

A Study of the Differences between English and Chinese Compliments in the Same Context

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Abstract: As a positive evaluation, compliments are a complex speech act commonly used in social culture. At the same time, compliments are influenced and restricted by different ethnic cultures, and they exhibit different characteristics in terms of language forms and topics. Based on this, this article conducts a study of the differences between English and Chinese compliments in the same context, which has certain significance for foreign language teaching and cross-cultural communication.

1. Introduction

The comparative study of English and Chinese languages has become increasingly in-depth and extensive in recent years. With the rise of small and medium-sized countries in Asia, the rapid development of China's economy, and the continuous improvement of cultural soft power, the research on Chinese language in the world is deepening. English is the most widely used language in the world today. With the development of the world economy, Chinese and English together play a pivotal role in the world language. As a common social phenomenon, compliments widely exist in human verbal communication, and thus become a frequently used polite speech act in daily communication. In interpersonal communication, compliments can be used to greet, acknowledge, congratulate, open a topic, alleviate conflicts, and have a certain pragmatic function of praising, appreciating, and evaluating people and things. Due to different values and standards in different cultures, the use of compliments is subject to different cultural values, social backgrounds, and interpersonal rules in their language environment.

2. The Connotation and Characteristics of Compliments

Compliments, also known as compliments, are frequently used in human communication. In a broad sense, compliments are a positive evaluation of people or things in social interactions. Specifically, the speaker directly or indirectly praises objects other than himself. Compliments are often referred to as the "lubricant" of social communication, which can be used to praise and encourage, open up topics, and help build harmonious interpersonal relationships.

Complimentary language includes two parts: the speaker delivering the compliment and the recipient responding accordingly. An obvious feature of complimentary language is the use of positive evaluation language. The difference between compliments and other speech acts is that there are no negative evaluation words, and all of them are positive evaluation words. The use of compliments is closely related to society and culture. Different cultural communities have different attitudes towards the object, content, occasion, and response to compliments. The occasions in which compliments are used are also different under different cultural backgrounds. For example, although the main function of both Chinese and Western compliments is to maintain a harmonious and consistent relationship, Western compliments tend to express equal and consistent relationships, while Chinese emphasizes showing respect and caring for each other. The correct response to compliments in the West is "Thank you", while in China it is the traditional form of self modesty. Generally speaking, when receiving compliments, Chinese people often choose the strategy of "not accepting" or "not agreeing", or answer "nothing" or "you are flattering me".

Compliments can be used to enrich greetings, strengthen gratitude, and trigger talks. In mutual

conversation, appropriate topics can stimulate each other's interest. Moreover, compliments can create a harmonious atmosphere and express good wishes. Therefore, using compliments in conversation can not only promote the development of the conversation, but also help to overcome difficulties and remove barriers. Compliments have the function of persuasion and encouragement.

3. Differences in English and Chinese Compliments in the Same Context

In order to better analyze the differences between English and Chinese compliments, this article compares and analyzes the differences between English and Chinese compliments in the same context, that is, the business context.

Firstly, in a more serious and solemn business negotiation context, the success of the negotiation depends largely on the use of language. The corpus in this section mainly comes from books related to business talks and authentic negotiation corpus collected on the website. Business negotiation includes the following interlinked stages: establishing contacts, making inquiries and quotations, discussing quantity and quality, negotiating prices, determining payment methods, packaging and shipping methods, insurance, signing contracts, etc. The research results show that the highest frequency of compliments between English and Chinese occurs during the inquiry and quotation stage, with 28.6 percent and 33.9 percent respectively. The second performance is in the link establishment stage, which is 20 percent and 17.4 percent respectively (as shown in Figure 1). Early researchers' results showed that the topic of praise mostly focused on aspects such as appearance, achievements, abilities, and personality traits. According to the data, over half of the goals of praise in English are appreciation of goods (53.9 percent), followed by appreciation of the other company (16.5 percent), while the goal of praise in Chinese presents a decentralized distribution trend. The concentration of praise for products in English is only due to their interest in certain features of Chinese products before they come for business talks. From simple business talks, it can be found that Westerners have always been straight forward, and their straightforward personality prevents them from beating around the bush. The Chinese language is often thought-provoking and meaningful, making it easy to leave a deep impression on others. Therefore, it is often referred to as "running a train with a full mouth." This feature is actually reflected in many language uses.

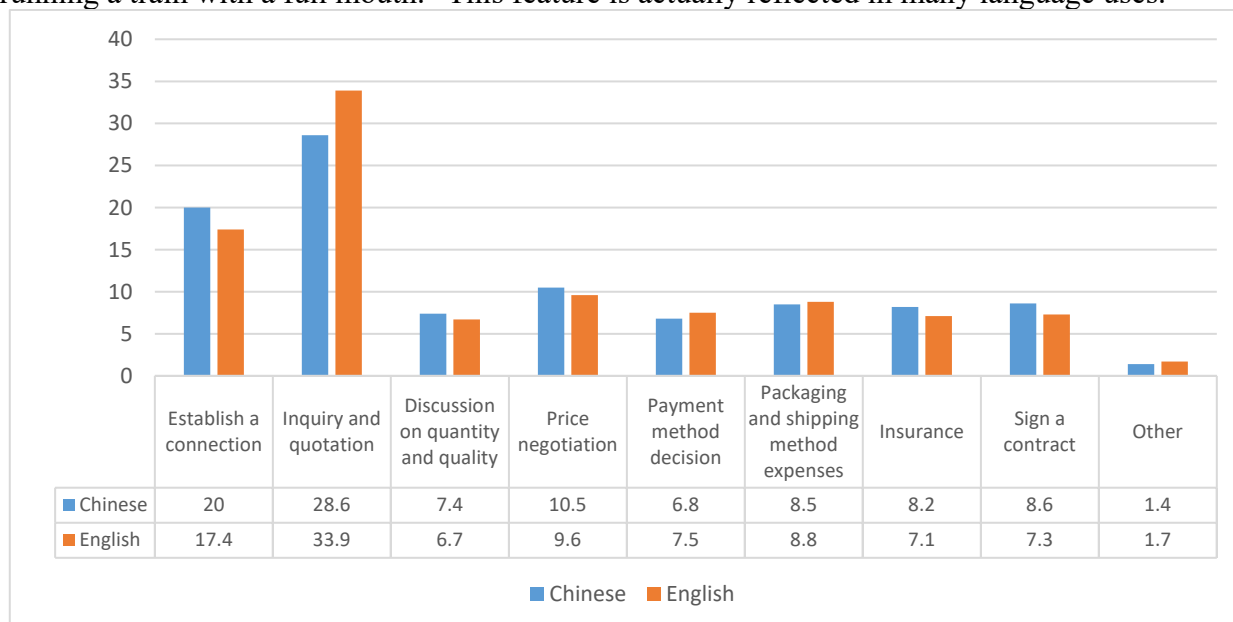


Figure 1 The frequency of English and Chinese compliments at various stages of business negotiation.

Secondly, in business meetings, the flatterer often expresses his or her dissatisfaction or demands after the compliment, while the flatterer often only responds to the flatterer's dissatisfaction or demands without responding to the compliment. In addition, it has always been believed that the application frequency of "weakening compliments", "denying compliments", and "restricting

compliments” frequently used by Chinese representatives is very low. This is mainly because with the gradual deepening of China’s reform and opening up, and the continuous increase in foreign exchanges, Chinese people have more and more ways to contact foreign cultures. Another important reason is that many enterprises that engage in business cooperation with foreigners often engage in negotiations with professionals who have received higher education, and in higher education, language and cultural education in English speaking countries is a very important part.

Thirdly, in the context of business work, there are differences in the purposes of compliments between English and Chinese. In Western culture, it is more often for superiors to compliment their subordinates, such as in a company, in order to maintain a normal relationship between superiors and subordinates or to motivate employees. People with ability and high social status are qualified to evaluate others’ abilities and achievements. In China, the opposite is true. According to Jia Yuxin’s research findings, nearly 33 percent of people rarely give a positive evaluation of others’ work abilities and achievements, while 58 percent of people with lower social status compliment their superiors’ work abilities and achievements, with the obvious purpose of pleasing their superiors in order to obtain opportunities for promotion and salary increases. However, with the continuous increase of foreign exchanges among Chinese enterprises, many open working methods have also been introduced into the workplace life of many enterprises. A large part of the results also show that such a work atmosphere is more conducive to stimulating the enthusiasm of employees, thereby bringing more significant profits to the company.

4. Analysis of the Reasons for the Differences between English and Chinese Compliments

From the above analysis, it can be seen that the difference between Chinese and Western compliments lies in the fact that Chinese compliments are reflected in “humbling oneself and respecting others”, while Westerners are “respecting others” rather than “humbling oneself”. The main reason for this difference lies in the cultural differences between English and Chinese.

Western culture emphasizes individuality, respects individual personality, values, and dignity, and advocates individual independence, individual liberation, and different value orientations. Individualism is the most important and fundamental value of Westerners. They believe that each individual is unique, special, and different from any other person, and that the individual is the most basic unit of nature. They further advocate personal struggle, advocate personal achievement and freedom, and advocate that people express their views boldly and bluntly. Westerners even believe that people who are not good at expressing individualism are not healthy. Knowing this value of Westerners, it won’t be surprising to see why they always speak loudly and assume a self righteous attitude when dealing with Westerners. It’s just about expressing their self existence. Advocating equality between people is another important value in Western society. This value is reflected in all aspects, from government agencies to social relations to the family. Westerners believe that everyone has the right to success, and the government should ensure this right through legal and educational means. People are named after each other, family members are equal to each other, and children are treated as adults. In social activities, the use of compliments cannot be separated from this cultural background, and is based on adhering to these basic values, thereby making the relationship between interlocutors more harmonious.

But in Chinese culture, group relationships or the affairs of others are often much more important than their own. Therefore, compliments also play a different role, even if the listener has a good impression of themselves and tries to please or use others. China is a country with over 2000 years of feudal culture, and the traditional feudal hierarchy has a deep imprint on people’s hearts. In the course of history, China’s official system has formed a strict hierarchical system. As the saying goes, “Officials one rank superior crush the inferior”. Not only is there a gap between the upper and lower levels, but also there is a difference between closeness and estrangement. Chinese culture has always advocated that “Courtesy costs nothing”. *Guanzi Wufu* clearly points out that “etiquette” is the principle of behavior to maintain the current social inequality: “there is justice between the upper and lower levels, distinction between the high and the low, equality between the elderly and the young, and tolerance between the rich and the poor”. Confucius further explained the

relationship between etiquette and language, saying, “Introduction of unrighteousness is going, things are not going statement”. The traditional Chinese ethical and moral concept is that the men and women should keep distance, with differences in age and youth. People are clearly positioned in the family and society, and cannot be arbitrarily transcended. This etiquette standard emphasizes the politeness principle of “humility to oneself and respect to others”, resulting in numerous words of self modesty and respect. This repressive social culture leads to self value repression in value judgment, and tries to show humility and obedience in communication, namely, the "low self-esteem person" criterion, the elegant criterion, the seeking common ground criterion, and the moral code, which have a profound impact on people’s words and behaviors. This kind of value judgment is reflected in the use of compliments in Chinese cultural communication, which shows the characteristic of “humbling oneself and respecting others”.

5. Conclusion

To sum up, different ethnic groups have different cultures, and people’s values, ways of thinking, and aesthetic views are all different. The differences in the objects, occasions, and response methods reflected in the implementation of compliments are ultimately due to differences in national cultures. However, with the deepening of cultural exchanges between China and the West, the two distinct cultures of English and Chinese are infiltrating and influencing each other, and even experiencing a phenomenon of “fusion”. Therefore, by analyzing the differences between English and Chinese compliments in the same context, we can reveal certain linguistic rules and social norms, strengthen our understanding of both parties’ cultural backgrounds, try to avoid taboo topics, choose appropriate sentence patterns, and make positive responses based on specific communication situations. Only in this way can we achieve proficiency in cross-cultural communication.

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