

# Construction of Chinese Learners' Cross-Cultural Identity

A Textual Analysis Based on Chinese Learners, "Cover Letters"\*

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**Abstract**—The important purpose of foreign language learning is to carry out cross-cultural communication with people in the target language countries. This requires that foreign language learners not only pay attention to basic knowledge such as phonetics, vocabulary and grammar, but also pay attention to the use of language, that is, pragmatics. This study takes Chinese learners as a foreign language as the research object, and through the analysis of various speech behaviors in "cover letters" written by Chinese learners, it explores the construction of Chinese learners' cross-cultural identity.

**Keywords:** *Chinese learners, cross-culture, identity, construction, discourse analysis*

## I. INTRODUCTION

In the past decades of foreign language teaching, the teaching goals have expanded from "linguistic competence" to "communicative competence" (Hymes, 1972) and then to "cross-cultural communicative competence". The lack of cross-cultural communicative competence will cause foreign language learners to be inappropriate or even fail in cross-cultural communication. Therefore, cross-cultural communicative competence has attracted more and more attention of linguists and foreign language educators. Cross-cultural communicative competence is reflected in many aspects, among which cross-cultural pragmatic competence is particularly important. According to Bachman (1990), cross-cultural pragmatic competence mainly includes "illocutionary competence" and "sociolinguistic competence". Illocutionary competence refers to the ability to understand communicative behavior and how to implement it; sociolinguistic competence refers to the ability to use language appropriately according to context.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

There are relatively few studies on "cover letters" for foreign language learners. Most studies focus on English cover letters written by Chinese students, such as Xing

Xuejing, 2006; Zhao Qian, 2007; Wang Jing, 2011; Wang Lijuan, 2011; Zhang Wen, 2012; Wan Luyan, 2013; Shi Xiaoqi, 2015. Only Xiu Huanhuan (2015) used Singaporean Chinese cover letters as the research object. The current research focuses on: (1) pragmatic comparison of vague restrictive pragmatics in English cover letters by Chinese English learners and native English speakers (Zhang Wen, 2012); (2) Xiu Huanhuan (2015) used the HSK dynamic corpus developed by Beijing Language and Culture University to analyze common based errors in writing cover letters for students in Singapore, and to find targeted correspondence teaching methods. Xiu Huanhuan summarized common based errors including address errors, greetings errors, conclusion errors, signature errors, and date errors. These errors involve both formative errors and pragmatic problems; (3) Xing Xuejing (2006), Zhao Qian (2007), Wang Jing (2011), Wang Lijuan (2011), Wan Luyan (2013) and Shi Xiaoqi (2015) have all paid attention to the move of the cover letters, and at the same time, they also observed whether the pragmatic characteristics of the Chinese in writing a "cover letter" in English followed the politeness principle and the cooperative principle. However, none of these studies systematically observed the verbal behavior that appeared in the "cover letters". In short, a systematic analysis of the speech behaviors in "cover letters" for Chinese learners is extremely lacking.

## III. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODS

### A. Research questions

Through literature review, the shortcomings of current research are clearly visible. In order to make up for these shortcomings, this study will focus on how Chinese learners express various speech acts in cover letters.

### B. Research methods

This research text comes from the "HSK dynamic composition corpus" version 2.0 developed by Beijing Language and Culture University. In the library, the composition "a cover letter" is selected. In order to minimize the errors of students' basic knowledge such as Chinese characters, vocabulary and grammar, in addition, considering that pragmatic ability should be a high-level ability of

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\*Fund: This research project is supported by Science Foundation of Beijing Language and Culture University (supported by "the Fundamental Research Funds for the Central Universities") (Project number: 19YJ010405)

learners, the students who scored above 80 in the composition are selected. Due to the large gap between the scores of 80 to 100 points, every 5 points is set as a score segment. In order to avoid the influence due to migration of students' mother tongue culture that may occur during the students' Chinese learning process, one essay from different countries is randomly selected in each score segment. A total of 19 essays are obtained. These materials are observed sentence by sentence; speech acts are identified, summarized and analyzed.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. *Speech act of referring*

In this section, the address form of Chinese learners in the cover letters and the reference of the applicant and the employer are mainly observed. A total of seven forms of titles are found, as follows ("Table I").

TABLE I. SEVEN FORMS OF TITLES

Serial number	address form class	Number and proportion
1	name+general reference Li Wen (Mr) 李文 先生	8(42.11%)
2	name of organization +name+general reference Happy Family Traveling [F Traveling] Company Ji Xiang (Mr) 快乐家庭旅游[F 遊]公司 季翔 先生	5(26.32%)
3	name of organization + role + name + general reference Happy Family Traveling Company Principal Li Wen (Mr) 快乐家庭旅游公司 负责人 李文 先生	2(10.53%)
4	name of organization +role+general reference Happy Family Traveling Company Director (Mr) 快乐家庭旅游公司 董事 先生	1(5.26%)
5	name of organization +role Happy Family Traveling Company Principal 快乐家庭旅游公司 负责人	1(5.26%)
6	name of organization Happy Family Traveling Company 快乐家庭旅游公司	1(5.26%)
7	honorific prefix+name+general reference Well-beloved Li Wen (Mr) 尊敬的 李文 先生	1(5.26%)

Among these address forms, the most commonly used form by Chinese learners is name + general reference (42.11%), followed by name of organization + name + general reference (26.32%). The two forms add up to 68.32%. It can be seen that when Chinese learners use the address form, they clearly indicate the addressee. The proportion from (3) to (7) of each form is small. Another thing to note is that Chinese learners rarely use honorific prefixes. The possible reason is that the Chinese learner doesn't know that the cover letter needs to use honorific prefix to show respect or has not acquired the word at the vocabulary level.

In the cover letter, the reference, that is, how the job applicant refers to himself and the employer is also an important issue. Through the reference, how the job applicant sees his social distance and relative power with the employer can be seen. It is found that job seekers use "oneself (本人)", "I, myself (我本人)" or "I (我)" and "Your esteemed company (贵公司)" or "You (您)" when referring to an employer. "Esteemed (贵)" and "You" (您) show great respect. It can be seen that job seekers put themselves in a lower position and employers in a higher position.

B. *Speech act of adversary-glorification*

In this section, the speech act of adversary-glorification in cover letters will be discussed. First of all, as a job seeker, Chinese learners praise their employers, which is why they apply for positions in the company. Chinese learners praised the company's grand scale, such as Example 1; attaching great importance to talents, such as Example 1; great business development and rapid development, such as Example 2; promising future, such as Example 3.

素闻贵公司规模宏大, 又重视人才, 故此冒昧应征 (例 1)

I've heard that your company *has a grand scale and attaches great importance to talents*. Therefore, I've taken the liberty to apply for this position. (Example 1)

贵公司业务良好, 发展迅速…… (例 2)

Your company *has a good business with rapid development* ... (Example 2)

并且我认为在像贵公司这样很有发展前途的公司…… (例 3)

And I think in *a company as promising as your company* ... (Example 3)

It is also found that in a cover letter, Chinese learners praised the company indirectly by expressing their expectations, as follows:

现因想谋求**更高的待遇**，又想**到外国取经**，所以拟在贵公司任职。（例4）

I now want to work for your company because I want to **get higher treatment** and I **want to learn abroad**. (Example 4)

Chinese learner wants higher treatment, and he wants to study abroad, so he chooses this company, which shows that the company can meet the applicant's two wishes.

### C. Speech act of self-glorification

In addition to praises from Chinese learners as job seekers, there are also a large number of praises from Chinese learners as job candidates. These self-commendations relate to work experience, language skills, personality or qualities.

……曾被派往外国，**经验颇丰**，（例5）

... have been sent to foreign countries with groups **with considerable experience**, (Example 5)

……曾在旅游公司当过导游两年，**胜任愉快**，**与顾客的关系甚好**，（例6）

... have worked as a tour guide for two years in a travel company, performing well and **getting along with customers very well**, (Example 6)

由于设计得独特、新颖，且**深得广大的顾客朋友们的赞赏**……（例7）

As the design is unique, novel, and **deeply appreciated by customers** ... (Example 7)

……进入旅游业后，三年我不断努力**得到领导人的称赞**。（例8）

After entering the tourism industry, I have been working hard for 3 years to **get praise from the leaders**. (Example 8)

我曾担任另一公司之广告部门主任，且在**广告界内闻名一时**。（例9）

I used to be the director of the advertising department of another company, and **was well-known in the advertising industry**. (Example 9)

Above are a few examples of Chinese learners praising their rich work experience or good results in previous work. In Example (5), the Chinese learner thinks that he has traveled overseas with a group, so he has accumulated rich experience; in Example (6), the Chinese learner evaluates that he has a very good relationship with the customer when he is a tour guide; in Examples (7), (8) and (9), Chinese learners praise themselves for being praised by customers, leaders, or industry professionals in their previous jobs. The followings are examples of Chinese learners praising their foreign language proficiency.

讲一口**流利**的英语和汉语，母语韩语当然更是**毫不逊色**。（例10）

I can speak **fluent** English and Chinese, and native Korean is **certainly not inferior**. (Example 10)

本人除了**精通**汉语以外，也**精通**英语与马来西亚文……（例11）

In addition to **being proficient in** Chinese, I am **also proficient in** English and Malay ... (Example 11)

还有我的英语水平**强**，带来了**很多外国朋友**来中国观光。（例12）

I also **have a great command of** English and have brought many foreign friends to China for sightseeing. (Example 12)

In these examples, Chinese learners rate their foreign language proficiency as "fluent", "not inferior", "proficient", and "great".

Chinese learners also praise their personalities and qualities. In Example 13, Chinese learners praise their forgetting food and sleep when doing advertising design, and tirelessly study advertisements; in Example 14 and Example 15, Chinese learners praise their personality as "lively and cheerful" and "straightforward"; in Example 16, Chinese learners praise their enthusiasm for work, their modest towards colleagues as well as their ability and confidence to do their jobs well; in Example 17, Chinese learners praise their quality as "serious and honest" and "approachable" to colleagues.

尤其对广告设计，时常**废寝忘食**、**孜孜不倦**地钻研……（例13）

Especially for advertising design, I often **forget food and sleep, tirelessly studying** advertisements ... (Example 13)

**活泼开朗**的性格（例14）

**Lively and cheerful** character (Example 14)

我性格很**爽快**，**活泼**。（例15）

My personality is **straightforward and lively**. (Example 15)

以本人对工作的**热忱**、**虚心**、**兴趣**、**能力与信心**，（例16）

With my **enthusiasm, humility, interest, ability and confidence** in the work, (Example 16)

本人性格一向**认真诚实**，……，而且本人比较**平易近人**，……（例17）

I have always been **serious and honest** in my character ... and I am **more approachable** ... (Example 17)

In the end, it is also found that Chinese learners also praise themselves through a third party's praise. In example 18, the Chinese learner claims to have been praised by the professors, and is valued and trusted by the boss; in example 19, the Chinese learner says that her father thinks she works hard; in example 20, the former company gives a positive comment on the Chinese learner. Through the third person's evaluation, Chinese learners praise them indirectly.

这段时间给了我一个很好磨练的机会，也**获得教授们称许**

**公司老板颇为器重与信任我**，把全公司的广告设计重任交由我一处理，（例18）

This period of time has given me a good chance to hone, and I *have been praised by the professors*

*The boss quite respects and trusts me*, handing over the heavy responsibility of company-wide advertising design to me. (Example 18)

因为 *蒙父认为刻苦的我* 可能对发挥方面有限…… (例 19)

Because my father thinks that *I may be hard-working*. I may play limited.... (Example 19)

本人 *相貌端正, 衣著端庄, 语言表达能力强*。相信在行政上与业务上, *都会有卓越的表现*。这是前一公司给我的评语。 (例 20)

The man has *regular features with dignified clothes, and he has strong language skills*. We believe that no matter in administration or business, he *will have excellent performance*. This is the comment that the previous company gave me. (Example 20)

D. Speech act of expressing thanks

In all cover letters, Chinese learners have expressed their gratitude. The following are various sentence forms for expressing gratitude. ("Table II")

TABLE II. VARIOUS SENTENCE FORMS FOR EXPRESSING GRATITUDE

Serial number	The form of expressing thanks	Times	Article numbers
1	Thanks. 谢谢。	7	11
2	... I hope [C] will be ahired, <i>thanks in advance</i> . ..... 祈望[C]能被录用, 先此致谢。	1	
3	I would like to express <i>my great thanks to your company</i> . 向贵公司表达十二万分谢意。	1	
4	..... write a letter to apply, ....., <i>appreciate it!</i> ..... 致函应聘, ....., 不胜感激!	1	
5	If I'm hired by your company, <i>I'll be greatly appreciated!</i> 如蒙贵公司录用, 则不胜感激!	1	
6	I'll be <i>very grateful</i> to be hired ... 本人能被录取, 将会感激不尽, .....	1	
7	No expression of thanks 无表达谢谢		8

Of all the cover letters, 11 contained expressions of gratitude with a total of 12 times, and 8 cover letters didn't express gratitude. In all the speech acts of expressing gratitude, the "thank you" in Example (1) and similar expressions such as Examples (2) and (3) are used 9 times, and the words "gratitude" and related expressions are used 3 times in total as Examples (4) (5) and (6). One cover letter expresses thanks twice. At the beginning of the cover letter, the Chinese learner looks forward to his employer's employment, so he expresses thanks in advance. And then he again expresses thanks at the end of the cover letter.

E. Speech act of promising

In the cover letter, some Chinese learners expressed promises after being hired. Most promises are that Chinese language learners will contribute to the company or provide better services to customers after being hired, such as:

*全力以赴为公司的发展做出点儿贡献*。 (例 21)

*I'll make every effort to contribute to the development of the company*. (Example 21)

..... *争取最佳的表现给旅客们最满意的服务*。 (例 22)

... *Strive for the best performance to provide the most satisfactory service to passengers*. (Example 22)

When expressing commitment, Chinese learners will also express their determination to increase the level of commitment, such as:

如蒙贵公司录用, 则不胜感激! *必竭尽所能、鞠躬尽瘁而后已*。 (例 23)

If I'm employed by your company, I would be greatly appreciated! *I will do my best and spare no efforts in my position until death*. (Example 23)

恳请先生允准。 *必尽全力*, 为公司服务。 (例 24)

Sir, I beg your permission. *I will do my best* to serve your company. (Example 24)

In addition, some Chinese learners have expressed that they will be qualified for the job after being hired, such as Examples (25) and (26) or give full play to their talents, such as Example (27).

*我相信一定能胜任*, 为贵公司开展业务效劳。 (例 25)

*I'm capable of this job*, and I believe that I can do a good job for your company. (Example 25)

相信以我的热情和能力, *我会胜任这份工作*。 (例 26)

I believe that with my enthusiasm and ability, *I'll be qualified for this job*. (Example 26)

我想如果我在贵公司工作的话, *我一定会发挥自己的才能*。 (例 27)

I think that if I work in your company, *I shall definitely give full play to my abilities*. (Example 27)

#### F. Speech act of congratulation-wishing

At the end of cover letters, the Chinese learners express their wishes. There are roughly five types: (1) wish the company evergrowing prosperity, for example: "I wish the business flourishes"; (2) wish the health and safety of the addressee, such as "I wish you safe and sound!", "I wish you good health!"; (3) wish the happiness of the addressee, such as "Have a nice day!"; (4) wish the smooth work of addressee, such as "... And I wish that everything goes well with your work!"; (5) conventional expression, such as "Best wishes, salute!". "Best wishes" means the end of the letter, and "salute" means respect.

#### G. Speech act of requesting

Requesting speech acts is considered a face-threatening behavior. The listener needs to pay some price or effort while meeting the speaker's requirements. In order for the speaker to meet the requirements of the listener to achieve his purpose, his discourse must follow the "politeness principle", so the speaker needs to adopt some strategies to preserve the listener's face, that is, the requesting strategy. Blum-Kulka (1989) divides requesting strategy into three broad categories based on English morphological changes, morphology, and subjunctive moods: direct strategy, conventionally indirect strategy and non-conventionally indirect strategy. Based on foreign research results, Li Jun (2001) fully considered the characteristics of Chinese, and divided the Chinese requesting strategy into direct strategy and indirect strategy based on whether the speaker's request intention was clear.

It is found that no matter what the request strategy framework of Blum-Kulka (1989) or Li Jun (2001), Chinese learners adopt a direct strategy that is, expressing wishes or needs. Here are some typical examples:

.....去函应征, 同时也附上我本人的简历与照片一张, **希望** 惠予考虑。 (例 28)

..... I'm writing to apply for this position, and I also attach a resume and a photo of myself, **hoping** that you can give consideration to my application. (Example 28)

特致函应聘, **望** 不吝赐教或给予机会..... (例 29)

I'm writing to apply for this position, **looking forward to** getting your valuable comments and suggestions or getting this great opportunity..... (Example 29)

**冀** 早日收到您的好消息。 (例 30)

I **hope** to receive your good news soon. (Example 30)

我对导游的职务感兴趣, 在此提出应聘书, **请研究**。 (例 31)

I am interested in the role of a tour guide. I submit an application letter here, **hoping taht you can have a look**. (Example 31)

本人**恳** 请季先生您考虑让我担任贵公司广告设计师..... (例 32)

I **sincerely hope** Mr. Ji to consider me as your advertising designer... (Example 32)

In the sentences used by the Chinese learners above, the word "hoping" in Example 28, the words "looking forward to" in Example 29 and the word "hope" in Example 30 are used to indicate that the company is expected to consider applications from Chinese learners. In addition, Chinese learners also used "hoping" in Example 31 to invite companies to consider their job applications. In order to improve the level, another student added "sincerely" before "hope", expressing honest wishes. These are single sentences. In order to leave more space for employers to consider, some Chinese learners also use conditional compound sentences, such as the following examples.

**如不嫌弃**, 请尽早来信通知, 或请拨电话 (例 34)

**If you don't loathe it**, please write to me as soon as possible, or call me (Example 34)

请您仔细考虑后, **如果方便**, 在本月底以内, 给予答复。 (例 35)

After careful consideration, **if convenient**, please reply within the end of this month. (Example 35)

**如果贵公司对我有兴趣的话**, 请联系一下。 (例 36)

**If your company is interested in me**, please contact me. (Example 36)

## V. CONCLUSION

This study describes various speech acts of referring adversary-glorification, self-glorification, expressing thanks, promising, congratulations-wishing and requesting of Chinese learners. Through the analysis of these speech behaviors, how Chinese learners construct their cross-cultural identity in the process of cross-cultural communication has been found. Due to the limited amount of text, the paper may not be comprehensive.

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