses. Chinese uses 南方国家 to refer to poor and backward countries.

Scope of Use

The usage of euphemisms in English and Chinese is similar. Although China and Britain have different cultures, there are still some taboos in the same areas between them, and people use euphemisms in these areas. For example, both English and Chinese euphemisms are used in the areas of death, sex, excretion, human shortcomings, illness, appearance, etc.

1. Euphemisms about death. People in every country are afraid of death and do not want to face it directly. So they create a lot of euphemisms for death. In English, people use “expiring”, “be knocking on heaven's door”, “going belly up”, “be on one's last legs” to express dying. Use the words “be brought to one's last home”, “final sleep”, “to leave this world”, “to lie asleep” to express death. In Chinese, euphemisms for death include: 离世, 长眠, 去见毛主席, 诀别, 仙逝, 升天, 玉殒香消, etc.

2. Euphemisms for sex. Both Chinese and Western countries consider sex to be a private topic that should not be spoken directly. For example, in English, sex is often said as “act of love”, “have a bit”, “to go all the way”, “fix her plumping”, “do it” and so on. In Chinese, we use 同房, 行云, 肌肤之亲, 干那事, 亲热, 发生关系 to express sexual acts.

3. Euphemisms about excretion. People consider excrement to be impolite and filthy. For example, to go to the toilet, in English, people often use “be caught short”, “powder one's nose”, “ease oneself”, “the needs of nature” instead. In Chinese, one would say 我去方便一下, 我出去一下, 我去解个手, 我内急.

4. Euphemisms about people's shortcomings. When talking about a person's shortcomings, people often use euphemisms to express them indirectly, taking into account the self-esteem of others. For example, to express that a person is lazy, in English people will use “lady of leisure”, “not to strain oneself”, “have no get-up-and-go”, “blanket pressing”. In Chinese, people would use 无所事事, 游手好闲, 吊儿郎当, 好逸恶劳.

5. Euphemisms for illness. Sickness is a bad topic for both Chinese and Westerners, it means suffering and parting. In English, “be below par”, “be in a bad way”, “be out of order” are used instead of sickness. In Chinese, it is used to refer to sickness as 精神不佳, 身体不适, 身体抱恙.

6. Euphemisms about physical appearance. It is considered rude to criticize a person's appearance. Therefore, when people want to say that a person is fat, English will use “large”, “portly”, “fill out of”, “classic proportions” instead. Chinese, on the other hand, will use 占地面积比较大, 吨位大, 富态 to indicate this.

Pragmatic Functions

An obvious common denominator between English and Chinese euphemisms is that they have the same function.

The first is the taboo avoidance function, which is the original and most direct function of euphemisms. Most euphemisms arise from linguistic taboos. The existence of language taboos in any culture in the world has greatly contributed to the creation and development of euphemisms. Both Chinese and English euphemisms play an important role in avoiding taboos such as death, illness, sexual matters, and private organs of the human body. For instance, People avoid the topic of death. Westerners are influenced by religion and believe that people are born with original sin, so they generally do not

directly say the word “death”; while Chinese people also think that it is unlucky and impolite to say “death” directly. It feels offensive to the deceased and others, so both English and Chinese have many euphemisms about death, which play a taboo function in communication to ensure that the communication can proceed smoothly and appropriately. English euphemisms about death are: “to be summoned to God”, “to be sleeping in the Arms of God”, “to be no longer among us” and so on. In Chinese, there are: 走了, 没了, 不在了, 去见马克思了, 圆寂(usually refers to the monk), 驾崩(usually refers to ancient emperors).

The second is the politeness function. Politeness is a hallmark of human development and civilization. Focusing on politeness in the process of communication helps to make both sides of communication comfortable to complete the communication activities and promote the harmony of interpersonal relationship. So in interpersonal communication, we need to be considerate of others, consider their feelings, and take care of each other's self-esteem and face. For example, in English, there are polite terms of address: “Mr.”, “Mrs.”, “Miss” etc. And in Chinese there are polite terms of address: 您, 阁下, 先生, 尊府, 令媛, 夫人 etc. In English, people politely call people with physical disabilities “disability” or “invalid”. In Chinese, aisles and seats for people with disabilities are politely called courtesy 爱心通道 and 爱心专座.

The third is the function of avoiding vulgarity, which is sometimes known as the function of elegance. With the progress and development of society, people try to avoid vulgarity in communication and make the language elegant and beautiful. When talking about sex and human physiological phenomena, if expressed directly, it will make both sides of communication feel embarrassed and appear to be less than appropriate. In this case, the use of euphemisms can make the discourse elegant and appropriate. For example, a fart is said to be “make a noise”, “break wind backwards” or “drop a rose” in English. In Chinese, it is said to be 排气, 后面吹了一股风. Sweat in English is called “dew”, “perspiration”. In Chinese, it is called 香汗 (generally refers to the sweat of women).

The masking function, often known as the disguise or deception function, is the fourth. Euphemisms often conceal some negative facts by expanding the ambiguity of language. This is generally more obvious in the political and economic fields (Wang, Zhang & Dong, 2012). For example, poor people, in English, are said to be “disadvantaged”, “man of modest means”, “underprivileged”. In Chinese, it is said to be 低保户, 建档立卡户. In English, people without jobs are said to be “unwaged”, “between jobs”. In Chinese, they are said to be 自由职业者, 待就业人群.

In diplomacy, when things don't work out between the two sides, English euphemisms will be replaced by “Serious and candid discussion”. The Chinese euphemism is 双方充分交换了意见 (The two sides have fully exchanged views). And in international political exchanges, considering the influence of many factors, a tactful way is needed. China, for

example, uses the term 零和博弈 (zero-sum game) to criticize a trade war waged by the US.

The fifth is the humorous function. Euphemisms can enhance the humorous effect of discourse and make language interesting (Yang, 2006). For example, in English, “shake hands with an old friend” is used to refer to men going to urinate, and the sexual act is said to be “night baseball”, “to tango”. In Chinese, jail is said to 去吃国家粮了 (Go eat the national food), and a single person is called 单身狗. The act of showing affection between a couple or husband and wife is called 撒狗粮.

In addition, from the perspective of metonymy, the functions of euphemisms can be divided into six kinds: rhetorical, linguistic, poetic, social, cognitive, and literal functions (Zhang, 2018).

Differences between English and Chinese Euphemism

Differences between English and Chinese euphemisms can be found in language features (linguistic features), cultures and cross-culture communication.

Language Features

Differences between English and Chinese euphemisms in language features can be found in formation, and semantic features.

Differences in Formation

As mentioned above, euphemisms use some of the same methods of formation, but, after all, Chinese and English are two different languages, so in some ways, they're also very different in the methods of formation.

English euphemisms have some unique methods of formation:

1. Abbreviations. For example, “water closet” is said as “WC”, “mental deficiency” is abbreviated as “M.D.”, and “intrauterine contraceptive device” is abbreviated as “I.U.C.D.”.
2. Shift the accent. The most common example of this strategy is the word “laboratory”. Since it is pronounced similarly to lavatory, the accent of laboratory is moved back a syllable in order to avoid embarrassment when people talk about it.
3. Respelling of initials. It means spelling out the initial letters of some taboo or sensitive words according to their pronunciation. For example, “damn” is said as “dee”, “piss” is said as “pee”.

Father: “Let's get the kids something.”

Mother: “Ok, but I veto I- C-E-C-R-E-A-M.”

4. Clipping. For example, replace “ladies' room” with “ladies”. Use “Bra” instead of “brassiere”.

5. Change the tense or use modal verbs. Euphemisms in English can also be achieved by using the past tense. For example, "I wondered if you can open the cap for me" would be more polite than "I want you to open the cap for me". What's more, English euphemisms often use modal verbs, such as the use of "Would you mind keeping quiet?" instead of "keep quiet".

Based on the long history and culture of the Chinese nation, Chinese as a unique language also has its own unique way of euphemism composition. There are six main methods: xiehouyu, word substitution, symbol substitution, antonym substitution, splitting character, and linking to Pinyin.

1. Xiehouyu. 他孝第忠信礼义廉 (expressing a person's shamelessness), 他那是挂羊头卖狗肉 (Expressing that person's false sentiment);

2. Word substitution. The colloquial 扯蛋 in the northern dialect means nonsense, but since 蛋 is sometimes used in Chinese to refer to the male genital organs, so to avoid vulgarity, people use 扯淡 in the written language instead (Liang, 2012).

3. Symbol substitution. For example, use 你是傻X吗? to replace 你是傻逼吗? .

4. Antonym substitution. It refers to the use of a term that has the opposite connotation of the forbidden word in lieu of the taboo word. For example, people replace 失火 with 走水, and in Cantonese, 笑生我 is used instead of 笑死我 (Liang, 2012).

5. Splitting character. Due to the unique composition of Chinese characters, Chinese euphemisms can also be formed with the help of splitting characters. For example, the traditional Chinese character for dung is 糞, so people use 米共田 to refer to dung.

6. Linking to Pinyin. Due to the progress and development of the times and the Internet, some euphemisms related to Pinyin have gradually emerged. For instance, substitute 吃藕 for 丑, and use 哥屋恩 rather than 滚. Such methods can also effectively cover up rudeness and achieve the purpose of euphemism.

Differences in Semantic Features

Seemingly identical Chinese and English equivalents can have different associative meanings. For example, the Chinese euphemism for 房事 is the English euphemism for "bedroom affair". In Chinese, the word 房事 refers to the legal and legitimate sexual behavior between husband and wife. But in English, the extended meaning of "bedroom affair" refers to the improper and illegal sexual behavior. "A special child" is the English translation of the Chinese word 特殊儿童. In Chinese, 特殊儿童 generally refers to a naughty child who is difficult to teach, but in English, "a special child" refers to a child with a disability. In addition, the meaning of English words is less stable and more variable; often a euphemism becomes less euphemistic as it is used and needs to be

replaced by a new euphemism. The meaning of Chinese words, on the other hand, is more stable and generally changes very little (Tan, 2005).

Differences in Culture

Because of the contrasts in geographical location and customs between West and China, their cultures are distinct and diverse. And language is rooted in culture. Euphemisms in Chinese and English show the disparities between China and the West in the fields of hierarchy, thinking patterns, religious beliefs, and values.

Concept of Hierarchy

For more than 2,000 years, China has had a feudal structure. Chinese people usually have a very great concept of hierarchy, influenced by the feudal system and Chinese Confucianism. The emperor is supreme and his name cannot be stated explicitly. Influenced by the idea of distinguishing between the young and the old and respecting the old, people believe that parents are higher than children, and their names cannot be mentioned directly too. For example, during the reign of Liu Xiu, the emperor of the Eastern Han Dynasty, 秀才 was called 茂才 because people have to avoid the word 秀. Du Fu wrote many poems in his life, but the reason why 海棠 and 闲 never appeared in his poems was because Du Fu's mother's name was 海棠 and his father's name was 杜闲, so he needed to avoid his parents' names (Tan, 2016). The notion of hierarchy is less clear in Western society. Westerners advocate for individual liberty and the belief that all individuals are supposed to be equal. Regardless of their rank, class, identity, or age, most Westerners refer to one another by their first names. They even believe that calling one other with their first names is more sociable.

Thinking Patterns

Modesty is a Chinese attribute that has been passed down through generations. Chinese euphemisms often show euphemism by demeaning oneself and praising others. For example, calling one's own house 寒舍 and calling someone else's house 贵府. To call one's own child 犬子, and to call someone else's child 令郎. Euphemisms in English, on the other hand, do not praise others by demeaning themselves.

In addition, Chinese men's superiority over women reflects the difference between Chinese and Western mindsets. Chinese males have always enjoyed a greater standing than Chinese women. Because previously a family generally depended on men to earn money to support the family, men naturally had a higher status than women. Therefore, men would refer to their wives as 贱内 or 内人. The English euphemism does not reflect this idea of male superiority over female. Of course, as society progresses and develops, the concept of gender equality has grown increasingly significant and popular in China.

Religious Beliefs

Religions are practiced differently in China and the West. Taoism and Buddhism are the most popular religions in China. What Taoism seeks is immortality and becoming a god. That is why Chinese euphemisms for death related to Taoism include 仙逝, 升仙, 仙游, 驾鹤西游 and so on.

Buddhism, on the other hand, believes that people are always in the cycle of suffering and that only by converting to Buddhism can they escape from the suffering of reincarnation and enter the highest realm of Buddhist practice. Therefore, Buddhism regards death as becoming a Buddha, which means the cultivation of righteousness (Li, 2010:105).

Buddhist euphemisms for death include 成佛, 见佛祖, 归真, 圆寂, 转世 etc.

Christianity reigns supreme in Western society, as symbolized by Anglo-American culture. The spirit and body of human beings are given by God, according to Christianity, and man is born with sin. Only by redeeming one's original sin can one be saved and enter heaven in the next life, or else one will be tormented in hell. Therefore, many English euphemisms are related to the salvation of the soul and the ascension to heaven (Li, 2010:113).

For example, “be asleep in the Arms of God”, “be taken to paradise”, “go to meet one's maker”, “join the Heavenly Host”, “be promoted to glory” etc.

Values

Chinese and Western values are different. One of the most typical examples of the difference between Chinese and Western values is the attitude of people towards old age.

China has been inspired by Confucianism since antiquity, and thinks that honoring the elderly is a traditional Chinese virtue. Being old means having a wealth of experience and knowledge, and is a symbol of status and position. Chinese families are more closely structured; the elderly usually dwell with their children, and they are highly regarded and cared for in the family. Therefore, old age is not a taboo subject in China; On the contrary, there are some encouraging remarks regarding becoming elderly. For example, 老当益壮, 宝刀不老, 姜还是老的辣, 老马识途, 老板, 老总, 老大 etc. (Xu, 2014). Western societies, on the other hand, have a looser family structure and emphasize the individuality. Generally speaking, children will live separately from their parents after they reach the age of eighteen, and the social retirement mechanism cannot fully take care of all aspects of the elderly's life. So the old people will be more lonely and isolated, and they feel that old age is useless. So old becomes a more sensitive topic (Tan, 2005). People will try to avoid using the word “old”; they use words like “advanced in age”, “golden age”, “seasoned man”, “senior citizen” instead.

Another factor is that people's opinions regarding sweat vary. Many euphemisms connected to perspiration may be found in English euphemisms. This is because people think that sweat represents punishment and hard work. For example, "dew", "dripping", "weeping" etc. However, euphemisms for perspiration are few in Chinese. On the contrary, people think that sweat is related to honor and hard work, such as 汗马功劳 and 血汗钱.

Euphemisms and Cross-cultural Communication

Human intercultural contact has grown increasingly common as the globe has progressed and developed. It is especially important to be polite and appropriate in communication, and euphemisms can help people achieve this goal effectively. Therefore, people should be aware of the importance of euphemisms in cross-cultural communication and acquire the right strategies to apply them.

The Importance of Euphemisms in Intercultural Communication

Euphemisms are inseparable from culture. While euphemisms communicate and convey information, they also carry a lot of cultural connotations. Euphemisms are part of the culture of any country or nation, reflecting the rich linguistic and cultural connotations and the psychological state of people. Euphemisms represent a society's beliefs and cultural customs and are firmly established in a country's or nation's cultural history.

Taboos and etiquette rules vary by culture. In cross-cultural communication, both parties have different cultural backgrounds, but people often use their own cultural backgrounds to understand what others say, which is likely to lead to communication mistakes and problems. The evolution of culture is aided by multiple connections and collaboration between countries, and the growth of intercultural communication is becoming increasingly vital. Euphemisms and intercultural communication are mutually influential. In the process of communication, different euphemisms are created in order to adapt to different regional cultures, and culture promotes the development of euphemisms. Euphemisms, on the other hand, are significant in international communication because they represent particular social and cultural norms. People are paying more and more attention to the usage of acceptable and standardized euphemisms in cross-cultural communication, as euphemisms serve a constructive role in intercultural communication. Cross-cultural communication relies heavily on the study of English-Chinese euphemisms. Understanding the similarities and differences between English and Chinese euphemisms and their causes, and learning to use euphemisms correctly in cross-cultural communication are conducive to cultivating and improving cross-cultural awareness, so as to reduce barriers in cross-cultural communication, make communication more appropriate, and promote the exchange and development of Chinese and Western economies and cultures.

Application Strategies of Euphemism in Cross-cultural Communication

The world we live in today is a human community with a shared future, and worldwide intercultural contact is becoming increasingly common and necessary. People sometimes struggle to communicate in international situations due to differences in culture, social

values, and customs. Euphemisms play a significant part in cross-cultural communication as a tool of communication. There are various distinctions between English and Chinese euphemisms owing to cultural and linguistic differences. Therefore, it is necessary to understand and master some euphemism strategies in cross-cultural communication to ensure that the desired communicative purpose in different situations is achieved.

First and foremost, it is critical to prioritize the cultivation of intercultural competence. Intercultural awareness may be developed in a variety of ways. Firstly, we can make full use of the rich modern information and communication media to understand the cultural differences between Chinese and Western cultures, for example, watching British and American TV series, reading English books, browsing websites of English-speaking countries, etc. Secondly, people can also practice cross-cultural communication by talking to people from different countries and consciously focusing on the cultural differences and the roots behind them. No two leaves in the world are the same, and each nation and state has its own distinct culture. Therefore, people should raise their awareness of the differences between their second language and their mother tongue, increase their sensitivity, try to avoid conflicts, and avoid “negative transfer” of their mother tongue. In this approach, euphemisms serve an important role in cross-cultural interaction. For example, “fish” is a derogatory word in English, generally used to describe bad people and things, such as “poor fish (poor worms)” and “slutty fish (women who live a slutty life)”. In Chinese, 鱼 and 余 are homophones, and fish is indispensable on the New Year's Eve dinner table during the Spring Festival to express the good expectation of 年年有余.

Besides, people should combine the context and make a specific analysis. Concrete analysis of specific problems is an important methodology in philosophy. It is equally applicable to how people utilize euphemisms in cross-cultural communication. The importance of context in language communication cannot be overstated. Context refers to the objective environment in which the two parties are communicating, such as the topic of conversation, time, place, body language and facial expressions of both parties, and so on. The broader context also includes the profession, status, and cultural background of the two parties communicating (Wang, 2010). In various circumstances, the same term has distinct meanings. For example, in the case of playing a game with a good friend, you can say, “Hey, wait for me, I'm going to WC.” But if it is when there are many people having dinner together, you say, “I'm sorry, I want to go WC” is not so polite. You can change it to a more decent euphemism.

What's more, we need to learn foreign customs and culture. Various cultures and conventions exist in different places. To use euphemisms correctly, it is necessary to know the customs and cultural background of other cultures. For example, in Chinese culture, dragon symbolizes good luck, authority, nobility and prosperity, and in ancient legends, dragon is a divine animal that can call the wind and rain. The dragon was an emblem of the emperor's supreme authority in feudal system. In Chinese, there are a lot of idioms about dragons, such as 生龙活虎 and 龙飞凤舞, which show the cultural connotation of dragons in Chinese culture. In English and American countries, “dragon”

is a kind of monster that spits fire and smoke, which represents evil and is feared. In English, they call the violent woman “dragon”, which reflects the significance of dragon to British and American culture.

CONCLUSION

Major Findings

The goal of this research is to compare and contrast the commonalities and dissimilarities between English and Chinese euphemisms from a cross-cultural standpoint. The main findings are as follows.

Firstly, the author makes a study on the classification, characteristics, and application principles of euphemisms. According to several classification criteria, euphemisms can be divided into unconscious and conscious euphemisms, negative and positive euphemisms and so on. Euphemisms also have cultural, regional and contemporary characteristics. People should adhere to three application rules when using euphemisms: the rule of distance, the rule of relationship, and the rule of politeness.

The author then compares and contrasts Chinese and English euphemisms. Euphemism is one kind of language phenomenon used by both China and the West, and it can play a positive role in communication. As a result, there are certain similarities between English and Chinese euphemisms. In terms of expression, formation, scope of use, and pragmatic functions, Chinese and English euphemisms are comparable. Both of them use metaphors, roundabouts and understatements to express euphemisms. Both Chinese and English euphemisms make use of phonetic, lexical, grammatical and rhetorical devices in their composition. Moreover, there is an overlap in the scope of use of Chinese and English euphemisms. Both are widely used when talking about death, sex, human excretion, human flaws, diseases and appearance. The author also finds that both English and Chinese euphemisms have the functions of taboo, politeness, avoiding vulgar, disguise and humor.

Because Chinese and English are such unlike languages, there are several variances between English and Chinese euphemisms. This also illustrates China's and the West's cultural disparities. First of all, English and Chinese euphemisms have different linguistic qualities, both in terms of composition and semantic features. English euphemisms are mostly formed by abbreviation, transfer of stress, respelling of initials, clipping and change of tense and use of modal verbs. Chinese euphemisms, on the other hand, are usually formed by xiehouyu, word substitution, symbol substitution, antonymic substitution, word splitting, and association with Pinyin. In addition, English and Chinese euphemisms also reflect the different cultures of the two sides, which are mainly reflected in the differences between Chinese and Western concepts of hierarchy, thinking patterns, religious beliefs and values.

Contact between countries has become increasingly regular and intertwined in today's globe. Cross-cultural exchanges between China and the West are also growing more common. The use of euphemisms can play a positive role in cross-cultural

communication, and the correct use of euphemisms is especially important. However, because there are so many distinctions between Chinese and English euphemisms, we need to pay attention to some strategies in using them. In intercultural communication, we should pay attention to developing intercultural awareness, analyzing the context, and actively learning about foreign customs and cultures in order to complete intercultural communication activities smoothly and comfortably.

All in all, understanding the similarities and differences between English and Chinese euphemisms and cross-cultural communication strategies is conducive to reducing errors in cross-cultural communication, enhancing the effect of cross-cultural communication, and promoting the exchange and development of Chinese and Western economics and cultures.

Limitations and Suggestions

Although the author hopes to provide a systematic and detailed analysis of English-Chinese euphemisms from a cross-cultural perspective, there are still some shortcomings in this paper. For instance, the classification of euphemisms in this article is neither systematic nor comprehensive enough. Due to limited resources, the collected examples are not rich enough, and some of them are even a bit outdated. The instances in this article do not cover a wide range and are not diverse sufficiently, and some of them are repeated. It is necessary to find more resources and materials in the further research. The parallels and distinctions between Chinese and English euphemisms are not exhaustive enough. For example, there are many other ways of forming English euphemisms besides those mentioned in the text. Other distinctions between the West and China are implied by the discrepancies between English and Chinese euphemisms. There is still a lot of room for research on English-Chinese euphemisms, and future research can be conducted from other more innovative perspectives.

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