A Contrastive Study of English and Chinese Apology Strategies from the Perspective of Cognitive Hierarchy

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Abstract: Previous studies on apology strategies have focused on pragmatics, and this study aims to classify apology strategies from a cognitive perspective. In addition, a corpus-based study was conducted to compare the apology strategies used in English and Chinese to explore the cognitive level differences between English and Chinese. As a result, there are both central and peripheral members in English and Chinese apology strategies, and the cognitive levels of the strategies are different, in which the direct speech act apology is more central.

Keywords: Apology Strategies; Cognitive Levels; English-Chinese Comparative

1. Introduction

Apology, as a linguistic phenomenon, has a narrow and broad sense of the difference. A narrow apology is a sentence that contains the above words. In a broad sense, an apology is a kind of speech act. Apology strategy refers to a certain pragmatic way used by the apologizing party in the process of apology, which can make the speech act of apology more smoothly, and then restore the harmony between the one who apologizes and the one who is apologized.[1]

Bruce Fraser[2], Marion Owen [3], Elite Olshtain & Andrew Cohen[4], and Geoffrey Leech[5] have conducted more detailed studies on the characteristics of the speech act of apology.Holmes [6]identified four categories of apology: an explicit expression of apology, an explanation or account, an acknowledgment of responsibility, and a promise of apology.

2. Classification of apology strategies

People will adopt a certain apology strategy when they apologize so that their apology can play a role. Based on the theories of Fraser, Olshtain & Cohen, this part summarizes the strategies of Chinese apology, and presents them as follows:

2.1 Illocutionary Force Indicating Device

The apology strategy involves using the apology directly or repeating the offense to express the intention of the apology, to show that you recognize the mistake, and to ask for forgiveness. This process does not require the hearer to make any inferences. For example:

（1）"Ni bu sheng qi lema？", "Wo shen mo shi hou sheng qi guo le ya？", "You shi hou wan xiao kai da le dui bu qi。"

（2）"Ru guo you xia dao ni men wo zhen de hen bao qian", "Dan ni tou xiang zhen shi hen xia ren hao ma"

（3）"Jiejie，sheng ri kuai le，zhu fu chi dao le！qing yuan liang"

2.2 Taking on Responsibility

In this kind of strategy, the apologist will take responsibility and show his fault, and the listener can understand the intention of the apologist directly. For example:

（4）"Wo yi jing gan mao le.", "Shei rang ni chuan na mo dian，bu guo ye dou shi wo de cuo"

（5）"Yun！shuai shou ji hao wan mo！", "Wo bu shi gu yi de"

（6）"Wo ju ran mei hui fu ni！wo de cuo！wo mei zhu yi"

（7）"Ni men dou qu le wo que bu zhi dao"，"Shei rang ni bu guan xin，dou shi ni de cuo"

2.3 Explanation or Account

In this kind of strategy, the apologist will explain the cause of his fault, so that the listener can understand the cause and process of fault.

（8）"Ni bu pei wo wan"，"Wo hen mang"

2.4 Promise of Forbearance

In this strategy, the apologizing party must promise to improve after the apology to avoid recidivism. For example:

（9）"Zhen de hen bao qian,zhe ge wen ti wo men zhen zai quan li geng jin,zheng qu xia ci bu hui zai fa sheng zhe yang de qing kuang,qing nin jian liang."

2.5 Showing Concern for the Hearer

In this kind of strategy, the apologizing party should pay attention to the listener's feedback, and use the feedback to determine whether the apology is delivered. For example:

（10）"Dui bu qi zhuang dao nin le,nin mei shi ba？"

2.6 An Offer of Repair

This kind of apology strategy, based on the oral apology, also makes up for the loss of the hearer through the actual actions. For example:

（11）"Ni qi pian le wo de gan qing"，"Wo hui bu chang ni de！"

3. Data collection

As can be seen from the two columns at the far right of the table 1, each apology strategy can be located by certain Chinese and English keywords. The study uses these key words to search for 15 Chinese literary works (Camel Xiangzi, Tea House, Dragon Beard Ditch, The Yellow Storm, Midnight , Shaanxi Opera, The three body problem, Bailu Yuan, I'm Your Father, Li Zi Cheng, Erguna River, World of Plainness, ,The Song of Youth, Frog, Fortress Besieged) and 18 English literary works (a Tale of Two Cities, Gone with The Wind, Grapes of Wrath, Great Expectations, Gulliver's Travels, Jane Eyre, Dick, Oliver Pride, and Prejudice, Robinson, Tess, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, The Great Gatsby, The Old Man and The Sea, The Scarlet Letter, The Moby Sound and The Fury, Sister Wuthering Heights) .

Table 1 Corpus data

Chinese	Amount	Rate	English	Amount	Rate
Dui bu qi	217	57.14%	I am sorry.	41	15.48%
Bao qian	54	14.21%	I apologize.	5	1.89%
Yuan liang wo	37	9.73%	Excuse/Pardon/Forgive me.	121	45.66%
Dou guai wo	24	6.31%	It's my mistake/fault.	55	20.77%
Wo bu shi gu yi de	16	4.21%	I didn't mean it.	2	0.75%
Wo mei zhu yi	0	0.00%	I didn't see/notice you.	1	0.37%
Dou guai ni	7	1.84%	It's your own fault.	27	10.18%
Wo hen mang	2	0.52%	I've been very busy.	12	4.53%
Zhe zhong shi qing yi hou bu hui fa sheng le	22	5.78%	It won't happen again	0	0.00%
Ni mei shi ba	1	0.26%	Are you OK/all right？	1	0.37%
Wo hui bu chang	0	0.00%	I'll pay for the damage	0	0.00%

4. Data Analysis

From table 1, Illocutionary Force Indicating Device and Taking on Responsibility are the two main choices for apologists, both in Chinese and English.

At the same time, the policy of an Offer of Repair is rarely used by speakers of either language, apparently because it depends on the situation. Because the method of compensation changes based on facts or background knowledge in various situations, it is difficult to filter it by fixed keywords.

4.1 Illoctionary Force Indicating Device

As you can see from Table 1, the Illocutionary Force Indicating Device is frequently used by apologists as an apology strategy in both languages. Indeed, "the most explicit implementation of an apology speech act in any language is through the use of Illocutionary Force Indicating Device"[7] In the meantime, "IFID serves the function of conventional linguistic devices, which represent specific cultural attitudes and patterns of social interaction with specific cultural features"[8]

Table 1 shows the number of occurrences of the three IFID expressions in Chinese and the percentage of occurrences of the English IFID expressions. It should be noted that the correspondence between Chinese and English expressions is not strict.The most commonly used apology in Chinese is "Dui bu qi", accounting for 57.14%, followed by "Bao qian", accounting for 14.21%, and "Yuan liang wo", which is much less common, only 9.73%. The most commonly used apology in English was "Excuse/Pardon/Forgive me." It accounted for 45.66 percent, followed by "It's my mistake/fault." at 20.77 percent and "I am sorry" at 15.48 percent.

4.2 Taking on Responsibility

Table 1 shows the number of occurrences of the three Chinese RESP expressions and the percentage of occurrences of the English RESP expressions. English apologists are more inclined to express their apologies in the form of assuming responsibility than Chinese apologists. The order of expressions in Chinese is "Shi wo de cuo/Dou guai wo" "Wo bu shi gu yi de" "Dou guai ni". Chinese speakers do not use the expression "Mei zhu yi/Bu xiao xin". The order of expressions in English is "It's my mistake/fault." " It's your own fault." "I didn't mean it." "I didn't see/notice you."； The latter two are used by English speakers in negligible amounts.

From these two tables, we can see that the Chinese usage of "this kind of thing will not happen again in the future", although rare, still occupy a certain proportion; The English "I've been very busy." Takes a similar proportion.

5. Analysis

Searle, J. R. [9] holds that the Speech Act of apology belongs to the performative speech act and has the characteristics of family similarity; a performative word is an apology word, which contains a phrase or sentence that directly expresses the communicative intention of the apology, and the injured party can directly acquire the implied meaning through the literal meaning of the performative word, therefore, such a way belongs to direct speech act. For example:

（12）I'm so sorry！

（13） I apologize for the Trouble I have caused you.

In addition to the use of performative words, the apologizing party also expresses its intention of apology in other ways, including inquiry, promise, explanation, etc. . In an indirect speech act, the agent verb does not appear, the injured party must rely on the context and the consensus of both parties, and first understand the literal meaning of the ways of inquiry, promise, explanation, compensation, etc., and find out what the other person is apologizing for. For example:

（14） A hears that his actions hurt B, "How is he? Is He all right? A knows that his behavior had caused great trouble to the neighbors and said, "this kind of thing will never happen again, I promise."

（15） A took remedial measures after hurting B: "I just hit you with my left hand, I'll cut it off now."

（16） A was late and said to B: "because there were so many accidents on the road."

Now, we can use the information from the statistics to classify the apology strategy. The apology strategies in the first

level are direct speech acts, that is, the apology party uses the most basic and simple strategies that contain the performative words to express the apology intention, and the hearer can directly get the implied meaning, both direct and explicit apology strategies and accountability strategies are included. Both the Illocutionary Force Indicating Device and the Taking Responsibility are members of this hierarchy, and their internal forms of expression are not entirely equal, rather, they are arranged in a descending, step-by-step manner, which fully demonstrates that even direct speech acts have more central members and more marginal members, this is due to the different cultural and social environment.

6. Conclusion

After statistical analysis of the data, we can draw some conclusions. First, both in Chinese and English, IFID is their primary apology strategy. People tend to use direct speech acts to express their apologies. This is because a direct apology is more acceptable to the other person, and the psychological distance with the other side also wants closer, such ability achieves the best apology effect.

Secondly, Chinese and English use the same strategy, but the expression of the semantic form is very different, which of course is related to the grammaticalization of the two cultures, and cognitive differences. Chinese speakers use "Dui bu qi"(I am sorry) to express their apologies directly from the point of view of the apologist, while English speakers use "Excuse me" to think from the other person's point of view and ask for their forgiveness.

Finally, both in Chinese and English, apology strategies have cognitive hierarchies, in which direct speech acts are more central and indirect speech acts are more marginal. There are also a few direct speech acts that are on the periphery because these apology strategies are more context-dependent and can not simply replace all of them with one iconic expression.

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