

The Study of the Chinese People's Inductive Inclination in Communication*

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Abstract—As globalization becomes a fact, it is true that more and more communication happens among people in different languages. In order to avoid conflicts in cross-cultural communication because of misunderstanding between Chinese people and westerners, the further study of cross-cultural communication is necessary. According to Sapir & Whorf Hypothesis, the use of language is involved far more than words, but also the way of thinking. For language and thought, they work side by side. This paper, reviews Sapir & Whorf hypothesis and argues that because of the factors of geography, ideology and history, the Chinese people have the inductive inclination in communication and we believe our research can promote the communication between Chinese people and westerners.

Index Terms—inductive pattern, deductive pattern, inclination, communication, Chinese, westerners

I. INTRODUCTION

Linguists have concentrated their attention on the language system itself since for a long time. Saussure (1982) defines language as a semiotic system of expressing concepts. Nowadays, with the establishment and development of sociolinguistics and pragmatics, the study of language gradually turns from language system itself to the function of language, which widens the fields and produces quite a few new macro-linguistics and one of them is intercultural communication. Generally, people consider Hall's book, *The Silent Language* (1959) as the mark of the beginning of intercultural communication. In his book, Hall emphasizes the importance of culture in communication of human being. He argues that culture is the life environment of human being so all the aspects of human being's life are affected by culture and changed with culture. In other words, culture decides the existence of human being, including the ways of self-expressions, feelings, thinking, behaviors and settlements and so on. It is these which are regarded as common but rarely studied to affect man's behaviors subtly (Hall, 1959). Since 60s-70s of last century, the anthropologists, linguists, socialists and so on have studied these things from various angles and a lot of books are published. However, in the view of the writer of this paper, most of the scholars focus the surface and hardly concern the deep difference such as the differences of national psychology, character, quality, value orientation and way of thinking of different countries.

In the preface of *The Corpus of the Study of the Comparison between Chinese and English*, the Chinese linguist Lv Shuxiang (1983) points out that it is not difficult to point out the difference but it is hard to explore the reasons while in fact, it is the final purpose of the research.

Sapir & Whorf Hypothesis (Hu Zhuanglin, 2011) suggests that men's language helps mould men's way of thinking, and as a consequence, different languages may express speakers' special ways of understanding the world. On the one hand, people do not perceive the world freely but rather they do by language. On the other, language is a filtering structure, which distorts the reality and thus influences and controls people's thoughts. Sapir-Whorf's Hypothesis now has been developed into a strong and a weak version. The strong emphasizes the decisive role of language as the shaper of men's thinking pattern. The weak one, on the other, holds that there is a correlation between language, culture and thought.

From Sapir & Whorf Hypothesis, we can say that language, therefore, would seem to have a major impact on the way an individual perceives and conceptualizes the world. So we are surely convinced that if Aristotle speaks in Chinese, his logic would have been different.

According Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, some scholars stereotypically think that, when the Chinese talk with the others, they must adopt inductive pattern, while the westerners, deductive. As Scollon & Scollon (2000, p. 123) argue: "The result of these different discourse strategies is that there arise the unfair and prejudicial stereotypes of the inscrutable Asian or of the frank and rude westerner." Then, Scollon & Scollon, argue that, in spite of the evidence from both ancient and contemporary sources proves that inductive pattern is widely approved used in Asian, but it is quite wrong to consider that inductive pattern is only used by Asians.

Based on the above researches, this paper argues that because of the effects of geography, ideology and history, the

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Chinese people have their own culture, which deeply influences their thoughts, so in their verbal communication, they have the strong inductive inclination. We think that our research can promote the westerners to know more about Chinese language, culture and the way of thinking, which, of course, can reduce misunderstanding between Chinese people and westerners in verbal communication.

II. INDUCTIVE AND DEDUCTIVE PATTERN IN COMMUNICATION

Scollon & Scollon (2000, p. 1) have a good example to explain inductive pattern in communication. In a business meeting between Hong Kong Chinese and Anglo-North American businessmen, one of the Chinese might say the following:

Because most of our productions are done in China now, and uh, it's not really certain how the government will react in the run-up to 1997, and since I think a certain amount of caution in committing to TV advertisement is necessary because of the expense, so, I suggest that we delay making our decision until after Legco makes its decision.

Here the Chinese businessman adopts a periodic order of presentation in which the main point is deferred until sufficient background of the topic has been done, and according to Scollon & Scollon, this is a typical inductive pattern in verbal communication, which can be summarized as:

Because of Y (topic, background, or reasons)

=>X (comment, main point, or action suggested)

On the other hand, a westerner tends to expect a discourse pattern of opening the discussion with the introduction of the speaker's main point so that other communicators can react to it, which has them have time to prepare their arguments on the speaker's topic. For this process we can call it as a typical deductive pattern, which can be written as:

X (comment, main point, or action suggested)

=>because of Y (topic, background, or reasons)

Here we can analyze the above business meeting in detail. For the Chinese businessman, his main point is that he wants to delay in making a decision until after Legco makes a decision. Scollon & Scollon (2000) call this line of argument inductive, in which it places the minor points of the argument first and then derives the main point as a conclusion from those arguments. According to Scollon & Scollon, the schema of inductive pattern is like this:

Because of A, and because of B, because of C and the others, therefore D.

On the contrary, in deductive pattern, it follows that main points first, the minor or supporting arguments latter. So, the deductive pattern can be written as:

It is D, because of A, because of B, because of C and the others.

Based on Scollon & Scollon's (2000) analysis, we give a summary about the contrast between the inductive and the deductive pattern as follows:

Inductive	Deductive
Cyclical	Linear
Climax	Anti-climax
In order of time or space	Cohesive devices (such as because)
Outcome and what	Process and why
A list of phenomena	Problem solving
Conclusion in the end not the beginning	Conclusion at the beginning not in the end

III. THE CHINESE PEOPLE'S INDUCTIVE INCLINATION

The Chinese people's inductive inclination in daily life can be proved in different areas. Wang Moxi & Li Jin (1993) once did an experiment, in which they had the Chinese students write an essay of argumentation. According to their statistics, 80% of the Chinese students adopted inductive pattern, which is much different from the very typical deductive pattern of Americans (Hu Chao, 1998).

The similar phenomenon can be found in the writing of narration. For instance, for the order of narration, westerners usually list the information focus openly at the beginning and then the outer environment (time, place and means and so on). On the contrary, the Chinese people almost list the outer environment firstly, and then the information focus in the end. So for the westerners, the order of narration is generally arranged as:

(1) Agent/ the content of the event/ the outer environment.

For example,

Tom did his homework once again as mother required at home early in the morning.

Agent the content of event the outer environment

On the contrary, the common thinking order of narration of Chinese is:

(2) Agent/ the outer environment/ the content of the event, so the above sentence can be written in Chinese as follows:

一清早 在家里 按妈妈的要求 汤姆 又做了一遍作业。

yi qing zao zai jia li an ma ma de yao qiu Tom you zuo le yi pian zuo ye

the outer environment agent the content of event

The differences between the inductive and deductive patterns between Chinese people and westerners are typically

shown between Xun Zi's "The Persuasion of Study"¹ and Francis Bacon's "Of Study."

In Xun Zi's "The Persuasion of Study", he adopts inductive pattern. First, the minor statement, "The sons of Gan, Yue, Yi, and, He, they speak using the similar sound when they are born, while when they grow up, their habits are much different." Second, the topic or the main point: "Teaching makes them so".

In Francis Bacon's "Of Study", he adopts a deductive pattern. First, he gives the topic or the main point, "Studies serve for delight, for ornament, and for ability." Second, it is the minor or the comment, that is, the explanation of delight, ornament and ability one by one.

Kaplan (quoted from Bander, 1978) points out that, the thinking model of the English discourse is linear. It begins from the topic of a sentence, and then it develops the sentence around the topic, while the eastern discourse thinking model, is circular/spiral (Hu Chao, 1998). It discusses around the outer of the topic not discusses from the beginning of the topic. The common view is that, the Chinese people's thinking way is inductive which is featured as from the specific to the general, from the concrete to abstract, while the westerners' is deductive which is featured as from the general to specific, from the abstract to concrete.

IV. THE FACTORS OF THE CHINESE PEOPLE'S INDUCTIVE INCLINATION

A. *The Factor of Geography*

The natural and geographical context of one country or a race, to some degree, determines their culture orientation, living-style and communicative behavior. So Firth (1950) argues that language study should begin with environment.

China is an inland country. The origin of the Chinese culture is the area of the Yellow River, where the climate is temperate zone.

The result of the physical geography leads the Chinese people take agriculture as their occupation. The feudal rulers preach that people should take agriculture as main branches, while commerce as an insignificant stunt. The natural economy has the following features: A. regularity; B. self-sufficiency. These features form a special agricultural or continent culture. According to Jia Yuxin (1997), the Chinese agricultural or continent culture can be characterized as: A. conform to nature; B. conservative; C. inward character; and D. not willing to risk. This kind of culture leads the Chinese not willing of risk or changeability, so for the Chinese people, in their verbal communication, they do not prefer to give the topic or the main points at the beginning because that means a kind of risk since they have to present their ideas at first, that is, they like inductive pattern but not deductive one.

B. *The Factor of Ideology*

Confucianism is the main ideology, which influences the Chinese people for thousands of years. Kong Zi (Confucius), the founder of Confucianism, is the product of the natural economy of China. Guo Shangxing & Sheng Xingqing (1994) introduce Kong Zi like this: Kong is family name, his given name is Qiu and his literary name, Zhongni, but he is often referred to by his title of honor, Kong Fu Zi, Master Kong or Sage Kong. *The Analects* (Huang Chichuang, 1997), a collection of notes of the master's discourses, conversations and traces is kept by his disciples is the earliest and most reliable source on the life and teaching of Kong Zi, which is regarded as the basic "scripture" of Confucianism. The influence of Confucianism is so predominant that if anyone should be asked to characterize in one word traditional Chinese life and culture, that word would be 'Confucianism', primarily a code of ethics and a system of philosophy. Confucianism has left its mark on Chinese politics and government, family and society, and art and literature. In a certain sense, Confucianism even functions as a religion in the ancient community (Scollon & Scollon, 2000).

The Chinese people's communication is greatly influenced by Confucianism, which can be analyzed from the following aspects.

1. Facework

Scollon & Scollon (2000) define "facework" as the negotiated public image, mutually granted each other by participants in a communication event. They (2000, p. 38) claim "Any communication is a risk to face. It is a risk to one's own face, at the same time, a risk to the other persons'."

Because of the ideology of Confucianism, traditionally, the Chinese people cherish their faces very much. Kong Zi thinks (Huang Chichuang, 1997) that the man of humanity wishing to be established himself seeks also to establish others; wishing to be developed himself, he seeks also to establish others. Lao Zi² (Lau, 1964) thinks that the man who is wise does not speak, or the one who speaks is not wise, and he also preaches that doing everything by doing nothing. So the Chinese people believe that "Silence is gold." or "Scourge comes from speaking." As Samovar, et al (1998) say, Chinese communication pattern and use of language are similar to the indirectness and face-saving pattern of Japanese and the pattern of Koreans—they believe face-saving is crucial and the losing of face is a shame.

Because of the ingrained idea of facework, when Chinese people talk with the others, they would be prudent, that is to say, they like protecting their faces, moderating and following middle way but not an aggressive one. So in verbal communication, in order not to lose their faces, they prefer the inductive pattern to the deductive, that it is to say, they

¹ "The Persuasion of Study" is Xun Zi's (a famous Chinese thinker) classical essay, in which Xun Zi explores why and how to study.

² Lao Zi is a Chinese philosopher and founder of the Taoist religion in China. His name means "Old Master". He worked as a librarian at the court of Chou. When the kingdom showed signs of decay, Lao Zi left and was never heard of again. Tao Te Ching is said to be his principles of his philosophy.

would not give the topic or conclusion or the critical demand at the beginning.

2. Harmony

Chinese culture belongs to being not doing. For thousands of years, they emphasize to be harmony with nature but not be the master of nature. For instance, Lao Zi holds the cooperation view, in which he argues that Heaven and man are unity. Hui Shi, a native of the state of Song, and a friend of Zhuang Zi, holds that one should love all things equally. The ancient Chinese claim that the universe is one (Guo Shangxing & Sheng Xingqing, 1994). So, for the Chinese, harmony is one of primordial values of Confucianism and Chinese culture. It is rooted in Chinese religion in which they argue that the ultimate goal of human behavior is to achieve “harmony”, which leads Chinese people to pursue a conflict-free and group-oriented system of human relationships. For example, the proverb of Chinese “The first man to raise his voice loses the argument.” This is much different from the English proverb “Early bird catches the worms”. In history or at present, the Chinese would like to have harmony with the neighbor countries. They would not invade others. Even the others invade them, if the war can be avoided, they would compromise to them. There are so many examples: The Southern Song Dynasty submits to King; The marriage between Prince Wen Cheng and Son Zanganbu³; One of the founders of China, Chairman Mao Zedong’s words reflect this idea exactly, “If the one does not offend me, nor do I.” Even today, the Chinese leaders emphasize: Stability overcomes everything. Scollon & Scollon (2000, p. 38) argue that in verbal communication, “...the Chinese tend to be concerned that good relationships are maintained, even this means that less information maybe exchanged....” Therefore, the Chinese people would not give his conclusion or accurate meaning at the beginning but in the end to arrive at the harmonious goal. That is why Samovar, et al (1998) think that the Chinese people like indirect language while the westerners like direct one, and this is also a reason why in communication the Chinese prefer inductive pattern to deductive one.

3. Hierarchy

As Han nationality, in the use of language, the Chinese people have their own characteristics. The feudalism, based on the natural economy, rules the Chinese thought for thousands of years. The core of the feudal patriarchal clan society is the hierarchy among the social members. In *The Analects*, Kong Zi (Huang Chichuang, 1997) preaches a term called Rite. In his answer to Yan Yuan, one of his disciples on what is humanity, Kong Zi describes Rites as to restrain oneself and abide by rites is humanity. The essence of Kong Zi’s Rites reflects in the following sentences: Do not look when your action would be contrary to rites; Do not listen when your action would be contrary to rites; Do not speak when your action would be contrary to rites; Do not touch when your action would be contrary to rites (Huang Chichuang, 1997). When Duke Huan of Qi⁴ asked Kong Zi about how to govern a country, he answered: There is a government, when the prince is prince, and the minister is minister; when the father is father and the son is son. For the obvious hierarchy of ancient Chinese, we can also find proof in *Zuo’s Commentary*⁵. In this classical book, it (Guo Shangxing & Sheng Xingqing, 1994) writes: The Li constitutes the warp of Heaven, the principle of earth, and the conduct of the people. Later, Dong Zhongshu⁶, the greatest Confucianism scholar of his day, reaffirms the teaching of Kong Zi and Meng Zi. Among the five social relationships—between sovereign and subject, father and son, husband and wife, brother and brother, friend and friend, he thinks the first three is very important, and he propounds it as “Three cardinal guides”. That is, the sovereign is the guide of his subject, the father is the guide of his son, and the husband is the guide of his wife. Here, to be the guide means owning absolute authority. These relationships, as Dong Zhongshu maintained, are all derived from the principle of Ying and Yang. The sovereign is Yang, while the subject Ying; The sovereign is Yang, while the subject Ying; The father is Yang, while the son Ying; The husband is Yang, while the wife Ying. Dong explains further that the king was co-equal with heaven, and heaven, earth, and the ruler of men are just one. He also popularizes the set of “Five Constant Virtues”, which is described as humanity, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and faithfulness. The mainstay of Confucianism ethics, these theories are a severe mental burden on the majority of the Chinese people in the long years of feudal society, which makes the Chinese people know “there is a power distance between old and young, leaders and subordinates or even teachers and students.” For example, even here today in the daily life, the subordinate usually calls his vice director as director but not vice director. The students call the vice professor as professor not vice professor, otherwise, it shows that he does not know customary rules of good behavior. As a result, when the lower power group talks with the higher one, they must pay much attention to the customary rules of good behavior, so they do not dare give the topic or conclusion at first but in the end. That is also an important reason that the Chinese people like inductive pattern.

C. The Factor of History

As one of the four civilized ancient countries, China has a long splendid history. Chinese people are proud of their more than five thousand years civilization. They like to tell the westerners their four great inventions, the Yangshao culture, pottery wares in Ban Po Village, the Silk Road, and the Great Wall and so on. They terribly believe in the significance of prior event. So the Chinese culture belongs to past-time orientation (Samovar, et al., 1998). The Chinese, with their tradition of ancestor worship and strong pride in their culture persistence for thousand years, take the past as a

³ This happened 1300 year ago in Tang Dynasty, in order to arrive at a harmonious relationship, the emperor married his princess (Wen Cheng) to a Tibet local chief (Son Zanganbu) and this story is popular in China still today.

⁴ A monarch in Warring State of China.

⁵ A classic book on Confucian historical biography.

⁶ A thinker and Confucian in the Western Han Dynasty of China.

guide to show how to live in the present. These cultures (p-time) have histories that date back thousands of years, so they find out it normal to take a long-range view of events and are less likely to be rushed when they face decisions (Samovar, et al., 1995). So, the Chinese people believe future is unknowable. A phrase can be an instance “drink today while drink you may”. The feudal ruling class preaches “Eliminating human desires, and reserving heavenly principles.” In fact, the past long history is a kind of burden for the Chinese. The past-time orientation makes the Chinese people no confidence for the future, so when they talk with the westerners, they prefer to inductive strategies to avoid to give ideas or make decisions at the beginning in communication.

V. CONCLUSION

Successful intercultural communication is based on sharing culture knowledge between the speakers (Scollon & Scollon, 2000). It is a false dichotomy that the Chinese must adopt inductive pattern while the westerners have to choose deductive strategy in verbal communication, while the investigation of the physical environment, the ancient ideologies and past history of China, shows that the Chinese people have the inclination of using inductive pattern in speech events and we think this research can make less miscommunication between the Chinese and the westerners in intercultural communication.

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