




A Comparative Study of Chinese and Japanese Interesting Expressions

An Analytical Approach Based on Rhetoric Technique and Emotional Color

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Abstract. Japan and China, which are located in East Asia, have experienced historical precipitation and are full of distinct regional features and folk cultural deposits. Throughout history, intercultural communication has induced a remarkable resemblance between the two countries in many areas, including Chinese and Japanese. Nevertheless, along with the development of the times and the progress of society, interesting utterances have gradually come into view. Therefore, with a perspective of cross-cultural pragmatics, the research focuses on the interesting expressions from China and Japan in the past five years, to observe and analyze the linguistic features of China and Japan and the changing trend. This paper aims to help people have a comprehensive understanding of these two East Asian languages by means of exploring the similarities and differences between the interesting utterances.

Keywords: Interesting Expressions, Comparative Study, Intercultural Perspective, Chinese and Japanese, Senryu.

1 Introduction

Japan and China, which are located in East Asia, the comparative study of their languages, such as sonkeigo (respectful language) and kensongo (humble language), has always been the focus for researchers in the two countries. However, there has been less research and low concern about the interesting utterances in Chinese and Japanese.

In recent years, due to the inclusiveness and openness of the Internet, more possibilities are given to language^[1], whether an inadvertent complaint from a stranger on the Internet or something interesting published on social media, if it can arouse netizen's resonance, and through the process of spread and promotion, it might become a popular word in China, a senryu in Japan, an interesting "meme" in East Asia. Huang Huimin^[2] believes that social buzzwords and interesting utterances keep pace with the times. Therefore, the research focuses on the interesting expressions from China and Japan in the past five years (2018-2022), to compare the interesting utterances in these two countries.

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H. Kassim et al. (eds.), *Proceedings of the 2023 8th International Conference on Modern Management and Education Technology (MMET 2023)*, Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research 798, https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-146-3_4

2 The classification of interesting expressions

Interesting utterances play a very important role in a variety of contexts, such as film and television works, articles, and buzzwords. No one spends the whole day staying on formal occasions such as meetings and speeches, nor do people only read strict academic reports every day. Due to the role transformation and changes in the new environment, in an informal occasion, between family members and friends, people always choose to “drop the pretense.” Interesting utterances are the spice of life, bringing people closer together and relieving stress. It can be humorous language to make people laugh and lighten the mood, or it can be mock language to make a self-deprecating or compliant, which can be seen in the Table 1.

Table 1. The classification of interesting expressions

Country	Classification		
	<i>Popular words</i>	<i>Tik Tok Meme</i>	<i>Senryus</i>
China	37	30	0
Japan	35	0	40

3 Rhetoric technique

In order to reinforce the expressive effect of the language, rhetoric techniques are often used in interesting utterances, which could make the language more vivid and funny. For example, Catchwords are closely related to rhetoric activities^[3].

Table 2. Classification, Quantity and Proportion of the rhetoric technique

Rhetoric Technique	Quantity and Proportion			
	<i>China</i>	<i>Japan</i>	<i>Totals</i>	<i>Maximum</i>
Metaphor	7	5	12(60.0%)	China(58.3%)
Comparsion	0	5	5(25.0%)	Japan(100%)
Exaggeration	3	0	3(15.0%)	China(100%)

According to the Table 2, data reveals that the most frequently used techniques in China are metaphor and exaggeration, while in Japan are comparison and metaphor. The focus of this chapter centers on the latter two rhetorical techniques.

3.1 Comparison

Now that exaggeration is uncommon in Japan’s interesting utterances, and the comparison is an excellent rhetorical technique to express opinions, avoid explicitness and use euphemistic expressions^[4], which is consistent with the characteristics of the Japanese language, for example:

- 会社へは 来るなと上司 行けと妻 Translation: My boss said you don't come to the office again. My wife said you don't stay at home and go away.

In this sentence, the boss and wife said one pair of antonyms. However, the meaning is the same. This is the advantage of comparison. Although the meaning is not expressed frankly, everyone knows what it means, and this is a concentrated expression of Japanese humor.

3.2 Exaggeration

Exaggeration allows people to create a rich imagination^[5]:

- 酸死我了！ Translation: I'm so jealous!

"酸" means envy and jealousy, and "死 'so'" is used to emphasize its degree, and similar expressions such as "吵死了！ 'The noise is awful!'" are also common in China. China's exaggeration is to exaggerate its degree directly, but Japan's exaggeration is not the same as China's. Japanese people are used to embellishing something more exquisitely. It is called "implicit exaggeration" ^[6]. If a Japanese person wants to say the same thing, he might say, "That's good." it sounds flat and not very interesting. The reason why the rhetoric technique of exaggeration has become less in Japan in the past five recent years is also strongly associated with its social environment.

4 The comparison of emotional color

Interesting utterances are often equated with humorous language in China and Japan. Although humor is also conducive to intercultural communication^[7], it is not the only emotional color that makes a statement interesting. Humor involves teasing and self-mockery^[8]. Discontentment, self-mockery, and other seemingly negative colors can also create interesting utterances. All the emotional colors add up to a complete interesting utterance. The focus of this chapter centers on the two middle emotional colors in Table 3.

Table 3. Classification, Quantity and Proportion of the emotional color

Emotional Color	Quantity and Proportion			
	<i>China</i>	<i>Japan</i>	<i>Totals</i>	<i>Maximum</i>
Humor	30	32	62(60.0%)	Japan(51.6%)
Ridicule	14	27	41(25.0%)	Japan(65.8%)
Self-Mockery	25	11	36(15.0%)	China(69.4%)
Irony and Discontentment	3	9	12(7.9%)	Japan(75.0%)

4.1 Ridicule

Such language can be found more in informal situations^[10]. The quantity of this kind of Japan's interesting utterance is almost two times of China's. This is also because Japanese people are experts in expressing a sense of humor by using the technique of ridicule. The difference can be seen between the two countries:

- 俄罗斯方块教会了我们:如果你合群就会消失。 Translation: Tetris teaches us that you will disappear if you get on well with others.
- 抱き上げた 孫が一言 密ですよ Translation: I picked my grandson up, and he said, "Too close!"

Likewise, many kinds of phenomena will be mocked in an interesting utterance in China and Japan. Still, the difference between the two countries is that Chinese people ridicule not only themselves but also the phenomena around them. In contrast, Japanese people prefer to make jokes about themselves. The Japanese believe that talking about people around them openly may be impolite and rude, so mocking myself is a better choice because I already have so many experiences to talk about. Ridicule is a strategic interpersonal relationship^[9], and if not careful, it can bring trouble to others. This conclusion makes people easy to understand the differences between the two countries.

4.2 Self-mockery

Some Internet interesting languages contain a sense of self-deprecating^[11]. In recent years, Sang culture (demotivation culture) has been brewing among China's millennials, which means that some people have more and more negative thoughts and cannot stay motivated in their life, because of the influence of COVID-19, the workers are also finding it hard to make a living, students are also suffering from tremendous pressure. This has led to the prevalence of Sang culture, and people began to make fun of themselves as "trash" one after another. Although Japan's society is repressive, it has not changed significantly as China's in recent years, so the quantity of sentences with self-mockery is more in China, for example:

- 我喜欢现在的年纪, 却不喜欢现在的自己 Translation: I love my age now. But I don't love myself.
- タバコ辞め それでも妻に 煙たがれ Translation: I've quit smoking but my wife still says she's overcome by the smell.

Compared with the emotion of ridicule, utterance with self-mockery is more "bitter and sad." This kind of sentence is full of wit and funny because this is the current situation of many people. Moreover, in Japan, people believe that utterances with self-mockery can help others save face^[12]. In short, the difference between China and Japan is not apparent to this point.

5 Conclusion

This paper tries to contrast the interesting utterance in China and Japan in three respects. For example, Sang culture is brewing among Chinese people, which has influenced the emotional color of the interesting utterance in China over recent five years. Simultaneously, some interesting utterances in Japan are euphemistic due to the feature of Japanese, but have a sense of ridicule or irony.

The Chinese and the Japanese, living in the same global village, in the same Asia, interesting utterances can help both countries to understand each other's national conditions and cultural differences, improve mutual understanding and develop friendly relations.

Acknowledge

College Students' Innovative Entrepreneurial Training Plan Program (xj2023118450703: A Comparative Study of Interesting Expressions in Chinese and Japanese)

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