Differences Between Chinese and Western Thinking from the Use of Kinship Terms in Chinese and English

Chen Xin[1*]

[1]*School of Literature, Hubei University, Wuhan, Hubei 430000, China*
*Corresponding author. Email: chenxin2000alasim@163.com

ABSTRACT

An important manifestation of the differences between Chinese and Western thinking is the difference between Chinese and English. Based on Wilhelm von Humboldt and other scholars' linguistic views, this paper summarizes the relationship between language and thinking, compares the differences between Chinese and English in form, sound and meaning, and analyses the differences between Chinese and Western thinking from the perspective of kinship terms. This paper holds that Chinese people pay more attention to context and order, while Westerners pay more attention to category.

Keywords: kinship terms, Chinese, English, culture, comparation

1. INTRODUCTION

There are kinds of languages in the world, and each language represents a unique world view. Language affects people's thinking, and people's thinking also affects the use of language. This paper analyses the overall differences between Chinese and English from the perspective of "their form, their sound and their meaning ", as well as the detailed differences in kinship terms between these two languages. Through the difference of languages, we can see the difference of thinking mode between China and the West. Chinese adopts a more detailed method of classifying by narrative, while English adopts a rougher classification method of classifying by category [1]. This kind of language difference is likely to reflect the differences in thinking between Chinese and western in the division of things: Chinese people pay more attention to context and order, while Westerners pay more attention to category.

1.1. The Relationship Between Language and Thinking

Whether in linguistics or philosophy, the discussion on the relationship between language and thinking has never stopped. So far, we still cannot make a clear conclusion on the question of which is the first between language and thinking, but we can roughly sum up the predecessors' basic views on the interaction between thinking and language. The following is an analysis from the two aspects of "language to thinking" and "thinking to language".

1.1.1. Language to thinking

Language is the form and tool of thinking, and influences the mode of thinking. Wilhelm von Humboldt points out that any form of thinking must be carried out with the help of the general form of perceptual activities [2]. He emphasized the role of languages in thinking. Sapir and his student, Wolfe inherited Humboldt's view points that each language plays an important role in thinking, and further formed Sapir-Wolfe hypothesis, putting forward the view that "languages determine thinking". They think that language form determines the thinking mode of language users; language users can only observe the world in the way that language describes the world [3]. Many scholars have questioned this kind of linguistic determinism, for example, the grammar translation method cannot completely correspond to each other. However, the attention and emphasis of Sapir and wolf's hypothesis on the role of language are still worth learning from. Language is not only the external form of thinking, its rules and vocabularies also affect thinking all the time. Thinking also needs the help of language. Without language, it is difficult to realize the process of thinking. Languages affect the mode of thinking. There are many different nationalities and languages in the world, and the mode of thinking of each nationality is

different. For example, Chinese people who speak Chinese don't like to speak too directly, they like to express themselves euphemistically with the help of implied meaning; while Westerners who speak English do not like to beat around the bush, they prefer direct communication, and the difference in expression should be related to language differences.

1.1.2. Thinking to language

Thinking is the content of languages. There is no meaning in disordered language that does not reflect the ideological content. What we say should express certain content, which is the product of our thinking. Only people have something in mind, and then expresses it through language, can it be transmitted from the inside to the outside. In this way, our own ideas can be transmitted to the speaker who we talk to, so that communication can be realized. Thinking belongs to the cognitive level. We form an impression of our perception of the external world and form a corresponding concept in our brain, which is thinking. This kind of thinking is the content of languages. This has long been reflected in the views of ancient Greek philosophers. The representative is Aristotle. He believes that the relationship between languages and the world is realized by two processes: one is a natural and universal process, which connects the external world with human's psychological representation of the external world through senses; the other is a special and conventional process, which combines psychological representation with languages [4]. Thinking is our psychological representation. The connection between languages and the world is based on the reflection of thinking on the world. Languages are inseparable from thinking. The form of languages without content cannot exist in isolation. Languages realize the connection with the world by expressing thinking, which is reflected in the process from the objective material world to thinking, or from thinking to language.

1.2. Language Differences between Chinese and English and Their Embodiment in Kinship Terms

There are many analysis perspectives on the differences between Chinese and English, which have been discussed in detail by predecessors. This paper takes the characteristics of Chinese as the starting point, analyzes the overall differences between Chinese and English from the perspective of "their form, their sound and their meaning", and analyzes the differences between Chinese and Western thinking from the perspective of kinship terms.

1.2.1. Differences between Chinese and English in "their form, their sound and their meaning"

1.2.1.1. Differences between Chinese and English in "form".

First of all, from the perspective of morphology, Chinese does not implement word segmentation and continuous writing, and there is no obvious formal mark on the boundaries of words, so it is often difficult to divide the boundaries between words; while English, as an alphabetic script, implements word segmentation and continuous writing, and the boundaries between words are relatively clear. There are no morphological markers and morphological changes in Chinese parts of speech, and it is difficult to divide parts of speech. Many words have several parts of speech, such as "Hua（花）", which can express both the verb "spend" and the noun "flower". However, the morphological markers in English parts of speech are very obvious, the most significant of which are affixes and deformations, such as "tion, ment, ty" and so on, are typical nominal affixes. We can basically judge English parts of speech from the morphology. Of course, some English words have the same form of adjectives and adverbs, or nouns and verbs, but the number is small and does not affect cognition. Chinese vocabularies basically have no morphological change, "men（们）" is a special case, which specifically refers to the plural of people, but other plurals basically have no morphological markers; while English deformation is very rich, such as main dynamic, passive dynamic, singular third person, progressive tense, past tense, present tense, etc. for example, the verb "to run" in different tense can have different forms, like "ran, run, running", And so on. In Chinese vocabularies, there are two kinds of words with outstanding characteristics -- function words and quantifiers, such as the most commonly used "de（的）, le（了）, ne（呢）, ba（吧）, a（啊）, ma（吗）". Function words are an important mean of expression in Chinese, and the increase or decrease of function words will affect the meaning of sentences. For example, "Wo chi fan（我吃饭）" and "Wo chi le fan（我吃了饭）" express different meanings. The former only means the action of eating, while the latter means the action of eating has been completed, like the past tense in English. There are also abundant quantifiers in Chinese. Many quantifiers generally expressed by "a" or "an" in English are divided in detail in Chinese, such as "yi tiao（一条）, yi zhi（一只）, yi zhang（一张）, yi fu（一幅）". Different nouns match different quantifiers, and there are also situations where a noun can match multiple quantifiers. For example, "yi zhi（一只）" and "yi tiao（一条）" can be used as the quantifiers of noun "dog".

From the perspective of sentence morphology, the rules of the combination of words when composing sentences in Chinese are relatively random, and there are even some single word sentences. The sentence structure is complex and diverse, and the semantic function is greater than the form; while English sentences must have verbs, with verbs as the core, and the simplest sentences also need verbs to support. The word order of Chinese and English is not exactly the same. The adverbials of time and place in Chinese are usually placed after the subject and before the verb, while the adverbials of time and place in English are placed at the end of the sentence. There are some special sentence patterns in Chinese and English, such as "Ba-construction" in Chinese and "inverted sentence " in English.

1.2.1.2. Differences between Chinese and English in "sound".

From the perspective of pronunciation, Chinese characters are monosyllabic symbols (except Er hua), and the number of Chinese characters is more than that of syllables. Based on the standard dictionary of modern Chinese, 1265 basic syllables of modern Chinese are counted in the number and composition distribution of modern Chinese syllables [5]. However, the number of Chinese characters far exceeds this figure. In 1994, Leng Yulong and others published the sea of Chinese characters with a total of 85000 characters. The most significant result of the unequal number of syllables and Chinese characters is homophone. There are many homophones in Chinese characters. Their forms and contents are not exactly the same or different, but their sounds are the same. For example, "shi（石）", "shi（十）" and "shi（时）" are all pronounced as "shí", but "shi（石）" means "stone"; "shi（十）" means "ten"; "shi（时）" means "time", and their forms and meanings are different. There are many examples in Chinese. On the contrary, the correspondence between English syllables and letter combinations is more obvious. We can judge which specific word is by pronunciation. Although there are some homophones, their spelling will also be different.

Chinese is a language with tones. Different tones may indicate different shapes or meanings. If the tones are changed arbitrarily, the meaning of words or sentences may be changed beyond recognition. For example, "si ren（私人）" and "si ren（死人）", the former is the first tone, the meaning is "private"; the latter is the third tone, and the meaning is "dead". If you don't pay attention to the tone, you will express completely irrelevant meaning, and even offend others. In English, there is no fixed tone of a word [6]. The tone of a word does not change its meaning, only the difference in tone. In terms of pronunciation, Chinese has such pronunciation rules as modified tone, light tone and Er Hua, while English also has such pronunciation features as heavy tone, continuous reading and loss of explosiveness.

1.2.1.3. Differences between Chinese and English in " meaning".

In terms of meaning, there are also differences between Chinese and English. Most Chinese characters in Chinese have a certain origin and meaning, many monosyllabic morphemes, a single word has a lot of room for interpretation, and the combination of words may produce new meanings. In addition, there are quite a number of pictophonetic characters（形声字） in Chinese. According to the research of Li Yan, Kang Jiashen and other scholars, among 7000 general characters, the total number of modern Chinese pictophonetic characters is 3975, accounting for more than half [7]. We can infer the meaning of a word according to the meaning symbol of pictophonetic characters. Similarly, there are ideographic characters（会意字） and pictographs（象形字）in Chinese. The meaning of characters is contained in the form. However, in English, 26 letters alone are meaningless. Letters have meaning only when they are combined.

Chinese pays more attention to its meaning than its form; English pays more attention to its form, and its meaning is expressed in form. A lot of information in English sentences are included in the morphological changes. We can judge whether the subject is the third person according to the singular third person form of the verb. We can see the time of the action according to the tense of the verb. We can also judge the agent according to the active voice or passive voice of the verb. However, there is no active or passive morphological change in the verb centre in Chinese. We cannot judge the relationship between active and passive from the verb form, and we cannot judge the tense from the verb. Chinese needs function words and context to present semantic changes.

In addition, the difference in meaning between Chinese and English is also reflected in the ambiguous sentences. The generation of Chinese ambiguous sentences is often related to the way of sentence segmentation; English ambiguous sentences can be divided into two categories: lexical ambiguous sentences and syntactic ambiguous sentences. Lexical ambiguity is mostly caused by polysemy or homonymy of a word [8], while syntactic ambiguity is relatively diverse. The most common one is syntactic ambiguity caused by subordinate sentences, which will not be repeated here.

1.2.2. Differences between Chinese and English in kinship terms

In terms of kinship terms, the most significant difference between Chinese and English lies in the degree of detail: Chinese is more detailed, while English is relatively rough. Generally speaking, both of them distinguish kinship terms of different genders and generations. The difference is that Chinese pays more attention to "lineage" and "age", while English pays more attention to "category".

The Chinese language is used to be divided according to the age and parents' clans: for the same generation, the elder is called "ge ge（哥哥）" and "jie jie（姐姐）", while the younger is called "di di（弟弟）" and "mei mei （妹妹）"; except for the same parents, the non lineal relatives of the father's clan are preceded by the word "tang（堂）", which is called " tang ge（堂哥）", " tang jie（堂姐）", " tang di（堂弟）" and " tang mei（堂妹）", while those of the mother's clan are preceded by the word "biao（表）", which is called "biao jie（表姐）", "biao di（表弟）" etc. For father's generation, father's big brother is called "bai bai/ bo bo（伯伯）", father's little brother is called "shu shu （叔叔）", father's sisters are collectively called "gu gu（姑姑）", mother's brothers are called "jiu jiu（舅舅）", mother's sisters are called "yi ma （姨妈）". For many brothers and sisters, many uncles, and so on, Chinese will add "da（大）", "er（二）", "san（三）", "si（四）"……till "xiao（小）" in order of age. In Chinese kinship terms, ordinal words are used to distinguish different individuals represented by different appellations. All in all, the younger generation's address to the elder strictly follows the kinship address, which will be more polite. Besides, some families use "name + kinship address" to distinguish different relatives.

In English, the appellation does not distinguish between the elder and the younger, nor does it distinguish between the paternal or the matrilineal. Brothers are called "brother" and sisters are called "sister". In the case of the elder and the younger, the attributive is added in the front, such as "big brother" and "little sister". Apart from siblings, other relatives of the same generation are collectively referred to as "cousin", without making a detailed distinction. If it is necessary to specify which cousin it is, English speakers are used to calling it by first name, or "cousin + first name". In the appellation of parents, the sisters of parents are collectively referred to as "aunt", and the brothers are collectively referred to as "uncle". The male grandparents, such as father's father and mother's father, are collectively referred to as "grandfather" or "grandpa", while the female grandparents are collectively referred to as "grandmother" or "grandma".

In English, the way to identify a specific relative is "kinship address + name", which is contrary to the order in Chinese. According to this "kinship address + name" way of address, there is no need to consider who is older and who is younger.

1.3. Thinking differences behind language differences between Chinese and English

Chinese people tend to have a comprehensive way of thinking, emphasizing the overall program, while Westerners tend to have an analytical way of thinking, emphasizing the structural program [9]. Chinese characters are the combination of form, sound and meaning, the lack of morphological changes in Chinese vocabularies the vague boundaries of words and other characteristics reflect the Chinese holistic thinking. Chinese pays attention to the overall expression of meaning, not limited to form; Chinese pays attention to politeness and implicature, which also reflects the Chinese modest and introverted thinking habits. By comparison, English pays more attention to the relationship between morphological changes and internal logic, meaning is contained in the form, reflecting the Western emphasis on rational analysis and logic; English attaches importance to the accuracy and directness of meaning expression, which reflects the Western rigorous and scientific thinking habits. We can see the thinking differences in classification between Chinese and English from the differences in kinship terms: Chinese thinking pays attention to order and subdivision, while western thinking pays more attention to category and induction.

In the Chinese way of thinking, the concept of order is very important, which is related to the hierarchy and clan concept in ancient China. Chinese people attach great importance to the family, and most of the relatives of the same clan have relatively close ties. In addition, they also attach importance to the kinship of blood relationship, and distinguish between lineal and collateral [10]. Lineal relatives are generally closer than collateral relations. In addition, the different appellations of paternal and matrilineal, elderly and young relatives also reflect the classification of Chinese kinship terms: meticulous and strict. This emphasis on kinship terms also reflects the sense of reunion in China. Traditional Chinese people often live together in the form of family, and the family relationship is relatively close, so they attach importance to the whole big family. When it is extended to the country, it becomes the feeling of home and country. In modern society, the small family has gradually replaced the traditional big family, but the relationship between relatives has not been broken, the habit of helping each other between relatives has not changed, and the overall concept of family country integration has not changed. Thus, Chinese thinking advocates integrity and unity.

English kinship terms generally do not distinguish between clans and non clans, Family members are often classified by seniority [11]. Many kinship terms "have several duties", which reflects the Western sense of category. They like to classify things into one category. They think that some kinship terms do not need to make a more detailed distinction, nor do they need to use different words to express them. They are used to adding attributives to distinguish when necessary. In many cases, they do not emphasize whether "grandmother" is father's mother or mother's mother. "Grandmother" is just the general name of female elders at this level. In western society, when parents bring up their children to adulthood, their children begin to live independently, and there is no necessary interdependence between their relatives. At the same time, Westerners advocate equality, equality between relatives and no formality, which is different from China. Most Chinese children attach importance to their parents' suggestions and sometimes even follow their parents' decisions rather than their own. This difference also reflects that western thinking pays attention to individual freedom and independence, and the boundaries between people.

2. CONCLUSION

Languages provide the form of thinking and influence the way of thinking; thinking is the content of languages, and the two complement each other. We cannot absolutely say "languages determine thinking" or "thinking determines languages", because the two influence each other and are inseparable. The differences between Chinese and English reflect the differences between Chinese and Western ways of thinking. The Chinese nation pays more attention to holistic thinking and the expression of meaning than form. The determination of word meaning and sentence meaning needs the help of language environment. The west is accustomed to adopting analytical thinking, focusing on the perfection of form and the transformation of word form. From the perspective of kinship terms, Chinese pays attention to blood, clan and order, which reflects the order concept of Chinese thinking and the concept of family affinity and estrangement; English emphasizes category, which only distinguishes from generation, regardless of age, which reflects the consciousness of simplification and category in Western thinking.

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