

Cognitive Interpretation of Chinese Gendered Discourse Pattern*

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Abstract—In Chinese, there are clear embodiments of gendered discourse pattern. Based on the concrete embodiments of gendered discourse pattern in Chinese, this paper will discuss about some specific examples. Then the reasons of forming the Chinese gendered discourse pattern will be illustrated. Lastly the paper will summarize the cognitive interpretation of Chinese gendered discourse pattern.

Index Terms—gender, Chinese discourse pattern, cognitive interpretation

I. INTRODUCTION

As everyone knows, among all kinds of creatures on the earth, mankind is the only one who has languages. We can say that it is language that makes mankind totally different from other kinds of creatures on the earth. Since language is a special social phenomenon of human society which formed with the developments of human society and directly reflected human thoughts of the society. From the complicated understanding of unlimited universe to every little feeling from people's daily life, people need wordage to record all of these since wordage is an important part of written languages.

As we all know, people use language to communicate with others, to express and exchange thoughts. Through these communicative activities, people get more information and learn more knowledge. In ancient times, people created more tools and transported their skills much further and faster than any other kinds of creatures with languages. The advantages enable mankind to get more food which could let them have chances to develop human civilization. So, obviously, human civilization has evolved with the evolution of language. It is no doubt that language played a crucial role in the process of human evolution.

With the developments of human society, languages changed step by step. Therefore, the languages we speak today are different from the ancient ones. A lot of languages disappeared while a lot of new words appeared. History left trace in languages as languages are an interpretation of human evolution. It is remarkable to realize that there are many differences between men and women when they communicate with languages or the way they interpret languages, especially when they transport messages and exchange thoughts. It means that men and women would like to choose different discourse patterns and use different communication strategies. It is quite likely, that as long as language has existed, the distinction between male and female has also been present within it. Today, there are no languages, which do not distinguish between the genders at all, leading linguists and psychologists to believe that gender may be "so fundamental to social organization and social structure that linguistic means to refer to this category are indispensable for speech communities" (Stahlberg et al. 2007, p.163). However, references to grammatical conventions of gender in language have prompted contemporary concerns over the power of language to shape social stereotypes about gender, and perhaps ultimately shape status distinctions between men and women. The feminist language critique, in particular, deems language to be overwhelmingly androcentric, putting girls and women at a disadvantage in personal and professional relationships (Stahlberg et al. 2007), and some countries, such as Norway, have actively reformed their languages to reflect a more genderless outlook (Gabriel and Gygax, 2008). In spite of attempts at language reform already underway, numerous questions remain regarding the relationship between the social aspects of gender and language and the potential benefits of modifying languages to be more gender-neutral.

This phenomenon reflects many reasons which come from the social culture and the social ideas. So studying this phenomenon is helpful for people to recognize the gendered discourse pattern in social communications and make communication strategies more flexible and more practical in order to have the team-work more efficient, the expression more friendly, the communication more fluent, our society more stable and the development greater. In recent years, academia had more and more interests in gendered discourse pattern. And the scholars also changed their focus to the gendered discourse pattern of communication which ensure the research have more practical value and realistic significance. Qian's research has already showed that men and women had many differences in their discourse patterns. Men and women had different discourse styles which mainly displayed on the choices of topics, the number of topics and the exchanging frequency of talking chances.

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Sociolinguists found that men's topics were more abstract and extensive. Men would like to put their attentions on competitive topics, such as politics, legal matters, taxes or sports. And they rarely talked about their own feelings on personal things. The topics of women were different from men's. Women would like to talk about things connected with their everyday life, such as personal relationship, life's troubles or life styles.

Accordingly, Qian's research could prove this theory well. Western sociolinguists studied men's and women's topics by doing the survey in a group of western people. The result was that men's topics were mainly about competition or aggression, sports and other thing related with these topics. Women's topics were mainly about themselves, feelings, relationship with others, home and family. A similar survey had been done in a Chinese university in order to test this theory's reliability. And this survey had a same result. The male students' topics focused on politics, news sports, careers, computer games, military affairs, historical events, economy and beautiful girls. While female students' topics focused on clothes, cosmetics, entertainments, feelings, food and drinks, home, make-up, and books.

It was clear that not only in the western world but also in China the topics selected by men and women had great difference. The reasons were various as follows.

In ancient agricultural society, because of the distinctions between men and women in physiology, men did most of hunting, farming and other dangerous or labor work. While women did most of collecting, knitting and taking care of children and elder people. Even though women's job scope got much wider after the industrial revolution than it used to be, people's traditional mind was not eliminated easily. In modern times, there are still traditional concepts existing in people's mind. Men and women are expected to play different roles in society. Generally speaking, men are tough, strong, brave and competitive so they are fit for being statesmen, businessmen, engineers and doctors. While women are gentle, emotional and conscientious so they are fit for language teaching, being nurses and secretaries. Different social division of labor is one of the reasons for gendered discourse pattern.

Almost in every culture, people tended to teach boys and girls in different ways, set different hopes and standards to boys and girls and wished them play different roles in society after they grew up. In childhood, the games played in different ways. The games not only let children play together but also shaped children's characters. There was a research about games played by boys and girls. By the research, researchers found that girls' game tended to be played in little and close groups. They would like to play in room with toys or play some other kinds of family games together in order to keep their close relationship strong and stable. Girls' groups were so close that the other ones had little possibilities to get in. (Yu, 2008)

While the boys' game partners were much more than girls'. Their groups were larger and looser. They would like to play in this kind of groups. They played with a large group of children in outside. They competed, raced or played other games imitated hunting or fight. In their games, they usually appointed themselves as captains or soldiers. By these games, boys maintain their relationship and developed their team work abilities. The way people taught boys and girls showed their hopes to their children. Their wishes for their descendants were the reactions to the society's wish and culture values. The culture values had a great influence on everyone. And it changed the languages greatly. It is easy to understand that there is gendered discourse pattern in language. Recent theorizing suggests that language not only reflects the conventions of culture and particular patterns of thought, but systems of language can actually shape our cognitive understanding of the world around us (Boroditsky, 2009; Deutscher, 2010). Specifically, the gendering of language (even that which appears mundane and purely grammatical, such as the use of *la* versus *le* in French) can actually impact our perceptions. For example, researchers have discovered that the grammatical gender of a term for an inanimate object can influence people's perceptions of the masculine or feminine characteristics of that object, and this cannot be due merely to the properties of the object as the researchers used terms that were grammatically masculine in one language and feminine in another (Boroditsky et al. 2003; Konishi, 1993). The same findings are true even when pictures are used instead of text (Sera et al. 1994). Furthermore, when Jakobson (1966) had participants choose voices to personify the days of the week; Russian speakers consistently selected male or female voices to match the grammatical gender of that particular day. Therefore, Chinese gendered discourse pattern is to be studied in my paper.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The cognitive interpretation of gendered discourse pattern is not a new topic. In 1960s, with the rising of sociolinguistics, statistics and survey research which are typically used in sociology are brought to analyze the features of human language from gender and other factors on language. It counted gender factor as one of social variables to quest the relationship between language and gender. Some scholars began to explore the gendered discourse pattern. In 1930, Trubetzkoy introduced markedness theory which is widely used in study of language today. In this theory, the words are divided into two parts, the marked and unmarked. The markedness theory is used in appellation research. There are many researches about the topic. Qian Jin had a paper which was about the Chinese appellations of gendered discourse pattern. People's gender has a great influence on Chinese. In Chinese appellations, people of different gender have different appellations. The appellations of the father's side of the family and the mother's side of the family are different. There are relative appellations and social appellations. In both of them, the appellations for men and women have many differences. There are many reasons of this phenomenon. Traditional culture and social ideas are two of them. And in the researches which have been done before, we can find that studying this topic is meaningful, because we can figure out the social ideas and people's thoughts clearly via the study of gendered discourse pattern.

A. Markedness Theory

The theory had a great influence on language study which opened a new page for the structural linguistics. Now it was widely used in many parts of language researches. The rules of the theory indicated that unmarked words were more widely used than marked ones and unmarked words' meanings were used more extensively and universally.

Example2. Shi Bing (solider)—unmarked Nan Shi Bing (male solider)—marked
Nv Shi Bing(female solider)—marked

Example3. Hong Niang (Match-maker)

B. Gendered Marks of Chinese Relative Appellations

In normal conditions, the unmarked appellations mean the people in direct line (the father's side of the family or the husband's side of the family) and the marked ones mean the people in maternal line (the wife's side of the family). Meanwhile, the unmarked words sometimes can refer to someone who is not of the direct line. Please refer to the following examples.

Nv xiong and Nv di are the appellations of ancient Chinese which are not usually used in modern Chinese. In modern Chinese, we use Jie jie and Meimei to address elder sister and younger sister.

In ancient Chinese when Chinese ask about how many people of one generation, people usually speak in Chinese “Ni xiong di ji ren?”. It could be directly translated into English as ‘How many brothers in your family?’ But the answer should include the women of the person’s generation. When we use Chinese to put forward this question, xiong di is unmarked appellations in this situation. In ancient Chinese, xiong di also had the meaning of sisters, but in modern Chinese, it only means brothers.

(1) The common appellations of both genders must be added with Nan(male) or Nv(female) to distinguish the gender. Example6. Nan Pengyou—boyfriend. Nv Pengyou—girlfriend.

Example7. Si ji shu shu—the male driver
jie fang jun shu shu—the man of liberation army
jing cha shu shu — policeman

In ancient China, if there were a woman who wanted to do these kinds of jobs, she would be an exception. In this situation, the appellations needed to be marked in order to explain. While in modern society, these jobs have been done by lots of women. But the appellations were still marked with gendered marks because of the usual practice.

Example8. ji zhe—reporter nv ji zhe—female reporter
xue zhe—scholar nv xue zhe—female scholar

(3) The appellations usually belonged to women and rarely described men, or didn't have a corresponding appellation for men. The professions which lack male appellations were usually regarded as humble professions. In traditional ideas, men couldn't or shouldn't do these jobs. People naturally contracted these professions with women, such as hu shi a yi (female nurse), you er yuan a yi (kindergarten aunt). In contrast, if a man had this kind of profession, this situation would be regarded as abnormal. Some depreciative appellations especially which endanger others or endanger the society need to be marked. In common sense, these appellations were only for men. So when people used these appellations on women, they would add them with gendered marks.

Example9. liu mang —hooliganism qiang dao—robber
pian zi)—cheater te wu—spy

IV. DISCUSSION

Increasingly scholars and researchers recognize the power that asymmetries in lexical gender, male false generics, and the systematic way language becomes gendered can have on social gender stereotypes and inequities in status between men and women (Cameron, 1998). For example, feminist scholars have long decried that masculine generics are androcentric, and make women seem invisible in historical and contemporary discourse (Cameron, 1998). With empirical research highlighting the real world impact that gendered language can have on people's social judgments, decisions, and behavior, many have begun to rally behind the idea that change in language is needed to curb social inequalities in society (Foley, 2011). Although opponents of language reform argue that male false generics remain mere grammatical convention, too widespread to expect change, and irrelevant to gender inequality, empirical evidence supports what feminists have long known (see review by Foley 2011). For example, studies have shown that the male generic is in fact not simply a grammatical convention but that speakers actually visualize males when the word "he" or "his" is used in its generic form (Gastil 1990). Moreover, a "chairman" primes male pronouns and is rated as more masculine than a "chairperson". If men and women interpret male generics in a gendered way, then it stands to reason that these gendered impressions could have a lasting impact on real world gender stereotyping and role behavior. For example, consider the implications for career choice. Masculine forms of nouns, such as are found in lexical gender and gender related structures, are problematic, specifically when it comes to occupational titles and positions because women may have trouble identifying with the masculine forms, and so may choose to not pursue a career which implicitly excludes women. For example, Bem and Bem (1973) found that only 5% of female participants applied for a traditionally male job which used male generics in its description, whereas 25% of women applied when it was described in a gender neutral way. Moreover, Braun (2001) found that people rated women's attraction to a future career in psychology as lesser when they had read an excerpt about ethical standards for psychologists worded using male generics, as opposed to versions that were worded in a gender neutral way. Thus, over and above the influence of stereotypes about traditional gender roles associated with a particular occupation, the gendering of language may influence women's desire to seek certain employment opportunities.

Based upon the qualitative analysis, there is gendered discourse pattern in the cognitive interpretation of Chinese. In Chinese appellations, this phenomenon is very clear. People who are in different positions have different appellations. Chinese relative appellations appear to be divided by the family positions. However, they are divided by the blood lineage in essence which reflects Chinese social ideas and traditional influence. Chinese take the blood relationship seriously. In my view, the social appellations have more reflections of the society than the other ones. People use the gendered appellations to address professional men and women who take up same or different jobs. Because the appellations shed light on the social ideas and people's thoughts, the study of the cognitive interpretation of Chinese gendered discourse pattern is of great significance.

V. CONCLUSION

In Chinese, there exists gendered discourse pattern, especially in appellations. Chinese use gendered marks to make appellations marked or unmarked. By this study, people can understand Chinese traditional ideas more deeply. Above all, to have a thorough study of the markedness of personal gender appellations entailed a close study of personal relation, especially the gender sensitive interpersonal relation. More and more special attentions were given to discuss the markedness phenomena including ways of cognition, economic motivation, politeness principle and social elements. So to truly understand the intersection of gender in language, cognition, and culture, researchers will ultimately need to draw connections between large-scale cross-cultural trends, cognitive process models, and experimental research on interpersonal behavior. Moreover, although language may very well play a role in gender equality and language reform could be a fruitful avenue for improving the status of women, it is important to remember that linguistic modification must be accompanied by social and political adjustments in order to truly change existing asymmetries in gender. It

showed that people pay more and more attentions to the communications with others. With the development of the society, the world is becoming more and more globalized. Mankind is need of communications which all depend on our understanding of each other.

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