

Pragmatic Failure in Chinese and English Intercultural Communication

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Abstract: Since the 21st century, the science and technology have developed by leaps and bounds. At the same time, with the increasing exchanges among countries in politics, culture, science and technology, trade and so on, cross-cultural communication has attracted more and more attention. It is worth noting that in the process of cross-cultural communication, due to the different cultures, mistakes, contradictions and conflicts are emerging. Different countries, different peoples have their own unique culture, so misunderstandings always happen. The different cultures, values and ways of thinking, often lead to the failure of communication, which seriously affects the efficiency of cross-cultural communication. Therefore, through the analysis of pragmatic failure in cross-cultural communication, this paper tries to find a solution to this problem.

Keywords: language; cultural background; intercultural communication; pragmatic failure; values; social taboos

Examples of Pragmatic Failures in Intercultural Communication

In cross-cultural communication, conflicts or misunderstandings are inevitably occur due to people's different cultural backgrounds. In 1983, Jenny Thomas of Lancaster University published "Intercultural pragmatic failure", in which she defined and classified pragmatic failure. "pragmatic failure refers to the inability to understand the meaning of utterance," she said. "and pragmatic failure can be divided into pragmatic failure of language and social pragmatic failure [1]".

Pragmatic failures of language

In the context of intercultural communication, according to Thomas, pragmatic failures include two aspects: first, misuses of language habits and expressions that are incompatible with foreign languages; and second, a person who does not understand the foreign language apply the semantics and structures of the native language in the foreign language, therefore cause pragmatic failures. For example, a female secretary of a Sino-foreign joint venture did a good job one day, her manager was very satisfied and said to her, "Thanks a lot. That's a great help." The secretary replied, "Never mind." In fact, "Never mind" is often used to comfort the other person who apologizes. In this case, the secretary obviously used the wrong expression, which led to the pragmatics failure of language and make the other party of communication couldn't understand exactly what she intended to express.

Pragmatic Failure in Phonetics and Vocabulary

Lack of understanding of the phonetic characteristics in the target language in Intercultural Communication or can't correctly grasped the principle and method of pronunciation can cause pragmatic failure in phonetics. In addition to the sound, rhyme and tune, the tone, intonation, pause and speed of speech can also lead to pragmatic failure in cross-communication. Vocabulary, as the basic element of language, is the basis of language existence. When people want to express themselves in language, they must first choose the appropriate word. And whether the choice of words is appropriate or not is an important part of the success of cross-cultural communication. The pragmatic failure of vocabulary is embodied in the meaning of words. For example, "the latest news" in English refers to the newest news, however if translate to Chinese directly it may be misunderstood as the final news. Therefore, understanding the similarities and differences in different languages is one of the keys to effective cross-cultural communication.

Social Pragmatic Failures

Social pragmatic failure refers to the pragmatic failure caused by the lack of understanding of the cultural background of the two sides of the conversation, which involves what should be said, what should not be said, the distance of interpersonal relations, people's rights and obligations, and so on. Relating to the identity, register, familiarity, etc of the two parties to the conversation. For example, a female Chinese scholar heard a compliment on her dress at the party, a gentleman said to her "That's a lovely dress you have on". And she immediately answered "No, no. It's just a very ordinary dress." This polite reply may sound hypocritical to westerners, who may mistakenly think that Chinese people are too ungrateful for their praise. In addition, due to the differences between Chinese and Western cultural backgrounds, the use of compliments and self-deprecation will also lead to social pragmatic failures [2].

In conclusion, through the above analysis, we can clearly see that there are cultural pragmatic barriers in intercultural communication. Topics, expressions and communication strategies can best reflect the different orientations of different cultures in interpersonal relationships, values and moral norms.

CONCLUSION

If there is cross-cultural communication, there will be pragmatic failure in cross-cultural communication. Which is determined by the characteristics of culture and language. Cultural differences are still the main reasons for pragmatic failures. At any time, the pragmatic failure of cross-cultural communication must be solved by the continuous improvement of the communicator's communicative competence. Only by improving the communicative ability of cross-cultural communication, expanding the consensus and narrowing the cultural gap, can the two sides gradually negotiate and construct new rules suitable for cross-cultural communication, adapt to the new environment, and adjust their own norms of words and deeds. So that both sides can understand when to speak, what to speak and how to speak. To achieve better communication between the two sides, this is the original intention of this paper.

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