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On the Role of “Fuzzy Language” in Cultivating “Core Accomplishment”: Based on the Cross-Cultural Communication

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Abstract

Fuzzy language has something to do with beauty, techniques, competence and accomplishment. On the way from “core knowledge era” to “core accomplishment era”, the author tries to focus on the role of fuzzy language in cultivating students’ core accomplishment by cultivating aesthetic taste, promoting international understanding, enriching humanistic accomplishment and enhancing practical ability.

Key words: Fuzzy language; Aesthetic taste; Cultural accomplishment; Practical ability

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INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, the educational objectives of the countries all over the world, including China, are moving from the “core knowledge era” to the “core accomplishment era”. The so-called core accomplishment refers to the key abilities and essential characteristics that students should possess in order to adapt themselves to social development and their lifelong development. The author believes that teaching students how to recognize and use fuzzy language is the concrete embodiment of cultivating aesthetic taste,

enhancing international understanding, enriching human culture and promoting practical ability, which is part of core accomplishment.

Fuzzy language originated from the “Valley heap paradox” and the “Bald paradox” put forward respectively by Greek philosopher Eubulides and British philosopher Russell (Xu & Hu, 2016). China’s study on fuzzy language has a long history of nearly 40 years, with beginning in 1970s, enlightened by the two papers of “Study on fuzzy language” and “Re-study on fuzzy language” written by Wu (1979, 1980). As for how to define fuzzy language, scholars in different fields have made their own description, and so far there is no unified understanding. In the author’s opinion, fuzzy language is a vague language, compared to the clear one, with the former’s words or expressions having implicit meaning (Verschueren, 2000). Fuzzy language contains not only moral, wit and humor, but also the truth. It is an indispensable strategy or technique for people to communicate with each other in daily life. Kant ever said “Vague concepts are more expressive than clear ones.... Beautiful things should not be expressed but only be sensed. We are not always able to express what we want to” (Wu, 1979). Lao Tzu, a famous philosopher in ancient China, said: “Vagueness contains preciseness, and uncertainty implies certainty.” (Xu & Hu, 2016) Ji Xianlin, a contemporary language master, also said, “The beauty of Chinese language lies in vagueness.” (Ji, 1996). Chinese is beauty, and English is no exception. Therefore, paying much attention to fuzzy language is very important for language learners, especially for middle school students.

1. CULTIVATING AESTHETIC TASTE

The beauty of English language lies in the expression, structure, fuzziness and translation. Especially when we do some translation work, the comprehension of vague English words is essential. It requires firstly translators to have the cognitive ability of fuzzy language and

aesthetic taste. That is, they could make logical reasoning, construct simple sentence, choose the beautiful language and determine the semantic meaning, according to the context of the discourse (Liu, 2016). As “**thing**” and its compound word “**things**”, sometimes their fuzziness makes readers really confused. Take American journalist Pete Hamill’s utterance for example. There is a sentence in Pete Hamill’s famous article *Going Home*, while he memored a letter to his wife: Get a new guy, I said—she is a wonderful woman, really **something**—and forget about me (我叫她重新嫁人, 我知道她是个很不错的女人, 真的不一般, 我让她忘了我). The word “**something**” puzzled many readers. Another example is the sentence “**Make foreign things serve China** (洋为中用)”. Here, “**things**” can be used to refer not only to a variety of “**事**”, but a variety of “**物**”. It can also refer to people’s thoughts, beliefs, quality, and the science, technology, knowledge, experience, invention, as well. In short, a small “**thing**” category can be involved everywhere. If only for “**事**” and “**物**”, when it is translated into Chinese, there will be something wrong with the translation.

Practice proves that good translation is not confined to the book, nor the doctrine, nor the dictionary. Please compare:

If we want to learn **something** more, we must work **like anything**. Otherwise we’ll be **good-for-nothing**. Of course, sometimes we need to have **something** pleasant. For example, we need to take part in a dance **and things**. But we would dance upon **nothing** if we dance too much without caring **anything** for studying. You know **something** real, I think, in what I said **dance upon nothing**.

① 如果我们想学得更多的东西, 就必须像任何东西那样学习. 否则我们将会什么也不是. 当然我们有时也需要娱乐, 如需要做一些跳舞之类的事. 但如果跳舞太多而不在于学习什么的, 我们就可能会“什么东西也跳不成”, 我想, 你一定知道这里所说的“什么东西也跳不成”是什么意思.

② 如果我们想学得更多的知识, 就必须努力学习. 否则我们将会一事无成. 当然我们有时也需要娱乐, 如需要跳跳舞等. 但如果跳舞太多而对学习不在乎, 我们就可能会“被吊死.” 我想, 你一定知道这里所说的“被吊死”的真正含义.

“Familiar with the word, but can not catch its meaning” (such as ①). This is the embarrassment experience of some readers, including some students, teachers, and foreign language learners. Why? With careful analysis, we found that the above readers lack the ability of recognizing and using fuzzy language. Therefore, English teachers should attach great importance to the essence of teaching, and apply the technique of recognizing and using fuzzy language to teach practice. And these teachers are also required to improve their own comprehensive accomplishment first, then help students to enhance their English proficiency, so as to improve the students’ translation skills and cultivate their aesthetic taste. In

translation practice, it is necessary for the translators to present the beauty of fuzzy language to the target language readers as much as possible, enabling them to appreciate the beauty of the works (Li, 2015).

2. PROMOTING INTERNATIONAL UNDERSTANDING

English and Chinese are two different languages, inheriting and implying certain fuzziness in the cultures respectively. Pragmatic mistakes may be caused during cross-cultural communication, if ignoring this factor.

How to translate Chinese “小心, 孩子们!” into English?

The context is a call from an old kind man to a group of children playing in a dangerous place. The author’s test shows that almost all the candidates translated: **Be careful, children!** There seems to be nothing wrong with the translation. However, from a cultural point of view, it is not in line with the expressing habits of westerners, and it also violates the wishes of the old kind man at the time.

Suppose the danger came from a rolling stone on a hillside. The children might be hit by the rolling stone, because the children were frightened by the old man’s such cry and ran away in a hurry without caring about the danger of rolling stone.

But what happens if the old man adds a word “my” in front of “children” and shouts “**Be careful, my children!**”? No doubt, the children would feel warm and kept away from the dangerous place quietly and safely.

In turn, if we translate the old man’s cry “**Be careful, my children!**” into Chinese “小心, 我的孩子们!”, Chinese children would be puzzled: “**Who are your children? What do you want to do with us, old fellow?**”

In fact, the current English textbooks have involved cross-cultural knowledge. Unit 10 *You’re supposed to shake hands* (Talk about customs and what you are supposed to do) (Jiao, 2014) (Book1 of *Go for It*, Published by people’s education press) tells students how to understand the habits and customs of some foreign countries: What to do and how to do when you meet the foreigner for the first time? Shake hands? Bow? Or Kiss? Do you arrive on time or late for a party? What to wear while invited to someone’s home? What are the differences for table manners? And so on. The teaching material of the text takes the United States, South Korea, Japan, France, Switzerland, Colombia, for example, hoping the students to understand the different customs and cultures, through the training of listening to dialogues, reading short passages, writing letters and acting role-plays.

Of course, there are some fuzzy languages in this text. Eg.: **What are you supposed to do when you meet someone for the first time?** (Ibid., p.76) The “**someone**” in the sentence is vague and uncertain. Both teachers and students should keep an eye on it.

3. ENRICHING HUMANISTIC ACCOMPLISHMENT

One of the main reasons why many English learners fail in learning English well is that they only care about the “accuracy”. Once a girl from a middle school English class asked her English teacher how to understand the sentence “**Tell me whom you love and I know who you are** (告诉我你爱怎样的人, 我会告诉你你是怎样的人)”, with complaining that she couldn’t catch the meaning of the sentence although there was no new word in it.

The teacher put this sentence to the class for discussion. Surprisingly, no student in the class could give the correct answer. Then the teacher hinted: **If you tell me whom you love I know who you are** (如果你告诉你爱怎样的人, 我会告诉你你是怎样的人). On hearing this, the whole class was roaring with laughter. The girl blushed with shame, and it seems that the teacher really revealed her secret. With a sigh, the teacher had to tell the students: “**Tell me you love Lei Feng and I know you are a Lei Feng in your class** (如果你告诉我你爱雷锋, 我就知道你在班上雷锋式的好学生).” Thus students saw light suddenly in an uproar.

Fuzzy language is a psychological appearance of human civilization. It is implicit and profound, and full of fuzzy beauty beyond expression. Unfortunately, a lot of students lack of the ability to recognize the “fuzzy beauty”. How to teach students to recognize and use the “fuzziness”? Teachers should ask the students to read more, and tell them how to read and what to read. The reading materials should be comprehensive—at all times and from all countries, which contain profound cultural background knowledge and are endowed with educational significance (Ding, Qi, & Liu, 2013). Doing so can broaden the students’ horizons, increase their knowledge, and improve their reading ability.

4. ENHANCING PRACTICAL ABILITY

Fuzzy language is much more pleasant if used on a particular occasion. Sometimes it is like spring breeze and drizzle, warming the people around. It is helpful to resolve contradictions, enhance friendship and bring benefits.

A young man, the son of the author’s friend, told the author a true story: He graduated from a secondary school, and opened a net shop. One day, a foreign customer placed an order. It happened that the goods have no inventory at that time, and he could not meet customer’s demand in the scheduled time. He told the customer: **Model F is out of stock, because your response delayed so long** (因为你的答复拖得太久, F型没有库存了). This utterance resulted in the deal failure and the customer’s unhappiness.

Before long, another customer wanted the same goods. As it happened before, the stock still didn’t hold the goods. What should he do? He learned from his mistakes. This time he answered the customer as follows: **I could have**

shipped Model F immediately, if I had known your needs earlier (如果我要是早知道您需要的话, 我会立即把F型货给您发出去了). This time the customer was not discouraged, and replied politely: “Never mind. I’ll wait”.

The effects are quite different, although with the same cause and the same purpose. Why? The reason is that the young man expressed in different words. The second time he used fuzzy language. That’s the charm of fuzzy language.

The vitality of language lies in its use. The ultimate purpose of learning language is to use it appropriately. Students should learn how to apply “fuzziness” to the interpersonal communication, so as to improve their own innovative ability.

CONCLUSION

Fuzziness is one of the great characteristics of civilized society. It is a kind of excellent accomplishment that civilized people must possess. Chinese culture is broad and profound, so is Western one. And language is the carrier of the culture. Human language is full of wit and humor, and fuzzy beauty as well. On the way from “core knowledge era” to the “core accomplishment”, it is very important for us to teach the language learners, especially middle school students something with fuzziness, in order to cultivate their aesthetic taste, improve their international understanding, enrich human culture, and enhance their practical ability. What is more, it is very helpful to their current studies and future work.

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