A Contrastive Study of Chinese and English Address Forms

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Abstract—Address forms are easily observed in people's daily utterances, which play a significant role in the smooth development of a whole communication process. There are various address forms in Chinese and English addressing systems, which have similarities and differences. This paper is a contrastive study of address forms in the two languages. The significance of the study is first presented. And the contrastive study is carried out in the second part through four aspects, i.e., names, kinship terms, titles, pronouns, respectively. The causes of such differences are finally expounded, among which cultural orientation is the primary one.

Index Terms—contrastive analysis, address forms, Chinese and English addressing systems, cultural orientation

I. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY OF ADDRESS FORMS

Address forms are easily observed in people's daily utterances. They play a significant role in the smooth development of a whole communication process. Dunkling (1990) lists some possible reasons for vocative usage of address forms. There are thirty items in all. They are in no particular order of importance, and relate to many different situations. The first four are cited here to show the necessity and importance of address forms in our daily life.

① To attract the attention of a particular person, especially when other people are present.

② To express the speaker's attitude to the hearer, especially if that attitude is highly emotional, of great fondness, or extreme contempt.

③ To demonstrate the hearer that he or she has been identified or recognized. This is often a welcoming use of the hearer's name. A head waiter might consider it important to greet regular customers in this way.

④ To flatter the hearer, perhaps by the use of a title to which the hearer has no right, or by a flattering word such as "lovely". (p.16)

Even with the brief list, we could see that an address form might need to be used in certain situations for a number of reasons. It is difficult to see how speakers could express and communicate without them. Syntactically, most address forms are nouns or noun phrases, and they are attached to utterances or sentences, but the positions of them are optional and they are usually independent of the grammatical structure of the sentences, e.g.

① Initial position: Tom, I met your brother today.

② Middle position: Come here, Jack, I have some words with you.

③ Final position: Good morning, Mr. Brown.

Concerning this, Quirk (1985) points out that "in its optionality and freedom of position, it is more like an adverbial (or, more precisely, like a disjunct) than any other element of clause structures." (p.89) Indeed, address forms occur nearly everywhere in a sentence. In this sense, it is optional. But is an address form optional? No. An address form is not only a grammatical element, but also a communicative and pragmatic element.

A potential visitor to Germany, if prudent, will learn when to use *du* and when to use *Sie*, and a foreign student coming to England would be wise to know the difference between addressing a teacher as "Jim" and calling him "Professor Smith". Not only does such preparation prevent embarrassing mistakes, but it enables one to understand the full implications of remarks made by others.

Address forms are common in every language, and frequently and easily observed in personal communication and have long been considered as a very salient indicator of status relationship. They are a social phenomenon and an extremely important sociolinguistic variable. The significance and importance of the study on personal address is clearly described by Philipsen and Huspek (1985) as follows:

"Personal address is a sociolinguistic subject par excellence. In every language and society, every time one person speaks to another, there created a host of options centering around whether and how persons will be addressed, named, and described. The choices speakers make in such situations, and their meanings to those who interpret them, are systematic, not random. Such systematicity in language behavior, whether of use or interpretation, is universal, although what elements comprise the personal address system and what rules govern its development, vary across contexts. And such variation in structure is, according to the extant empirical literature, correlated with social ends and social contexts of language use. From this view, personal address is a systematic, variable, and social phenomenon, and these features of it make it a sociolinguistic variable of fundamental importance." (p.94)

II. CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS OF CHINESE AND ENGLISH ADDRESS FORMS

Address forms are a universal part of human communication. No one can avoid addressing in interaction. Though all nations use addressing terms and common rules, and regulations may be found behind different addressing systems, the norms of what is appropriate to say to whom and under which conditions an address form is rated as "correct" vary greatly from nation to nation, or to be more exact, from culture to culture, showing considerable variation from one language group to another but within one language group as well.

It is very likely that some address forms are just unique in a particular culture and may even differ greatly from those of other cultures. This phenomenon has important implications for language learning and for intercultural communication in general. If we don't understand the address form system of the opposite interlocutors from other cultures, misunderstanding will arise. Therefore, it is necessary to know both our address system and the address systems in other cultures. This is also true with the Chinese and English address forms.

It is not only acceptable but even normal for one person to receive many different addresses from different speakers: a teacher could be addressed as "Mrs. Dillon" by her pupils, as "Sarah" by her colleagues, as "Sal" by her family, and as "Mom" by her children. (Dickey, 2002, p.8) Consequently, we have the various kinds of address forms.

Though an address system is subject to diversification and complication, people still try to classify them. Tian Huigang (1998), a Chinese scholar, classifies it into five sub-categories: kinship terms, social addressing terms, names, pronouns, and polite addressing terms. Quirk (1985) uses the term "vocative", which is divided into seven sub-groups: kinship terms, occupational terms, titles, honorific terms, general nouns, epithets and pronouns. For the ease of demonstration, the author would like to cut it into six categories which are: names, kinship terms, titles, pronouns, endearment terms, and common nouns, and focus on the first four categories.

A. Names

(1) Full names

According to Lou Guangqing (1985), there are three modes of name forms in the address system, which are as follows: ① NF^1—S +(X)+G; ② NF^2—G+(X)+S; ③ NF^3—G+(X)+(Y). *NF=name form; S=surname; G=given name; X=the first variable; Y=the second variable; ( )=noncompulsory element. (p.37)

Chinese follow the mode of NF^1 in which surname is put in the first place, and the given name follows it. X is a zero form in the mode, so the personal name is composed of two elements: S and G, e.g. 张华 and 王小飞. American and European people's names are the mode of NF^2 in which given name precedes the surname. It is the reversed form of that of Chinese. X can be a zero form or a middle name. Thus, a possible English name will be G+S or G+X+S, e.g. James Brown, George Walker Bush. As for NF^3, the Burmese, the Indonesian, the Arabian, etc. use it, and they have no surnames.

Names in Chinese are very complex. The most common form for the Han people is composed of two parts—surname and given name. A Chinese person may be addressed in the following ways: ① full name, e.g. 李小强; ② given name, e.g. 小强; ③ surname(less common), e.g. 李; ④ full name + title, e.g. 李小强先生; ⑤ surname + title, e.g. 李先生; ⑥ given name + title, e.g. 小强同志; ⑦ modifiers (such as "小/老") + surname, e.g. 小李/老李，or surname + certain modifiers (such as "老"), e.g.李老.

A common English name is usually composed of two or three parts. The first name is also called given name. If the person is a Christian, his first name will be given at his baptism, so it is also called the given name or the Christian name. Last name is commonly referred to as surname or family name. It is often the father's family name, so it is also called family name or last name. The majority of English-speaking people also have one middle name. The first name and middle name does not necessarily have immediate family connection of any kind. Middle name is the second given name. It tends to be drawn from the first name stock but can be other family name. When written, middle name is often shortened to the initial letter. For example: Ann Joseph Strong, Ann J. Strong.

The most common way of addressing in English community is first name. It can be used reciprocally between people of different age, rank or sex. Children may address familiar adults, their parents or their grandparents by their first names, and strangers might first name each other shortly after the first round of introduction. Last name alone is more likely used to address a male addressee. Surname plus first name is generally intended to keep the distance between the two or to perform certain pragmatic functions like warning, threatening or remonstrating, which should not be neglected in translation. As to diminutive names, being quite different from the original, such as "Betty" for "Elizabeth" and "Billie" for "William", they are sometimes misleading for readers as well as translators. The rendering of diminutive names may be hard sometimes, since a literal rendering usually fails to reveal the intimacy between the speakers.

(2) Nicknames

A nickname refers to an extra name, normally unofficial and not used in formal situations or for legal purposes, which can serve to identify a person. A nickname is often given to a person by others according to one of his distinguishable features either physically or mentally. For instance, one may nickname a person 小眼镜, 胖墩，Fatty, etc.

We are concerned here only with vocative nicknames, used in direct address to the person concerned. Some nicknames are purely referential. Mrs. Thatcher is called "the Iron Lady", but it is not suitable for someone to say to her

"How are you, <u>Iron Lady</u>?" Those nicknames which are used vocatively are of different types. A group nickname is known to a number of people. People can get a lot of different group nicknames at various stages of their lives, at school, at work, etc.

(3) Transferred, substitute, and nonce names

The definition of a transferred name can be easily illustrated by a well-known example. If we overhear someone saying to a friend: "I saw you at the cinema last night, <u>Romeo</u>.", we don't assume that "Romeo" is the first name or nickname of the man being addressed. We know that he is momentarily being compared to Shakespeare's tragic young lover, whose name is used to mean "a man who is very much in love". We can be fairly sure that the man seen at the cinema was with a girl friend to whom he was paying great attention.

A substitute name is slightly different. A man may call a stranger "Jack", "John" or "Jimmy", which are used to replace any other standard first name. It is simply a typical first name, used as a temporary substitute for whatever first name the man happens to be with. In a way, they are similar to the Chinese "张三" or "李四".

A nonce name is a name brought into temporary existence for use to a particular person, a word being converted to name status for the purpose. The conversation is achieved with the help of a name prefix or title, such as "Mr.", "Mrs.", or "Miss". In earlier times, they are more likely to use a professional description or a more abstract term to create names like: Mr. Policeman, Mr. Lawyer. Some vocative expressions of this type become fossilized as titles, e.g. Mr. President, Mr. Chairman. But such cases in English seldom happen in contrast to Chinese, in which official titles are often used as address forms. e.g. 经理, 主任. But they have no "Mr." preceding the titles.

B.   Kinship Terms

Kinship terms are terms for blood relationship and for affine. They are rather complicated. One can apply a kinship term in direct address and two or more referential forms when talking about the relatives. Kinship terms are of great value to the study of address forms because kinship terms are a universal feature of different cultures and very important in the social organization.

Kinship terms in Chinese are marked by its detailed stratification as well as the clear distinction between the paternal side and the maternal side. For example, the vocative form "aunt" in English may find a number of counterparts in Chinese like "大娘, 婶婶, 舅妈, 阿姨, 姑姑". This phenomenon will certainly bring difficulty to their translation. Moreover, great respect is shown to seniority. When interaction occurs between family members or relatives, the older generation invariably receives kinship addressing whereas the younger one may be addressed either by kinship terms, names, or by other names.

Kinship terms in English do not show particular emphasis for the distinction between the paternal side and the maternal side. We may find evidence in terms like "cousin, aunt, uncle, brother, sister". For "cousin", eight Chinese equivalents can be found, that is 堂兄, 堂弟, 堂姐, 堂妹, 表兄, 表弟, 表姐, 表妹. When it comes to the translation of such terms, the translator certainly has a tough job to deal with. Comparing with the Chinese kinship terms, kinship terms in English do not take seniority into much consideration.

Kinship terms are greatly used in addressing in Chinese address system. As address forms, they can be divided into two categories. One is the kinship terms that are used to address real kins as is mentioned before. The other is the kinship terms which are used to address nonkins.

Those nonkins are treated as the extension of kins. Not all kinship terms are used to address nonkins. Kinship terms like 爷爷, 奶奶, 叔叔, 阿姨, 大哥, 大姐 are often used. That the kinship terms are used to address nonkins is the fictive use of kinship terms, or is called "the extension of kinship terms". Chinese people treasure kinship, and the use of kinship terms shows warmth, friendliness and kindness. On the contrary, Westerners are not used to this usage. But some of the kinship terms continue to be well used in other ways. "Sister", for example, may refer to a member of a religious order of women, such as a nun. "Brother" may be used to a trade union colleague. The terms remain basically family terms, but their meanings have been considerably extended.

C.   Titles

(1) Social titles

In old China, there are several titles which are not used today such as 阁下, 陛下. The main forms of social titles in China today are 同志, 师傅, 先生, 小姐, 女士, 老师. These terms may be used alone, or together with surname or full name, and sometimes with modifiers like 大/小/老 or with other titles.

The normal social titles are "Mr., Mrs., or Miss" followed by the last name of the person being addressed. The British social system distinguishes a number of other categories of persons who are members of the nobility or children of some members of the nobility, or have received one of the highest British honors. They are conventionally addressed by such terms as "Sir"+ first/ last/ full name, "Lady"+ first/ last/ full name, "Lord"+ first/ last/ full name, "my lord", "my lady", etc. For instance, Sir Paul, Sir Paul McCartney, Lady Thatcher, Lady Jane Grey, Lord Derby. Some of these social titles are hereditary, and many are bestowed during a person's lifetime.

(2) Professional titles

Titles indicating one's profession also appear as address forms in Chinese very often. Though not necessarily so, professional titles, especially those indicating high social status, are well acknowledged and accepted when the

addresser has some ideas about the profession of the addressee. Examples of Chinese names of professions as titles are 医生, 警察, 司机, 经理, 教授, 工程师, etc. In China, nearly all the professional titles can be address forms.

However, professional titles used as address forms in English are comparatively scarce. Only certain fields of professions can be used in this way. Ministers of religion are normally addressed by titles, such as "Vicar", "Rector". Members of medical profession, from the trainee nurse to the eminent surgeon, have titles which place them precisely in the hierarchy. The academic world is another area where professional titles, such as Professor, Senior, Tutor and Dean, are frequently used.

(3) Official titles

Official titles are commonly used as address forms in China. They can be used alone or prefixed by the surname or sometimes full name implying added deference. Almost all administrative titles may be used as address forms, such as 省长, 市长, 局长, 主任. As to those served in the army, people would address them by the name of the position they assume, like 司令, 军长, 师长, 指导员. Since people in the West are generally regarded as equal no matter what jobs they take, official titles used as address forms in English are rather limited.

D. Pronouns

Almost every language has the first, second and third person pronouns. However, among the three kinds of pronouns, it is the second person pronoun that is used as address (Fasold, 2000). Many languages still have two active singular second person pronouns in addressing, and there is a distinction between a familiar and a polite second person pronoun, such as "您/你" in Chinese, "tu/vous" in French and "du/Sie" in German.

In Chinese, "您/你"are seldom used to draw the attention of the person addressed. Occasionally one hears "喂，你!" But it is impolite to use "你" in getting attention. Yet we can use other ways to express politeness and respect to more than one person, such as "二位", "三位", "各位", "诸位". English once had distinction between "thou/you". They say "you" to many persons and "you" to one person. At that time "you" showed reverence and polite distance and, also, the invariable plural. Nowadays, the pronoun "thou" is reserved to prayer and native poetry, but in the past it was the form of familiar address to a single person. We know that using "you" in English to get others' attention is impolite. It is true with Chinese. Examples are "Hey, you!" and "Excuse me, you!" Corresponding to the "二位", "各位" in Chinese, "both of you", "everybody", "every one", "all of you", etc. are used in English.

III. CAUSES OF THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CHINESE AND ENGLISH ADDRESS FORMS

Natural environment gives birth to different patterns of culture as well as different types of society, and the psychology of people in the society is nothing but the outputs of the corresponding culture. Many factors may lead to the differences of address forms. These factors mainly include cultural factors, social factors, psychological factors and geographical factors. They are closely related with each other directly or indirectly. Of all these factors, culture is the most important. Cultural orientation decides every aspect of it.

The Chinese cultural orientation is the ideas of Confucius while in the English-speaking countries it is the Western religion and philosophy. Confucianism is a philosophy of human nature that considers proper human relationship as the basis of society. In studying human nature and motivation, Confucianism sets forth four principles from which right conducts arise: *Ren* (humanism), *Yi* (faithfulness), *Li* (propriety) and *Zhi* (wisdom or a liberal education). Therefore, in China, harmonious relationship between people is foremost important. The relationship is based on love and benevolence, i.e. affectivity based. In the society, power and solidarity out of higher social order or elder age is greatly respected. Of all the relationships, kinship is the most important and highly valued or "family dominance", emphasizing the effect of families in a society. As a result, for example, the family name of a Chinese goes before the given name.

The Western culture puts the greatest emphasis on individualism, which is much more valued than in China. They also have the feeling that they must get involved. But the primary mode of the American and the English involvement is that one can voluntarily join or voluntarily withdraw from. Due to this cultural orientation, the dominant paradigm of communication is an individualistic one. Thus the interpersonal relationship is very simple. The relationship between family members is loose, so the kinships are much fewer than those in China.

In addition to the above, Chinese people think highly of hierarchy, which stresses the distinction of different class levels, such as the difference between the superiors and inferiors, the older and the younger. In Chinese kinship relationships, ascending generations are superior to descending generations. The primary relationships are not the equal relationships that are between brothers and sisters, but hierarchical, like those between parents and children. It is the place of older generation to lead and of the younger generation to follow. If hierarchy is not based on kinship relationship, then it may be based on age, social status, experience, education, gender or one of the many other dimensions of social organization within a culture. The sense of hierarchy can be well perceived through Chinese address forms. Except for the age order, Chinese kinship terms also have the strict distinction between paternal side and maternal side of the relatives. When one is addressing another, generation difference must be emphasized, as well as the younger or older difference between brothers and sisters. Moreover, if one has an official position, he usually receives the official title from the inferiors, as is a usual phenomenon in China.

Whereas the English-speaking people, especially Americans, hold high of the equality. Deeply influenced by the Bible,

they believe that all men are created equal. All people should be treated equally before the law and given equal rights and opportunities. Therefore, their belief in equality has great effects on their address system and their actual use of address forms. First names are largely used in amount. People address others, even their parents, by first names, irrespective of the difference of age and social status. Meanwhile, they have no difference between paternal side and maternal side.

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