

The Pragmatic Values of Chinese-English Fuzzy Language in Communication

Yanmei Zhao

School of Foreign Languages, Yuxi Normal University, Yuxi, Yunnan Province, China

Keywords: Fuzzy language, Communication, Pragmatics

Abstract: Fuzzy words and expressions are widely used in both Chinese and English. Fuzzy language is of significance in real communication. Many scholars have explored the pragmatic effects of fuzzy language from various aspects, while the author of this essay just focuses on the use of time fuzzy words and studies the common pragmatic values of the fuzzy language of Chinese and English in practical communication.

1. Introduction

Fuyi Xing and Zhenguo Wu (2002) stated that the use of language, or pragmatics for short, is an activity in which both parties in communication express and understand utterances in a certain way on certain occasions for a certain purpose. Pragmatics is a discipline that studies how to use language appropriately and effectively in a certain language environment to communicate. The concept of pragmatics was put forward successively in the 1930s, and after several decades of development, pragmatics gradually came into being and developed into an independent discipline in the 1970s. The use of fuzzy language has become a pragmatic strategy in daily communication, which exists in Chinese and English communicative environments. The use of fuzzy words in conversation will not harm the accurate expression of discourse, but make the content of speech more thorough and rigorous. If used properly, the expressive power of fuzzy language can make statements appropriate and produce euphemistic, implicit, and humorous pragmatic effects.

2. Pragmatic Functions of Chinese-English Fuzzy Language

A. The Fuzziness Improves the Accuracy of Communicative Language Expression

Paul Grice, an American language philosopher, put forward the Cooperative Principle in 1967, which indicates that accuracy is the essential requirement of discourse expression in communication and explains the inevitability of fuzzy language. H. Paul Grice (1967) believes that verbal communication needs cooperation. Both sides of the conversation hope to understand and cooperate, which requires people to observe a fundamental principle: "When participating in the conversation, provide appropriate words according to the change of the purpose or direction of the conversation." Grice's cooperation principle includes quantity criterion, quality criterion, relation criterion, and way criterion. The quantitative standard is that what is said should contain the information needed for the conversation, and what is said should not provide more information than is required. The quality rule is don't say what you know to be false and don't say what the evidence is insufficient. The rule of relationship is to be relevant, to be appropriate. The rules of the way require to avoid obscurity, ambiguity, wordy, to be organized. Zhimei Zhu (2010) holds that the principle of quality requires efforts to make the information provided valid, not self-aware false words. This criterion involves the accuracy of speech expression in communication. However, as communication is a kind of activity that people all need to participate in, it has diversity and complexity, and many

meanings to be expressed cannot be expressed entirely in precise words. A large number of fuzzy words, especially time-type obscure words, are needed to make the expression of discourse more accurate.

There is a situation in our daily communication. A friend invites you to visit him tomorrow, but you have work to finish first to reply, "OK. I will visit you tomorrow afternoon." "Afternoon" is a vague concept, but it accurately expresses your reply. You will go, and it is in the afternoon, but it is not necessary to clearly say the specific points. This vaguely worded phrase gives you enough time to get the job done and expresses your ideas more accurately.

B. The Flexibility of Fuzzy Language Makes Speech Euphemistic and Polite

Fang Yu (2011) holds that politeness is the symbol of human civilization and an essential criterion of human social activities. This criterion also constrains language activities. Both sides of language communication should abide by the principle of politeness. Although there are differences in understanding and expression of refinement between English and Chinese cultures, courtesy is needed by every social person. The "politeness principle" proposed by the famous British scholar Geoffrey Leech (1983) is a supplementary explanation of the "cooperation principle" and explains the purpose of the indirect conversational intention expressed by using fuzzy words in communication. There are six rules of politeness: the practice of propriety requires that both parties communicate in a way that minimizes the risk of expressing ideas that are harmful to others; Generous rules should limit the expression of opinions that benefit them; The code of praise should be less derogatory; The rule of modesty is to praise yourself less; Consistency rules reduce disagreement with others; The code of compassion requires a less emotional confrontation with others. Although the "politeness principle" proposed by Leech is based on the English pragmatic model, it is similar to the principle of self-deprecation and respect for others, the principle of politeness, the principle of seeking common ground, the principle of virtue, speech and action in Chinese culture to a large extent.

No matter what kind of cultural verbal communication, both sides should respect each other's culture. Communication can be carried out in a peaceful and friendly atmosphere, and the purpose of interaction can be achieved smoothly. One effective strategy is to use vague words to weaken the expression and leave yourself plenty of room when the other person's face may be threatened. Imagine a context in which A is B's supervisor and C is B's friend. A was inquiring about the progress of B's current project. B had no idea about the project and could not report to A. At this time, to make B less embarrassed, A may say, "Then you can report to me as soon as possible, tomorrow or the day after tomorrow." Here "tomorrow or the day after tomorrow," is an expression of the concept of fuzzy time. In this context, it is actually out of the politeness principle. In the presence of B's friend (C), he politely and clearly told B to hurry up the project. In English, when discussing a problem with a friend, it is common to say, "I wonder if you can spare me some time to talk about this problem? If the other party is not available now, he can say, "I'm afraid I can't now. Perhaps we can talk about it next time." The "next time" here makes the refusal seem subtle, and both sides are respected.

C. The Effectiveness of Fuzzy Language Promotes the Efficiency of Language Expression

In addition to accurate and flexible information transmission, both sides of communication should also consider the efficiency of communication, which is the fastest and most labor-saving way to transmit information. Using precise language to express complicated things often requires a long list

of words, whereas vague language requires only a few words and conveys enough information. J.A. Goguen, a computer science professor at the University of California, also notes that “inaccuracies can be very effective.” Therefore, both sides of communication should adhere to the “Relevance Theory” put forward by Sperber and Wilson. Relevance theory holds that the relevance of discourse depends on contextual effect and processing effort. Context effect is in direct proportion to relevance, and processing ability, i.e., the brainpower consumed by the cognitive language environment, is inverse proportion to relevance. The more relevance is, the more direct the utterance is; the less the cognitive effort, the less the cognitive load. The weaker the relevance is, the more implicit the pronouncement is. The higher the brain expenditure, the greater the cognitive amount. The use of cognitive load in communication is a kind of communicative strategy. This theory of correlation requires that The sender of the information express clearly as far as possible according to the “economic principle.”

In contrast, the receiver of the information should get the best correlation, that is, strive to obtain the maximum cognitive effect with the minimum psychological input(Zhimei Zhu, 2010). The accurate expression often requires more effort on the part of the information provider and receiver, while vague phrase can save energy on both parties, and it will be more labor-saving and correlated. Imagine a situation where you ask for the time, the exact time is 8:28, and you get the answer “8:30.” The answer is not that you don't want to tell the precise time, but that according to economic principles, “8:30” is easier to remember than “8:28.”

D.Increase Flexibility and Avoid Absolutism

Fuzzy words have the characteristics of flexibility and ease; if appropriately used, it can avoid the contradiction caused by too absolute terms. In addition to political, economic, diplomatic, and other news reports and documents, there are also many situations in communication in which vague expressions and obscure words have to be used, which is also the need of social strategies. It is necessary to avoid absolutism of terms and leave ample room for oneself. If such a situation, at 11 o'clock in the evening, the homework has not finished, the mother has been accompanying you, and you can say “the homework is finished right away,” let the mother go to rest first. Here “right now” is the use of time-fuzzy words. Or face such a difficult question, “How many days may you have in your life?” You can't predict and calculate, but the smart answer might be “Three days!We can only have yesterday, today and tomorrow. Yesterday can give your valuable experience and provide you the approaches to make important choices. Today can be essential to realize what you want by your efforts. And also, you can hope to have a bright tomorrow.” The answer is a perfect solution to the problem, with the clever use of three days with vague meanings: yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

3. Conclusion

Time-related fuzzy words are widely used in Chinese and English, making communication smoother and have a better pragmatic effect. Due to its flexible characteristics, our social interaction is more natural. From the perspective of pragmatics, fuzzy language has become an effective strategy in communication. However, both sides of conversation must give priority to precise language in the specific use, while fuzzy language is a subsidiary. That is to say, in the use process, the accurate expression should not be affected; the actual situation should be fully considered, and neither comes from scratch nor abuse. Only when it is properly and scientifically used can it give full play to its pragmatic value.

References

- [1] H. P. Grice (1967). Logic and Conversations. Unpublished Ms of the William James Lectures. Harvard University.
- [2] H. P. Grice (1978). Further Notes on Logic and Conversations. In Cole (1978: 113-28)
- [3] Leech G N. (1976). Semantics. Harmondsworth. Penguin Books.
- [4] Leech G N. (1976). Principle of Pragmatics. Longman.
- [5] Fuyi Xing, Zhenguo Wu. (2002). Introduction to Linguistics [M]. Central China Normal University Press.
- [6] Jinxia Li. (2007). Principles of Cooperation and Politeness in Analects of Confucius [J]. Social Sciences Review, (3)
- [7] Zhimei Zhu. (2010). Fuzzy Language and its Pragmatic Function [J]. Journal of Examinations, (3): 41
- [8] Yu Fang. (2011). Politeness Principle and its Influence on Chinese International Education [J]. Literature Education, (4): 88
- [9] Li Wang. (2007). Pragmatic Value of Fuzzy Language [J]. Journal of Dehong Normal College, (3): 53-56
- [10] Hui Ni. (2011). On cooperation principle, Politeness Principle and Relevance Theory [J]. Journal of Chifeng University, (12): 73