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Similarities of Expressing Disagreement by Chinese and American College Students

Yanling Yu

Yanrong Chang
The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

Zhan Long

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Yanling Xu[1,*] Yanrong Chang[2] Zhan Long[3]

[1] *Xinjiang University of Finance & Economics, Urumqi, Xinjiang, China*
[2] *University of Texas-Rio Grande Valley, Edinburg, TX, The United States*
[3] *Xi'an International Studies University, Xi'an, Shaanxi, China*
[*]*Corresponding author. Email: 1060069667@qq.com*

ABSTRACT

To explore the ways in which modern Chinese and Americans express their disagreement in intercultural communication and to reveal the reasons for their usage from the perspectives of sociolinguistics and persuasive communication and with the rapport management as the theoretical framework, this paper focuses on the discourse analysis of implicit disagreement expressions between 11 pairs of Chinese and American college students. The analysis of the four-month communication corpus reveals that Chinese and American students tend to use implicit disagreement when they disagree with each other and there are more similarities than differences in the usage of implicit disagreement. The reasons are related to their respective cultures and globalization. In addition, students use more implicit disagreement in the latter stage of their communication since these students are attending the course Intercultural Communication while interacting with each other. Last but not the least, the study suggests that the learning mode of pairing up Chinese-American students seem to be able to greatly promote their intercultural communication competence.

Keywords: Implicit disagreement, Discourse analysis, Intercultural communication competence.

1. INTRODUCTION

Disagreement is a common and universal language phenomenon in our daily life. With the development of the society and civilization, more and more people express their disagreement implicitly, and we call this kind of disagreement implicit disagreement. Since disagreement is expressed indirectly, politely and always with veils in implicit disagreement, it is harder to understand than the disagreement expressed directly, impolitely and publicly. If speakers' implicit disagreement could not be understood correctly, which may cause intercultural miscommunication and jeopardize international relations, the study of implicit disagreement facilitates the smooth intercultural communication. Intercultural communication studies have almost exclusively focused on cultural differences. However, as all human beings are after all similar in that we are human, cultural similarities exist. Exploring

cultural similarities can reveal underlying threads that connect people from various cultures, reduce uncertainty or anxiety about interacting with people from other cultures, and improve intercultural relationship building and maintenance. One way to explore cultural similarities is to examine communication patterns. The present work intends to explore whether there are similarities in expressing disagreement between Chinese and American college students.

Politeness is a symbol of human's civilization, which consequently makes it a study focus for quite a long time. For example, the study of cooperative or supportive speech act has a long history [9] since it is considered a polite act that people should know its rules and obey them. Agreement belongs to polite phenomena. Under such circumstances, expression of disagreement, which refers to an oppositional stance to an antecedent verbal (or non-verbal) action [17] or a reactive utterance of an interlocutor who considers a prior interlocutor's proposition untrue [20][22], was once regarded as a kind of negative discourse, destructive discourse or

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hostile discourse [14], and thus was put on the edge of study in early philosophy, anthropology, sociology, psychology, and linguistics. However, with the study focus shifted from politeness to impoliteness since the 1980s, more and more scholars have noticed that disagreement has equally essential impacts on people's interpersonal relationships [5]. Consequently, the study of disagreement expressions rapidly becomes a hot topic in discourse analysis and pragmatics [19]. The notion of disagreement overlaps with many other concepts, such as argumentation, argument talk, conflict talk, dispute, oppositional talk/exchange with verbal arguing [10][11][16][21]. The overlapping, to some extent, indicates scholars' interest in this field and most of these studies focus on public and direct disagreement, namely explicit disagreement.

When disagreement is expressed, it poses a threat to the face of those who hold the opposite opinions. Therefore, disagreement is an impolite face threatening behaviour [4][6][7]. Due to the face-threatening nature of disagreement, people often find it difficult to express their disagreement and are not willing to use explicit disagreement. For the development of individuals and society, however, it is important for people to express their own positions, opinions and understandings in communication. Therefore, more and more people are implicitly expressing their disagreement, which introduces the concept of implicit disagreement. According to Pomerantz (1984), implicit disagreement refers to argument, dispute or opposition in which an interlocutor implicitly utters opinions, evaluation or stance that is contrastive with the counterpart's [18]. The impoliteness of such disagreement is not as strong as disagreement is expressed explicitly, since implicit disagreement usually includes hedges, concessions, partial agreement or some other elements that can reduce the degree of impoliteness and reduce the severity of face threats caused by disagreement to the counterpart's face, status, identity and, above all, their relationships.

Implicit disagreement is more special and complex than explicit disagreement because there are no obvious or literal negative expressions in implicit disagreement, but in reality, implicit disagreement conveys negative illocutionary force. There are more complex psychological, cultural and other factors for people who use implicit disagreement. The investigation of implicit disagreement can not only give reference to people who need to express their disagreement implicitly but help people more accurately interpret others' implicit disagreement. However, implicit disagreement is still a new research topic that has not attracted much attention from scholars. Most of the previous limited research, however, focuses on investigating what Chinese peers think about their disagreement strategies through elicitation methods [8]. Little attention has been given to implicit disagreement in unequal-status and non-Chinese-speaking contexts [17]. What is more, studies of different languages speakers in equal-status setting are still needed. The present work, therefore, aims to investigate the patterns and sequence of implicit disagreement in equal-status conversations between American and Chinese college students and provide some reasons that account for the implicit disagreement, which may suggest useful ways for improving intercultural competence, building productive interpersonal relationship, and therefore establishing harmonious international ties.

2. DISAGREEMENT, (IM-) POLITENESS AND RAPPORT

As early as in 1967, Goffman proposed the "face" concept and the face-saving theory which stipulates four face management orientations, namely, face threatening, face maintaining, face saving, and face enhancement. According to the theory, the acts that enhance speakers' or recipients' face are politeness, while the acts that threaten speakers' or recipients' face are impoliteness. Disagreement is a kind of impolite discourse that threatens recipients' face [2].

According to Grice (1967), in order to achieve effective communication, communicators should use right amount of discourse, no more and no fewer words, and provide enough information in a sincere and clear manner. The Cooperative Principle (CP) proposed by Grice (1975) underlies people's conversations [13]. It includes the maxims of quantity, quality, relation, and manner. The maxim of quantity refers to making one's contribution as informative as is required for the current purposes of the exchange and not making one's discourse more informative than required. The maxim of quality means trying to make one's information true. The maxim of relation means that discourse is required to be related to communicative purposes, and the maxim of manner is being clear and nonambiguous. The maxim of manner subsumes the following submaxims: avoiding obscurity and ambiguity of expression and trying to make the discourse brief and orderly.

Implicit disagreement means that interlocutors express their disagreement implicitly and indirectly, in which the amount of words is more than that of disagreement expressed explicitly and directly. The difficulty in understanding implicit disagreement is much greater than that that of explicit disagreement. Implicit disagreements violate the CP. For this violation, Leech (1983) formally pointed out that the underlying reason is politeness, and then follow-up scholars begin to use it to explain phenomena like implicit disagreement, which also sparks the study of politeness [15]. For example, Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) proposed the politeness model, which helps to explain strategies for reducing face-threatening acts [1][2].

In 1983, Leech put forward the "Politeness Principle" (PP) to theoretically frame the politeness acts. Based on PP, there are three principles for politeness. The first is the tact maxim and the generosity maxim, which refers to minimizing the cost to others and the benefit to self; or to put it the other way, maximizing the benefit to others and the cost to self. Cost means the amount of work involved by the interlocutors including the length of discourse and effort in understanding the meaning of discourse, etc. One of the important benefits is politeness that one receives. The second is the approbation/ modesty maxim, which refers to minimizing dispraise of others and praise of self, and maximizing praise of others and dispraise of self. The last one is the agreement/sympathy maxim, which refers to minimizing disagreement and antipathy between self and others, and maximizing agreement and sympathy between self and others. Implicit disagreement is just used in an indirect way to express their disagreement, praising others or showing agreement and sympathy between self and others. Based on these maxims, it seems that implicit disagreement belongs to politeness.

Both Chinese and American people have a long history of practicing politeness. China has been a state of etiquette since ancient times and the United States has always been known for its etiquette. Therefore, politeness has always been the core ethics and values of both nations and it has received much scholarly attention.

So far, it seems that the reason for people to show disagreement implicitly is to show politeness. Implicit disagreements allow people to politely express their disagreement that is deemed impolite. Politeness and impoliteness are two extremes.

Implicit disagreement lies in between, half politeness and half impoliteness. There may be many reasons for people to behave politely, such as, identity, status, education, and relationships, and so on.

As social beings, people need to have relationships with others, and interpersonal communication in non-institutional settings is the central medium for human socialization [12]. Inverbal communication, language has two functions: one is information transfer, and the other is interpersonal relationship management, namely the social relationship maintenance function [3]. In interpersonal communication, there are four interpersonal orientations: harmony-enhancement, harmony-maintenance, harmony-challenge and harmony-ignorance [23]. Harmony-enhancement direction is the desire to strengthen the harmonious relationship between interlocutors. Harmony-maintenance direction is the desire to maintain or protect the harmonious relationship between interlocutors, which also needs to properly deal with face threatening behaviors, such as orders, criticisms, complaints, dissent, threats, etc. Harmony-challenge direction refers to the desire to challenge or damage interpersonal relationships. Specifically, this direction emphasizes the status and quality of intentional challenges or damage to existing relationships. It is usually a deliberate offense that makes people lose face. Harmony-ignorance direction is not caring about the quality of interpersonal relationships or not interested in that for being over-concerned about self [27]. The proper use of harmonious management strategies can minimize the negative effects on interpersonal relationships. If people's face is damaged in communication, that is impolite [14]. Implicit disagreement is impolite in nature but polite in outer form.

In China, people attach great importance to harmony, so there are many popular sayings, like "Peace and harmony are the most expensive", "If the family lives in harmony, all affairs will be prosperous", etc. In the United States, people are very polite and friendly to each other. For example, it is very common that strangers say hello to each other when they meet in streets. On one hand, they try to maintain good interpersonal relationships with others. On the other hand, it is an important manifestation of people's morality and quality, and also a symbol of social civilization. When people express opinions differently from others, this can cause harm to the recipient's face and ultimately damage their relationship. At this time, if people

choose the orientation of interpersonal relationship maintenance, implicit disagreement is often used. To some degree, this explanation supplements Leech's "politeness" claim that is used to explain the phenomenon of validating Grice's CP.

3. METHODS

The research employs intercultural pragmatic methods to investigate the way in which disagreement is communicated implicitly and the cultural factors that influence the way of communication. It looks into both central linguistic features and marginalized contextualization cues, situates inferences in contexts so as to increase the accuracy of inferences and suffices to illustrate why a particular utterance is used in a particular way and how that affects interaction. Because of the lack of research on natural implicit disagreement between Chinese and Americans, this study is devoted to investigating how young people in China and the United States express their disagreement implicitly and why.

Specifically, in our team, an American teacher and a Chinese teacher teach the same course Intercultural Communication to students respectively at a four-year college in Southwest Texas and a four-year college in Northwestern China. With the help of the teachers, 33 pairs of pen pals are set up. In fact, they communicate mainly through social networking sites or software, such as QQ, Wechat, facebook and email. The Chinese students are all undergraduate students who have learned English for more than 10 years, so they can communicate in English without problems. These students are from different majors, so they are all interested in intercultural communication and have taken this course for one semester. They share similar educational backgrounds, but their cultural backgrounds are different. This is what the present work intends to investigate, namely, how they communicate disagreement and how their national cultures affect the communication style of these students who have relatively high intercultural competence.

We obtained the students' consent beforehand to use their communication texts for scientific research, but we did not tell them the focus of the study is their disagreement expressions so as not to affect their normal expressions of disagreement. As part of the course project, students were asked to write down their journals to reflect their feelings or summarize cultural differences and similarities when they communicated with their partners who come from another culture. We collected their daily communication discourse from mid-September 2017 to the end of December 2017. After deleting unclear texts with many grammatical errors and texts without date, 11 pairs of students' communication texts were used for analysis. For these texts, only some spelling corrections were made to maximize the originality of the corpus. Texts that contain implicit disagreement were first selected. Whether the corpus meets the definition of implicit disagreement given in this research was decided by group discussion. Finally, differences and similarities were identified between Chinese and American students in expressing disagreement, and we tried to provide an interpretation of these differences and similarities from a cultural perspective.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A notable feature of implicit disagreement found in the study is that there are always pre-sequences before disagreement. In these pre-sequences, interlocutors frequently use some discourse to reduce the degree of impoliteness that disagreement may bring. The specific patterns and sequences of implicit disagreement can be listed as follows.

4.1 Compliment Before Disagreement

According to the data, compliment before disagreement is the most commonly used pattern of implicit disagreement expression. In this pattern, disagreement interlocutors always add one or more compliments before their disagreement rather than expressing their disagreement explicitly so that their disagreement becomes implicit, less face-threatening and less impolite. There are many examples in this regard. We just illustrate by using some excerpts from the corpus we built.

Excerpt (1):

- 5:59 PM, 9-14-2017

Speaker M: I am getting up now. Jordan, it is awesome. My friends just call me MLi or yuyu. In Chinese, my name means the bright moon. Because I was born in the evening, my families named me MLi. So Jordan, you must like playing basketball!

- 8:22 PM, 9-14-2017

Speaker J: **That's really cool!** So MLi means bright moon. My names don't really mean anything. When people find out that my name is Jordan, they

always ask me that. But no, I don't really play basketball. I do play guitar though!

- 9:02 PM, 9-14-2017

Speaker M: **Wow, I think it's cool that a boy can play guitar.** I thought you like playing basketball because Jordan is famous for it. In Chinese poetry, the full moon stands for reunion. For instance, in Tang Dynasty, there was a poet named Li Bai who wrote a poetry[sic], which expressed the homesickness by moon.

In the above excerpt, Speaker J and Speaker M is a pair of pen pals who communicate with each other through emails. Speaker M is a Chinese male college student and Speaker J is an American male college student. When Speaker M told Speak J the meaning of his name and inferred that Speak J might love playing basketball because of his name, Speaker J replied: "*That's really cool! ...When people find out that my name is Jordan, they always ask me that. But no, I don't really play basketball. I do play guitar though!*" In this response, Speaker J first praised Speaker M's name by "*That's really cool!*" Then he expressed his disagreement "*But no, I don't really play basketball.*" Speaker J put compliments before his disagreement so that he expressed his disagreement implicitly, which is the implicit disagreement we have defined. Next, Speaker M replied: "*Wow, I think it's cool that a boy can play guitar. I thought you like playing basketball because Jordan is famous for it.*" In this response, Speaker M also first praised Speaker J for his ability to play guitar, and then insisted that Speaker J can play basketball because of the influence of the famous basketball player, Jordan, although the American student Speaker J has denied that in the last turn, which shows that Speaker M also places compliments before his disagreement. Besides, disagreement can also be conveyed by insistence of one's original opinions rather than denying the counterpart's opinions. In short, neither of the students, in this excerpt, explicitly expressed their disagreement. They, however, praised each other first and then expressed their disagreement. This is what we call implicit disagreement. Putting compliments before disagreement is an important pattern of implicit disagreement. Another example is given below.

Excerpt (2):

- 23:56 PM, 9-28-2017

Speaker G: Russian! **It just sounds awesome.** I'm guessing it's about the language and culture of Russia. I did something related to Russian. It is the

origin of the language and Russian culture for my Introduction to Language.

- 12:10 AM, 9-29-2017

Speaker S: Strangely, I don't know too much about Russia, and also my roommates. We did the presentation together, but all of us didn't know more. **Yeah, Russian sounds awesome**, but it's too difficult to learn. We had the course as the second language, but I didn't choose that.

Speak G is an American college student and Speak S is a Chinese college student. In the first half of the pair, Speaker G replied "*It just sounds awesome*" and then expressed his opinions on Russian "*It is the origin of the language and Russian culture for my Introduction to Language,*" from which he meant that Russian was important to learn. In the second half of the adjacency pair, Speaker S first introduced his learning situation of Russian and then assessed "*Yeah, Russian sounds awesome*". Finally, he expressed his opinions on Russian "*but it's too difficult to learn.*" Speaker S's opinions are different from Speaker J's, so this is his disagreement expressed implicitly, namely the implicit disagreement. In his implicit disagreement, Speaker S also used compliments as pre-sequence of his disagreement. Commonly used expressions of compliments can be summarized like this: It is (sounds) interesting / cool / awesome / great / wonderful / fantastic…

Compliments are a vital social norm in both U.S. and China. When children are very young, parents praise them so often that they are taught to praise others. In the U.S., it is not only a manifestation of politeness but also personal qualities. Americans always tend to use compliments to greet, respond or evaluate others so that they can keep a harmonious relationship with others in their daily life. In China, showing respect is an important principle of communication. It can be traced back to Confucianism, in which courtesy is an essential tradition that people should respect others, especially the seniors. Chinese people also often compliment others regardless of whether they are familiar with or not. For example, Chinese parents like praising each other's children. What's more, when people are going to give negative comments, point out shortcomings or declare disagreement, they usually put their compliments before their disagreement. It is worth mentioning that not all these compliments are real compliments. Sometimes they are just used to open a conversation, show politeness, or bring out disagreement and so on. In implicit disagreement,

interlocutors use compliments to express disagreement implicitly so as to show politeness and maintain rapport between participants.

In conversations, interlocutors may not initially respond to the other side with implicit disagreement. They can say something else that is related or unrelated to their topic, and then express their implicit disagreement. In other words, implicit disagreement can be put in the middle of a response discourse as Excerpt (2) shows that Speaker S first responded to Speaker G with the introduction of his presentation with his roommates and then his implicit disagreement.

Our corpus also shows that the way of expressing implicit disagreement can be affected by counterparts. For example, in Excerpt (1) Speaker J complimented Speaker M by *"That's really cool!"* in his implicit disagreement. When Speaker M responded to Speaker J, he said "*Wow, I think it's cool that a boy can play guitar."* It is not accidental that the two interlocutors use the same way of expressing their implicit disagreement. There are many such phenomena in our corpus. As in Excerpt (2), before Speaker G expressed his opinions, he complimented Speaker S "*It just sounds awesome.*" Speaker S responded, "*Yeah, Russian sounds awesome*". In Speaker S's responses, he also used "awesome" in his implicit disagreement. "Awesome" is used quite often to express compliments in our corpus. Especially, it is used more and initiated by American students. After that, Chinese students gradually began to use it as well.

Compliments fall into two categories. One is that interlocutors began with compliment of their counterparts followed by the expression of disagreement. The other is that compliments are used to praise counterparts' other things unrelated to what they disagree with. Analysis of the corpus shows the way of expressing disagreement can be affected by the other interlocutor. When one part often uses implicit disagreement, it is more likely that the other part will also use implicit disagreement later in their conversation, including the model of compliments. Implicit disagreement is a polite way to express one's opinions that are opposite to others. In this case, the other side will also show their politeness, so they will learn to use implicit disagreement, including the way of expressing implicit disagreement. The phenomenon is not only presented in implicit disagreement but also in the way of greeting each other or ending a conversation and so on. This seems to suggest that pairing up international students may be an effective way to help them develop intercultural competence.

4.2 Appreciation Before Disagreement

As for the compliments mentioned above, participants also expressed thanks or appreciation before expressing disagreement, which is another kind of implicit disagreement. Excerpt (3) below shows such an example.

Excerpt (3):

- 23:03PM, 9-26-2017

Speaker Y: I worked with an American guy in the past summer. He is so polite and you are also polite. It seemed all Americans are polite. I wouldn't like to marry a person from another nation for the family's harmony. But I would like to date out with them. It sounds so cool, and the older generation is traditional, stubborn.

- 23:29PM, 9-26-2017

Speaker B: **Thank you!** and that's really interesting because in some families in America like mine, I respect my parents and want to marry someone my parents approve of but my parents are also respectful towards my happiness and understand that when I get married I'll be living with my own family. Of course my parents would not want me to marry someone from another religion, but I wouldn't want that either. That's also another cultural gap.

In the above excerpt, Speaker Y is a Chinese male college student and Speaker B is an American male college student. In the first half of the adjacent pair of Excerpt (3), before expressing his opinions, Speaker Y first praised a guy who once worked with him "*I worked with an American guy in the past summer. He is so polite*" and then he complimented Speaker B "*you are also polite*". He continued to express his opinions on marrying a person from another nation, "*I wouldn't like to marry a person from another nation for the family's harmony. But I would like to date out with them. It sounds so cool, and the older generation is traditional, stubborn."* In the second half of the adjacent pair, Speaker B first responded to him with "*Thank you!*" and then complimented Speaker Y's ideas by saying, "*that's really interesting*" before he expressed his different opinion, "*I respect my parents and want to marry someone my parents approve of..."* In his opinion, he will respect the old generation's opinions on choosing a spouse, which is different from Speaker Y's opinion. Since

Speaker B implicitly expressed his different opinions, that is implicit disagreement. In this response, the American student Speaker B used "Thank you" to express his appreciations for Speaker Y's compliments and compliment Speaker Y in turn. Two devices are used to mitigate the impoliteness that his disagreement may bring. One is thanks and the other is compliments.

Compared with the first model that only contains one mitigation device, this model greatly reduces the degree of face threatening and impoliteness and increases the acceptance of disagreement and the rapport between participants. Therefore, the more mitigating devices an interlocutor uses to express their disagreement, the less impolite the disagreement will sound. This is consistent with the politeness principle proposed by Leech (1983) which points out that the more indirect the discourse is, the more polite it is. In addition to placing "thanks" before compliments, it also appears after compliments and even without compliments, as the following example shows.

Excerpt (4):

• 08:38AM, 2017-11-02

Speaker C: Hello, there. I'm sorry to hear the news of New York terrorist attack. It's so frightening and so bad. I hope injured people have a speedy recovery. And also, I think terrorism is a threat to the people's daily life. Is that true? I hope you have a good sleep.

• 10:10AM, 2017-11-02

Speaker A: Wow I had not heard about it yet, I don't watch the news that often and I've been really busy today but thank you. And it's not a threat to daily life but Americans are really scared of terrorist attacks happening since they happen often and at random times.

In the above example, Speaker C is an American male college student and Speaker A is a Chinese male college student. When Speaker C heard the news about the terrorist attack, he thought that it is a threat in Americans' daily life. At this time, Speaker A first responded that he did not know the news and explained the reasons. Then he said "*thank you*" to Speaker C and finally denied Speaker C's opinion and expressed his own disagreement by "*it's not a threat to daily life but Americans are really scared of terrorist attacks happening since they happen often and at random times.*" The "thank you" and disagreement consist of Speaker A's implicit disagreement. In this

response, "thank you" is used by Chinese college student to express appreciation for telling the news rather than expressing opinions on terrorist attacks, the content of the news. Besides, "thanks" can also be used to thank for other things that have nothing to do with the topic they discuss, for example, thanks for responding, informing the counterpart of news, answering questions, sending wishes and so on as the following excerpt shows.

Excerpt (5):

• 09:25AM, 10-05-2017

Speaker D: I have a question, why American people love to say "cool, awesome," and some words to send wishes in almost each conversation. Did you always say that to your close friends or family?

• 13:46PM, 10-05-2017

Speaker P: Don't worry about it, even if your holiday was boring I hope you got lots of rest! And people in America are very expressive. If someone tells a story or shows another person something, the other will always give a reaction to acknowledge what they think. It's more of a habit, or like filler. I'm not sure how to explain it because it's so automatic. It's not that American don't mean it or aren't genuine, we are just very expressive when we talk to others.

• 23:10PM, 10-05-2017

Speaker D: **Thanks for your reaction and wishes.** That sounds so comfortable and sweet. Most Chinese show kindness or goodness by helping somebody out of trouble, we are not very expressive.

In the above excerpt, When Speaker D asked Speaker P why Americans like saying "cool" or "awesome", Speaker P first mentioned Speaker D's holiday and sent his wishes to him " *I hope you got lots of rest!*" and then explained the reason why Americans like to say "cool" or "awesome": *It's more of a habit, or like a filler*. Both Chinese and Americans like to us that in their daily conversations. As for the explanation, Speaker D responded "*Thank you for your reaction and wishes*" and then complimented "*That sounds so comfortable and sweet.*" Finally, he brought up a different situation in China where Chinese are not very expressive, voicing his disagreement. Before expressing his disagreement, Speaker D expressed his appreciation and compliments. The expressions of thanks, compliments and disagreement compose Speaker D's implicit disagreement. In this implicit

disagreement, "thanks" is used to thank the response and good wishes by Speaker P. In this situation, interlocutors will usually use the following expressing patterns: "Thank you!", "Thank you for you sharing your opinions!", "Thank you for your compliments/replying/ telling/wishes..." etc.

Saying "Thank you" is an important social norm in both the United States and China, so it is easy to hear "Thank you" in these two countries. For instance, in the U.S., when you communicate with others, the most common discourse you hear is "Thank you". Even when sometimes they help others, they also say "Thank you". It becomes a habit to say "Thank you" to those who interact with them. Gratefulness is also a traditional virtue of both Chinese and Americans. Since ancient times, people have paid special attention to "grace". Grace and retribution are the universal values that they have always admitted. Kindness in traditional cultures is to further reflect the feeling of "gratefulness" and to implementit is the specific behavior of "rewarding grace." The grace of parenting is called "filial piety" and Mencius said that "The filial son is the best, and he is very respectful." Repaying the grace of knowing is called "loyalty"; the grace of a friend is called "righteousness"; the grace of husband and wife goes like a saying "One day of being couples has a hundred days' grace". The above shows clearly that gratefulness has a long history and cultural roots in both the U.S and China.

4.3 Agreement Before Disagreement

An interesting way of expressing implicit disagreement is combining disagreement with agreement. It seems that interlocutors' opinions are contradictory. In one case, the agreement is not real agreement. It is just used to save the face of the other, mitigating the embarrassment caused by disagreement so that disagreement is expressed implicitly. In another case, the agreement is partial agreement. Interlocutors just agree with part of the counterpart's opinions. After that, they raise their disagreement to the part that they do not agree with. The purpose of doing so is that they can express their disagreement implicitly. It is more polite, more euphemistic, less harmful, and more persuasive than that of explicit disagreement. The following example is given as a demonstration.

Excerpt (6):

- 21:39PM, 9- 20-2017

Speaker H: O, Shakespeare. I have never read of his pieces though. I have Romeo and Juliet somewhere, but it is difficult to read. Play writing is confusing at time. I do take away one thing from Shakespeare, that would use the word "tis" when I talk or text. It also fits well with one of my characters in a story I'm writing by the way one of them talks.

- 9:20 AM, 9-20-2017

Speaker XF: **I agree with you.** Shakespeare is difficult to read, but almost half of my college professors told us we have to know him and his productions.

In Excerpt (6), Speaker H is a Chinese college student and Speaker XF is an American college student. They discussed Shakespeare's works. Speaker H believed that Shakespeare's works are difficult to read. Speaker XF replied: "*I agree with you, Shakespeare is hard to read.*" Then he added: "*but almost half of my college professors told us we have to know him and his productions.*" In this response, Speaker XF first agreed with Speaker H's viewpoints, but then he told Speaker H that more than half of the professors in his college require students to read Shakespeare's works, which implies that they should read, though difficult. This view is inconsistent with what Speaker H holds. Therefore, American student Speaker XF used implicit disagreement. In implicit disagreement, interlocutors can also express their partial agreement with the recipients before declaring their total disagreement. Commonly used sentence patterns are like "I agree with you, but...", "I partially agree with you, but...", etc.

In addition to claiming agreement or partial agreement explicitly, sometimes interlocutors imply their agreement through their attitudes, likes or preferences as follows.

Excerpt (7):

- 07:48 AM, 9-17-2017

Speaker RZ: so why you couldn't, for homework?

- 07:49 AM, 9-17-2017

Speaker A: Yes and I'm trying to finish fast to go to the party

- 07:52 AM, 9-17-2017

Speaker RZ: **Come on! I also love your idea**, but the party sounds so interesting. If I were you, I will go anyway.

- 07:57 AM, 9-17-2017

Amy: I'll finish this then go.

In Excerpt (7), Speaker RZ is a Chinese female college student and Speaker A is an American female college student. When Speaker A told Speaker RZ that she could not go to Mexico for a party as originally planned, Speaker RZ asked about the reason "*so why you couldn't, for homework?*". Speaker A admitted *"Yes and I'm trying to finish fast to go to the party."* It means that Speaker A planned to finish her homework before going to the party. Speaker RZ, however, thought she should go to the party first. She responded: "*Come on! I also love your idea, but the party sounds so interesting. If I were you, I will go anyway*". In this response, Speaker RZ expressed her disagreement "*If I were you, I will go anyway*". However, before this, Speaker RZ first expressed her personal attitude "*Come on, I also love your idea*", which implies her agreement on Speaker A's opinions, but this agreement is not real agreement. What Speaker RZ really wanted to express is disagreement. The expressions implying agreement are used to introduce disagreement implicitly; besides, she also complimented "*the party sounds so interesting*." Finally, she expressed her disagreement by using the subjunctive mood. All of these constitute her implicit disagreement. In this implicit disagreement, although Speaker RZ did not express her disagreement explicitly, in fact, she implied her disapproval of Speaker A's opinion through the use of the subjunctive mood. Speaker A can infer that implicit disagreement from the mood, words and so on. If someone uses the subjunctive mood to give you suggestions, they are actually showing their own different opinions. If communicators do not understand this way of speaking, it may cause misunderstanding.

What's more, to make disagreement implicit, interlocutors may also mention similarities before disagreement, as the following example shows.

Excerpt (8):

- 23:17 PM, 2017-09-27

Speaker ZWS: **Wow, it sounds similar to Chinese value, focus on the family.** I also wonder the common age of the girls getting marriage in America, in China girls who went to college and got higher education get marriage at age of 25~27 or even more. The girls who finished high school and entered the social world earlier get marriage at age of 21~22. Now more and more people get marriage lately. How about your country?

- 01:06PM, 2017-09-28

Speaker B: **That's how it is here too.** I've seen a lot of girls get married young here especially if they have a kid young. Where I'm from there is a lot of young girls that get pregnant at 16-18 so they usually get married young if the guy is still supporting the baby. Usually people who go to college will get married at around 24-26 even if they are still at the end of their studies they will get married before getting a job. I was going to ask about dating, in America kids start dating really young unless they have strict parents who are always in their business.

In the above excerpt, Speaker ZWS is a Chinese male college student and Speaker B is an American male college student. Speaker ZWS introduced Chinese young men's marriage age to Speaker B by saying that "*in China girls who went to college and got higher education get marriage at age of 25-27 or even more.*" For this point, it is similar to American young men who go to college and get married around 24-26. However, there are also some differences in American young men's marriage age, but Speaker B did not express differences first. On the contrary, he first mentioned similarities "*That's how it is here too.*" It shows that Speaker B confessed similarities before differences, which also means that Speaker B first gave agreement on Speaker ZWS' partial opinions and then illustrated his disagreement with another part of Speaker ZWS's opinions. Speaker B expressed his disagreement implicitly.

This model is more implicit than the explicit disagreement that contains negative words. It can hide one's disagreement to a great extent. The agreement may not be genuine agreement. They just use the agreement to avoid offense so that their interpersonal relationship can be maintained.

4.4 Surprise Before Disagreement

Implicit disagreement can be implied through expressions concerning surprise. Interlocutors firstly express their surprise at the counterparts' opinions and then disagreement. Usually the expressions of surprise are used to express some positive amazement over the idea proposed by the other side, which can make the recipient feel better and reduce face threatening and impoliteness that disagreement may generate so that proposing disagreement is not so offensive. Thus, the sequence including surprise and disagreement makes another typical model of implicit

disagreement. Even sometimes interlocutors just use surprise to imply their disagreement instead of literally expressing disagreement. In this way, the interlocutor's disagreement is more implicit, but the degree of disagreeing may be greater because the interlocutor is too surprised to agree with the other.

Taking Excerpt (8) again for example, before the first part of the adjacent pair of Excerpt (8), Speaker ZWS and Speaker B talk about families and find some similarities between Chinese and American families. When Speaker ZWS wanted to find out some information about young men's marriage in the U.S., he first expressed his surprise by "*Wow, it sounds similar to Chinese value, focus on the family.*" Then he introduced the current situation of Chinese young men's marriage. This surprise is also the response of the counterpart's last turn. Speaker B was surprised at the similarities between the U.S. and China, in which agreement and surprise are combined together.

Implicit disagreement can even be expressed just by the tone and content of surprise without appearance of disagreement. See the following Excerpt (9).

Excerpt (9):

- 13:12 PM, 9-28-2017

Speaker YXR: This is a fantastic topic! I love it. Most of Chinese parents hope their children have their fulfillment on study. The teachers here obey the school president's order. The dating was prohibited. Everyone focus on Gaokao (the important exam that can change their life). The most interesting thing is students make blind teachers' and parents' eyes, date secretly. Only the classmates know how the date goes on, and who has a girlfriend.

- 21:31 PM, 9-28-2017

Speaker BT: That's so interesting! I've always think it was a little funny how in Asian cultures the parents don't let their kids date but once they go to college they ask like "why aren't you dating! You need to get married!**" I see that a lot when I watch dramas but it's cool to hear from you that it's true!**

In Excerpt (9), Speaker YXR introduced Chinese men's marriage situation and his opinions on Chinese parents' attitudes towards that. As for this point, Speaker BT responded with compliments and repeated what Speaker YXR said. Then Speaker BT said "*I see that a lot when I watch dramas but it's cool to hear from you that it's true!*"

In this response, Speaker BT even did not mention her disagreement at all, but she implied her disagreement through her surprise and some words of approval such as "interesting", "funny", and "cool". These words may not be true words of praise. She was just unwilling to express her disagreement that is totally different from Speaker YXR's opinions or too surprised to agree with Speaker YXR, indicating that disagreement can be expressed by compliments and surprise. Compared with other models, this is the most implicit way of expressing disagreement and it is hard to catch the implications of such disagreement through speakers' compliments and surprise and even sometimes through tone, intonation and so on. We can call this kind of implicit disagreement completely implicit disagreement. Expressions of this model also include "I cannot believe it", "It is unbelievable", "It is amazing", etc.

5. CONCLUSION

Through the analysis of daily conversations between Chinese and American college students, it is found that they both use more implicit disagreement when expressing their disagreement. To achieve implicit ways of expressing disagreement, some discourse strategies are used before that, such as compliments, thanks, surprise, and so on. Besides, interlocutors first illustrate similarities and agreement that may exist between two parties' opinions and then express their disagreement. "Complimenting disagreement" is the most common model of implicit disagreement. These conversational strategies are used to increase politeness before raising disagreement.

Politeness refers to the idea and behavior of harmonious coexistence between people, and it is the embodiment of respect and friendship of each other. China has been called "the ancient civilization of civilizations" since ancient times. The state of ritual and righteousness has a great relationship with the "ministers and juniors, fathers and sons" advocated by Confucianism, which means that everyone should do something that suits their identity. "Ritual justice" is actually the foundation of the country. *Book of Rites* records "The reason why mortals are human beings is ritual and righteousness." Modern etiquette includes a lot of contents, such as respecting the old and the sage, being courteous to people and so on. Among them, "being courteous to people" is a very important tradition in China. Children are educated to be polite from an early age. They are supposed to greet

others politely. Accordingly, Chinese have a roundabout phenomenon when they speak — they do not directly cut into the theme. Instead, they first say something that has nothing to do with the theme, such as greetings, inquiries, etc., and then tell the true purpose of their communication. This method is used more often, especially when rejecting, requesting, or expressing a different opinion from others.

In the etiquette culture of the United States, the first thing to do is to be polite. Americans have developed a habit of being polite when they are young. In their everyday life, even if they talk to their parents, brothers and sisters, they will use "thank you", "please", "sorry" and so on. They believe that everyone is equal and respectable. Men must have a gentlemanlike manner and women must have aristocratic temperament, which is an important manifestation of personal cultivation.

Why do people pay so much attention to politeness? The underlying reason for the great value that both Chinese and Americans share in politeness is interpersonal relationship. It is one of the main purposes of people's communication. Therefore, in interpersonal communication, people try to establish a harmonious interpersonal relationship with each other. To establish, maintain or strengthen the rapport of interpersonal relationship, people tend to behave as politely as possible. For example, when expressing disagreement, people choose the rapport-maintenance orientation and hence implicit disagreement.

The corpus used in the current study is actually made up of daily communications through social media between Chinese and American college students. These students have never met each other before. The two sides only know and communicate with each other through social media for one semester. In the process of their communication, when they first communicated, implicit disagreement was used more. With the increase of familiarity, the frequency of implicit disagreement use decreased. This phenomenon shows that the usage of implicit disagreement is related to interlocutors' familiarity. In addition, students tended to use more implicit disagreement when they talked about serious things. On the contrary, the implicit disagreement was used relatively less when it is concerning some unimportant things, which indicates that the use of implicit disagreement is also related to the formality of discussed events. The more important the event that interlocutors discuss is, the more implicit disagreement is used. At this stage, however, there are always explanations for the reasons why they have disagreement no matter whether the disagreement could cause face threatening. Gradually, both the quantity and quality of implicit disagreement that students use are improved, and the disagreement is no longer accompanied with explanations, inquiries, and apologies, which shows the great improvement of students' intercultural competence.

After observing classroom performance, testing, and interviewing, this phenomenon might be related to these students receiving education in the course Intercultural Communication. With the deepening of learning, students have accumulated more and more knowledge about intercultural communication, and their awareness of intercultural communication has also increased. For instance, a student did not use implicit disagreement at the beginning of the communication, but when he found that another student used this expression, he gradually picked it up and used implicit disagreement in subsequent communication. While interacting with each other, they have the awareness to improve their intercultural communication competence. Therefore, in later exchanges, students could better use implicit disagreement and also have more confidence. Explanation- and apology-like discourse was naturally reduced. It reveals that in the process of learning intercultural communication, if students studying a certain foreign language and culture can communicate with the natives from that culture, the effects of learning will be more significantly enhanced.

In addition, the electronic communication method also has a certain influence on the use of implicit disagreement. To some extent, this form of communication is a written communication. Usually students are more careful and serious in their written communication and they will use more polite ways to express their disagreement, but the impact of this part is relatively insignificant because communication through electronic devices is very common now, especially among young people. Meanwhile, the difference between it and face-to-face communication is subtle as well.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Yanling Xu wrote the manuscript. Yanrong Chang was responsible for experimental design. Zhan Long analysed data.

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