

Contrastive Analysis of Chinese and English Time Fuzzy Words

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Abstract: There are quite a few time fuzzy words and expressions in both Chinese and English, which are of great significance in the process of cross-cultural communication. This essay analyzes the semantic, pragmatic, quantitative and cultural differences of these time fuzzy words from the perspective of contrastive linguistics to help learners grasp them better and effectively avoid the conflict in cross-cultural communication.

1. Introduction

The word is indispensable component in language and a unity of clarity and ambiguity. In the process of expressing concepts, words inevitably reflect their vagueness. Time-type fuzzy words are one of the most frequently used words in daily communication, thus it is essential to contrast the time-type fuzzy words in Chinese and English.

Hawkes (1977) states that space and time are in fact a continuum, without fixed, immutable boundaries or divisions, and each language divides time and space according to its own structure. Words representing time express some vague concepts that are difficult to delineate by extension, such as the existence of a non-size-fits-all boundary between "the past", "the present" and "the future". The Modern Chinese Dictionary (2002) explains time in this way "the objective form of the existence of things, a continuous system composed of the past, the present and the future, the movement of things, the continuity of change, sequential performance. The Arab philosopher Abu Yusuf Kimdi once said, "The time of the past and the time of the future have a common moment, which is the present. Because it is the end of the past and the beginning of the future." Therefore, linguists in various countries have a general understanding of the fuzziness of time category words.

Xu Yulong (2010) holds that contrastive linguistics is a branch of linguistics whose task is to conduct synchronic contrastive studies of two or more languages, to describe their similarities and differences, especially their differences, and to apply such studies to other relevant fields. There are many similarities in semantic, pragmatic and rhetorical aspects of time ambiguity in both languages. It can be said that the similarity in the use of time ambiguity in Chinese and English is the mainstream, otherwise the interpersonal communication is difficult to carry out. However, due to the cultural differences between Chinese and English, the particularity of context, the difference of thinking and values, there are still some differences in some aspects of Chinese-English time-fuzzy words in verbal communication.

2. Time Fuzzy Words

Modern Chinese Dictionary (2002) interprets time words as nouns for time. To some extent, this statement is rather one-sided. Although the definition of the term of time category is very complicated, in order to understand the fuzzy words of time category in depth, it can be simply divided into time noun, time adjective and time adverb from the point of view of part of speech.

Time nouns can be combined with prepositions into prepositional phrases, but time adjectives and adverbs can not. The time words which can be used with prepositions like at, in, to and from are time nouns, such as today, morning, past, future, noon, spring, summer, etc. Time adjectives are hourly, daily, nightly, weekly, biweekly, monthly, bimonthly, quarterly, yearly, biyearly, early, timely, fleeting, transient, overnight and so on while afterwards, eventually, lately, now, recently, soon, then and so on are time adverbs.

Time phrases can also be divided from different angles. In Chinese, time words can be divided into four categories: year, month, day and time. In English, time words are classified from the aspect of tense, such as the past, the present, the future and perfect tense. In the past tense, people often use time words like three days ago, last year, this morning, yesterday, the day before yesterday and so on. In the present tense, time marks like now, this morning, at present, this week, often, usually, sometimes are mostly applied. Time words like this morning, in half an hour, three days away, next year, the following day, on Sunday, the day after tomorrow, etc. are used to mean the future while means of time expressions like for phrases and since clauses can represent the perfect tense. It can be seen that actually there is no definite boundary between time words.

3. The Contrast of Time Fuzzy Words between Chinese and English

3.1 Semantic Difference of Chinese-English Time Vague Words

The semantics of time-fuzzy words in both Chinese and English languages are basically the same, but they are not one-to-one relations. People of different nationalities don't understand the time exactly the same. In the morning, the Chinese generally understand the time when the sun rises, about eight or nine o' clock, and in the English language, you can greet "Good Morning" before eleven o'clock, because the morning of the Europeans can last until eleven o' clock.

Xing Fuyi (2007) points that semantics is the meaning of language and the content expressed by language form. Semantics is the reflection of the phenomenon of objective things in people's minds, that is, people's understanding of the phenomenon of objective things, which is expressed in the form of language. Ye Feisheng (2004) notes that word meaning is the lexical meaning of words, which is the subjective evaluation of real phenomena brought about by science and technology. The Modern Chinese Dictionary (2002) explains the meaning of words include lexical and grammatical meanings.

From the perspective of lexical meaning, the author makes a contrastive analysis on the semantics of time category fuzzy words in Chinese-English to better understand the expressions and differences of time concepts in the two languages. For a long time, the understanding of words is based on the precise connotation determines the precise extension, but in the previous study of vague words, we found that the ambiguity of words is related to the uncertainty of connotation or extension. A time class fuzzy word is in a continuum, and there is no obvious boundary between two adjacent words, so it belongs to the words with fuzzy boundary. Since there are a large number of vague words in both Chinese and English languages, the following will focus on the semantics of Chinese and English words representing the passage of time in a day.

There are many words in Chinese that express the passage of time, including:

lingcheng (before dawn): a period from 0 to 6.

fuxiao (before dawn): It's almost dawn.

liming (dawn/ daybreak): It is just dawn.

qingchen (early morning): a period of time before sunrise

bangming (dawn): near dawn.

zaochen (morning): A period from dawn to eight or nine o'clock.

shangwu (morning): A period of time between morning and noon.

bangwu (about noon; near noon): By noon.

zhongwu (noon): a period of time around 12:00 during the day.

shangwu (midday/ noon): around noon or noon.

zhengwu (high noon): twelve noon.

wushi (period of the day from 11a.m.to 1 p.m): refers to 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., the old timing method.

wuqian (morning): before noon

wuhou (afternoon): a period from 12:00 noon to sunset.

xiawu (afternoon): From noon to sunset.

huanghun (even-fall/dusk): It's not completely dark until after sunset

bangwan (towards evening): near the evening

wanshang (evening/night): a period of sunset to late at night

wanjian (evening/night) : The time of the evening.

ziye (midnight) midnight, around twelve o'clock in the night.

banye (midnight): The middle of the night; especially at twelve o'clock.

shenye (late at night): after midnight.

tongxiaodadan (through the night): from night to day.

Words in English indicating the passage of time include:

dawn: the time at the beginning of the day when lights first appears.

daybreak: the early part of the day, from when the sun rises until 12o'clock

noon: 12 o' clock in the daytime.

midday: the same as "noon"

afternoon: the part of the day after the morning and before the evening.

dusk: the time before it gets dark when the sky is becoming less bright.

evening: the early part of the night between the day and the time you go to bed.

night: the dark part of each 24-hour period when the sun cannot be seen and when most people sleep; 2. Evening: the time during the evening until you go to bed.

midnight: 12o'clock at night.

As can be seen from the above comparison, although the expression of the passage of time in both Chinese and English is ambiguous in semantics, these words are not one-to-one correspondence and the expression of the same concept of time is not the same because of the cognitive differences between the two nationalities.

3.2 Pragmatic Contrast of Chinese-English Time Fuzzy Words

The use of fuzzy language has become a pragmatic strategy in daily communication. It exists in the communication environment of Chinese and English. The use of fuzzy words in communication will not damage the accurate expression of words, but make the content of the expression more precise and rigorous. The proper use of expressiveness of vague language can make speech appropriate and produce euphemism, implicature and humor and other pragmatic effects

Pragmatics is the activity of people communicating with language, that is, the activities of both sides of communication in a certain context, such as discourse expression and discourse understanding. When learning a language, understanding its pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar does not mean that you can use the language well. In order to achieve the ideal effect of verbal communication and complete the communication task well, it is often necessary for both sides of communication to express accurately and appropriately according to the specific context, and to understand the discourse correctly and correctly. Verbal communication is a very complex pragmatic process, which is influenced and restricted by communicative environment, object and purpose, and has different requirements for the accuracy and ambiguity of expression.

When the time fuzzy words both in Chinese and English are used in different contexts, the meanings of expression are also varied and needed to make different understanding. For a sentence like "It's already past 9 o'clock", both English and Chinese can assume the following situations:

1.A couple goes to the night market. The wife does not wear a watch and does not know the exact time, then she asks the husband "What time is it now?" The husband replies, "It's over nine."

2.A daughter goes out on business and agrees to go home before 7 pm, but by 9 pm she hasn't come back. Then the wife says to her husband, "It is more than nine o'clock."

3.A mother sets a rule for the child that he must go to bed before 9 p.m. One night, the TV broadcasts wonderful football match and the child watches with relish. When the hour hand points to more than 9 o'clock, he still has no attempt to turn off the TV. Then the mother says to him, "It is more than nine o'clock."

"It's more than nine o'clock" in the first scenario is just used as the husband's reply to the wife's question to tell her specific time. In the second scene, the wife expresses concern about her daughter's long absence. In the third one, it is a reminder to the child that he should go to bed since he needs to go to school tomorrow.

For Chinese-English time fuzzy expressions, the fuzzy effect can be increased by means of additional words, such as approximate, around, about, probably, perhaps and, almost and etc. For example, the sentence "They will arrive at around six o'clock." expresses the uncertain concept of time by adding the blurring adjunct "around". If it is removed from the sentence, the time can be understood as precise in most situations and also taken as vague in the context of airport pick-up.

3.3 The Quantity and Cultural Concepts of Chinese - English Time Fuzzy Words

There are differences in the quantity of the words that express the concept of time between the two languages. The Chinese expressions are rich and detailed and they are also more quantitative than English. According to the author's rough statistics, there are 24 of them in Chinese but only 10 in English. The English time fuzzy words are dawn, daybreak, morning, noon, midday, afternoon, dusk, evening, night, midnight while they can be translated in 24 different ways in Chinese. The gap between the figure is due to the different expressions and ways of thinking of the two peoples and the differences between the two in the lexical structure and the written form.

Any language communication activity is closely related to time, especially in cross-cultural communication. Different nationalities have different time concepts, and the difference of this concept often causes pragmatic failure. People in Chinese and English culture have different time orientation and time habits. Lu Yi and Tang Degen (2009) state that because the concept of time belongs to the deep structure of culture and is unconscious, people tend to take their own concept of time for granted and bring difficulties to communication. The Chinese take the past time as their orientation, while the native English speakers, especially the Americans, take the future time as their orientation. The Chinese value the previous experience, and the Americans focus on looking forward. Therefore, the concept of before and after have the opposite understanding. Chinese people often say the lessons of the past which is a metaphor for previous failures can be used as a later lesson. Another saying in China is learning from past mistakes to be careful and avoid repeating them. The counterpart in English is a lesson drawn from another's mistake or learning from past mistakes to avoid future ones. Moreover, Americans and Britons have a strong sense of time, which is more punctual in daily communication, so in the author's view, they use time vague words, and the frequency of beating about the bush is far lower than that of Chinese people.

4. Conclusion

Because of these differences in time ambiguity words in Chinese and English, in cross-cultural communication, language learners should constantly understand and familiarize themselves with the time ambiguity words in English, strengthen their cultural consciousness, actively adapt and negotiate before the conflict occurs, and avoid causing misunderstanding and even the failure of cross-cultural communication.

The mastery of any language and the use of language are not the same thing. Language use is a more complex activity. In verbal communication of any language, the expression of discourse should not only consider the various rules of the language itself, but also consider the constraints of various contexts. The understanding of discourse is not only limited to the literal meaning, but also grasp the implication and overtones according to the context. Zhang Qiao (1998) holds that learners can not fully explain fuzzy language from the perspective of semantics, and pragmatic factors must also be considered. In the process of cross-cultural communication, language learning and users must constantly strengthen their cultural awareness in order to accurately grasp the implication of discourse, especially the expression with vague semantics.

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