

Comparative Analysis of English and Chinese Humor Culture Phenomenon from the Pragmatic Perspective —— Takes Urban Sitcoms for Men and Women, for Example

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Abstract: Based on the maxims of quantity, quality, relation and manner under the principle of cooperation in pragmatics, this paper discusses the internal relationship between pragmatic principles and humor culture through the analysis of Chinese and Western sitcom of urban men and women. To have a deep understanding of the different mechanisms of Chinese and English humor, to improve our ability to understand and appreciate the cultural phenomena of humor in English and Chinese, to provide convenience for the communication of the cultural phenomena of humor in English and Chinese culture and to provide reference for Chinese culture to go abroad better, the paper should come into being.

Keywords: Comparative Analysis of Humor; Principle of Cooperation; Sitcom

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1. Introduction

There are different characteristics of humor in Chinese and Western cultures. If people want to understand a language, they need to know its production mechanism and cultural background. Only in this way can the understanding be profound, otherwise people can't fully understand the implied meaning of humor, and there will be no laughing.

This paper takes Chinese and western urban sitcoms for analysis. This corpus is chosen as the research object for the following reasons: excellent sitcoms are very popular with the public, and their humorous cultural phenomenon is young enough. Many humorous words in sitcoms more reflect the wisdom of human language and thinking, full of interpersonal communication strategies, and are frequently used for reference and use in People's Daily communication.

Modern Chinese and Western urban male and female sitcoms both use a lot of humorous language, which is a very typical comparative material between English and Chinese humorous cultural phenomena.

2. The theory of cooperation principle in Pragmatics

This paper analyzes some humorous cultural phenomena in Chinese and Western urban sitcoms for men and women in combination with the context and compares the selected corpus according to four conversational criteria proposed by Grice under the cooperation principle. The Cooperative Principle proposed by Grice is that in order to have a dialogue, participants must send out words related to each other in the same direction or achieve the same overall goal. Participants will assume that they are cooperating with each other in a common activity, adhering to the same conversational principles. The cooperative principle does not state exactly what each participant's contribution to the conversation “requires.” In order to explain the mechanism of people's conversational meaning, Grice introduced four conversational criteria under the cooperative principle. Next, excerpts from Chinese and western urban sitcoms for men and women are taken as the research corpus to analyze how the four norms play a role in the two different cultures, and summarize the similarities and differences between Chinese and English humor.

3. Analysis of cultural phenomena of humor in Chinese and English under the principle of cooperation

3.1 The Maxim of Quantity

The quantity criterion includes two aspects: the content information expressed by the speaker should reach the required amount of conversation; The speaker should not give more information than is required. The violation of the quantitative criterion is manifested in the speaker providing insufficient information or too much information in the process of communication, both of which will lead to the listener's misunderstanding of the discourse and produce implication. For example:

a. Phoebe: Oh, my God! You won't believe this! I have just been discovered.

Chandler: Now wait a minute, I claimed you in the name of France four years ago.

b. KFC: Welcome to call KFC. Can I help you?

Wanyu: I'd like a KFC, please.

KFC: KFC has a lot of products, which one do you need?

Wanyu: Nothing else. I'll have KFC.

The two texts in the play violate the first principle of quantity in the cooperation principle, namely, lack of information. A. Phoebe excitedly told everyone that someone saw her musical talent and wanted to help her record a demo, but only said very little information. So Chandler joked that I declared you French four years ago, which means I discovered you four years ago and named Phoebe as a new continent, which is pretty funny. b. The KFC waiter just wanted to know the name of the food Wanyu wanted to order. But the waiter didn't get what he was looking for from Wanyu's answer. Apparently, Wanyu had unwittingly flouted the quantitative code by providing less information than was required. KFC is the name of a fast food restaurant, not a food. Wanyu's answer implies that she thinks of KFC as a kind of food, and her misunderstanding has humorous effect.

And then there is:

c. Monica: (Pointing at Rachel) Decaf. (To All) Okay, everybody, this is Rachel, another Lincoln High survivor. (To Rachel) This is everybody, this is Chandler, and Phoebe, and Joey, and you remember my brother Ross?

d. Father: I am old and have a bad stomach.

Ziqiao: Well, my father also has this problem. The lack of organic conditioning in the stomach and intestines leads to digestive disorders. Plus now that the Earth's rotation is slowing down, gravity is getting smaller. Well, it's not easy. Oh, you're a priest

Priest: Yes, they asked me to officiate the wedding, I this stomach all eat bad.

The two pieces of corpus in the play violate the quantitative criterion of the cooperation principle and the second is too informative. c., Monica says, "Everybody, her name is Rachel, the other Lincoln High School survivor." d. Ziqiao said: "The rotation of the earth is getting slower and slower, and the gravity is getting smaller and smaller." These two sentences give more information than they should give information to bring humorous effect.

In the collectivist oriented Chinese culture, people are good at using this strategy to show that they are good at listening and continuing the conversation. But in individualistic Western cultures, most people are reluctant to share their personal experiences with others. What is more obvious is that the target of Ziqiao's humor is priests. English-speaking countries are big countries of religious belief. Most people believe in Catholicism and Christianity, and they treat faith very seriously. Therefore, priests are generally not found in English humorous cultural phenomena. China, on the other hand, boasts thousands of years of splendid civilization and rich and inclusive religious beliefs. Therefore, it is not uncommon for Ziqiao to use priest as the object of humor in Chinese humorous cultural phenomenon.

Monica and Rachel are bestie. This dialogue takes place when Rachel goes to the place where the leading group lives after she runs away from her marriage. Monica introduces her bestie to the people and she makes jokes when they don't know each other well, which is a reflection of the different humorous scenes in English and Chinese humorous cultural phenomena. For Chinese people who are mainly reserved and polite, such behavior is not prudent and impolite.

3.2 The Maxim of Quality

The quality code requires the speaker to be truthful, not to say what he or she believes is untrue, or what he or she believes lacks sufficient evidence. If the speaker deliberately violates the quality guidelines, conversational meanings can be generated and humorous effects can be triggered. For example:

e. Joey: Hey guys. You want to get some dinner with me and Kathy tonight?

Chandler: I already ate.

Joey: It's 4:30.

Chandler: You know I had a big meal on Monday, you know. So that I get me straight through the week.

f. Xian: Four and a half men here. What are you afraid of?

Zhanbo: Mingming three and a half!

Xian: One, two (referring to Ziqiao and Xian), one Fei counts as two, you count as half.

e. In our example, Chandler doesn't want to go out to dinner with Joey and Kathy, so he makes a false statement for personal purpose to achieve humorous effect. In the corpus of f., there were three men and one woman in the car, which was clear to the audience, but both of them gave incorrect answers, that is to say, the speaker deliberately reversed the principle of quality in order to achieve the purpose. This on the one hand from the side to write a strong image of Fei, on the other hand also achieved a humorous effect.

Under the influence of individualistic values, Westerners pay more attention to the direct expression of personal views, whether to leaders or elders, they can express their opinions. However, Chinese people should pay attention to their status and identity, respect teachers, be humble and understand etiquette, so Chinese humor is relatively mild and obscure. Therefore, in Chinese culture, people tend to maintain harmony in interpersonal communication, avoid contradictions, rarely criticize others directly, and even consider bluntness to be rude.

3.3 The Maxim of Relation

Relationship rules require that you say things that are relevant, not that are irrelevant to the topic of conversation. A violation of the relational rule is when the listener responds by saying something unrelated to what the speaker is saying, allowing the other person to infer between the lines of the words. Some verbal humor in English is the full use of the violation of the relationship rules, causing the donkey's mouth against the horse's mouth humor, in order to shirk responsibility or take care of each other's face and other communicative purposes.^[1] For example:

g. Ross: So Rachel, what're you, uh... what're you up to tonight? What're you up to tonight?

Rachel: Well, I was kind of supposed to be headed for Aruba on my honey moon, so nothing!

h. Wanyu: "You're funny, uncle. So you're the founder of Hip-hop."

Uncle Tractor: "What? Run someone over (founder)? I drive my tractor very slowly. I've never hit anyone."

These two pieces of corpus violate the relational principle of the cooperative principle, "be related". In g., Ross asks, "Rachel, how are you going to spend the night?" "I was supposed to be on my honeymoon to Aruba....," Rachel said It's okay.... "In other words, Rachel was still in her own world and didn't understand Ross in time to answer the question. While h. Zhong Wanyu says that Da Shu is the "founder", but this word is hard to come by in Da Shu's world, so Da Shu understands it as "killing someone". By using the same or similar phonological or analytical glyphs, the meaning is completely different from that of the speaker. In this way, the use of homophonic figure of speech can often bring people a sense of humor.

3.4 The Maxim of Manner.

The code of manner has four requirements: avoid ambiguity; Avoid ambiguity; Speak briefly; Be organized in your speech. In short, the speaker should express his intention clearly and succinctly. But in practical communication, people often do not abide by the code of manner, but speak in a long-winded, ambiguous way to achieve a specific communicative purpose. For example:

i. Monica: Are you okay, sweetie?

Ross: I just feel like someone reached down my throat, grabbed my small intestine, pulled it out of my mouth and tied it around my neck....

j. Yifi: You're shameless, you're despicable, you're unreliable!

Ziqiao: Then you are not shameless, not mean, very reliable! ?

Yifei: I'm not shameless, I'm not mean, I'm not reliable! ?

Ziqiao: Where you are not shameless, where you are not despicable, where you are reliable! ?

Yifei: No matter how shameless, despicable, unreliable I am, I can't be more shameless, despicable, unreliable than you! ?

Both of these two pieces of corpus violate the mode criterion of the cooperation principle "speak clearly, plainly and concisely". In i. corpus, Ross overemphasized his subjective feelings in his answer to Monica and gave vague answers to the questions. In j., two people are repeating each other, full of redundant words. They could have expressed their dissatisfaction with each other succinctly, but did not do so. Instead, they kept repeating each other's words.

In i. Their relationship ends when Ross's wife Carol discovers she is a lesbian. Ross is heartbroken and puts it in a rather insuccinctly: 'I felt someone reach down my throat, grab my intestines, pull them out of my mouth and tie them around my neck....' . In Western language, sex is a common subject of humor. In China, deeply rooted in Confucianism, people talk about sex in a cryptic way, much less openly. As a result, sexual humor is almost absent in Chinese language.

4. Summary

Through a comparative analysis of Chinese and Western urban sitcom for men and women, we can see the differences between English and Chinese verbal humor. First of all, English and Chinese have different topic preferences. Chinese humor culture prefers the topic of daily trifles, while English humor culture is more likely to talk about sexual affairs and racial discrimination. Secondly, the objects of humor in English and Chinese culture are not the same. English humor culture likes to make fun of everyone, while Chinese humor culture treats elders and senior colleagues with more respect and seriousness than ordinary people. This is due to the politeness and modesty required by Chinese tradition, so they are rarely joked about. Thirdly, there are some differences between English and Chinese humor culture in different occasions. Chinese humor culture likes to make jokes in informal everyday situations, while English humor culture uses verbal humor in unlimited situations. Finally, English and Chinese have different styles of humor.

Therefore, the differences between China and the West in historical and social background, way of thinking, values and other aspects are the deep root of the differences between Chinese and Western thinking and humorous cultural phenomena. We need to actively explore and study more differences between English and Chinese verbal humor, so as to seek common ground while reserving differences and avoid misunderstanding in cross-cultural communication. At the same time, it is also helpful for us to use western humor to express the humorous effect we want to express, so as to better spread Chinese culture.

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