On Discrimination in Chinese and English Indirect Addressings

Lianbing Yao[1]

[1] School of foreign languages, China West Normal University, China

Correspondence: Lianbing Yao (PhD), School of foreign languages, China West Normal University, No. 1 Shi Da Road, Nanchong, 637009, Sichuan, China. Tel: 86-817-259-6394. E-mail: lbyao115@163.com

Abstract

One of the fundamental usages of language is to address each other. As a socialized product, language is bound to transfer its users' intention, the examination of which will have to be based on the absence of either the addressor or the addressee, or even the both. In the process of social development, there exists discrimination between different nations, job-takers, and genders. This essay tries to look into the discrimination in the indirect addressings in people's communication. The foundings bring home some implications for foreign language teaching and learning.

Keywords: indirect addressing, discrimination, speech communication

1. Introduction

As is known to everyone, addressing is a very important sociolinguistic issue (Jia, 2003). In foreign language teaching, there arises such problem as to whether to address each other or how to address each other if people are going to communicate. To some extent, we can assume that the initial goal of creating language by our ancestors is to assign jobs to different members. Therefore, addressing has been playing a very important role in society at the very beginning of human history. If we are careful enough, we can find something beyond people's addressing. Yet, people are supposed to stick to some principles, for example, Leech's PP, in communication. In this case, it's very difficult to find out their intention or implied meaning in their direct addressing. Therefore, we need to view speaker's implied intention or discrimination from another perspective, i.e. indirect addressings.

Direct addressing has always been examined in the academic arena from two aspects: one is its classification; the other is its cross cultural study. All of them focus on such direct addressings as Mum, Grandpa, and so on(Tang, 2004). Since these words' implied meanings have been given by society and through language, it's very difficult to find out the meaning beyond them by examining them directly. If we are going to do this, we have to examine the addressings with the absence of the addressee; otherwise, people will always hear those high-sounding words (unless they quarrel with or abuse each other). Because of these, we need to study indirect addressings, which are the addressings used by addressors when the addressee are absent. Because the normal usages of indirect have always been studied, we are trying to talk about the discrimination in them here so as to make it known to the language learners that indirect addressings might reveal the intentions of the language users.

2. Theoretical Back-up

Basing on Hudson's definition of "power" and "solidarity", Professor JIA Yu-xing (2003) gives the following explanation: power and solidarity are very important sociolinguistic terms, which are introduced into sociolinguistics by social psychologist Roger Brown (Hudson, 1980). "Power" can be easily understood because it's used to indicate the social distance between the addressor and the addressee, for example, the relationship between the employer and the employee. But "solidarity" is used to show the shared knowledge between them. At the same time, French linguist Foucault thinks that speech is the manifestation of power. All power is realized through speech, in this sense, the power of speech is the "power" of itself (Cao, 2003). From the above two understandings, we can conclude that speakers use speech to express their attitudes, intention, and the effect they want to impose on their addressee. Also, in socio-psychology, people are always trying to achieve "nearness" in

communication (Jia, 2003). Anyhow, in a certain occasion, people try to approach "farness" to indicate their distance for some reason, e.g. in the years of class struggle or if the speaker wants to defame the addressee.

3. Manifestations of Discrimination in Indirect Addressings

3.1 Between Nations

Each country, developed or developing, is totally different from each other. Therefore, in education, its people are always told to love their countries, even at the cost of their lives. Of course, it is reasonable and understandable, but if it is overdone, it's dangerous in that it might lead to chauvinism. The most obvious is the indirect addressings used by different peoples, for example, in America, the Jewish-American are addressed Kikes; the Polish-American, Polacks; the Chinese-American, Chinks; the Japanese-American, Japs, which are only several cases. In America, this kind of phenomenon seems to be developing in a systematic way. Just as some Chinese living in America report that the word "Chinese" seem to carry some discrimination. With the help of linguistics, people come to see even the suffix "-ese" is used to show those races having evolved from worms, strange, less important, and of lower class. For example, the following peoples are addressed in this way: Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese, Portuguese, etc. On the contrary, they use suffix "-an" to refer to such so called "superior" races as American, Canadian, Britain, German, Texan, etc. That's why the beggars will call those who don't give them money "Your Chinese", instead of, "Your Korean", or "Your Asian"(no matter where they are from) to humiliate them. If we are to have a literal study of the word "Chinese", we can find "china" originally means "something made of earth" (pottery, earth ware, etc.), combined with the suffix "-ese", the meaning of "Chinese" is obvious! As far as etymology is concerned, "-ese" can be added to some place, some person, some organization to show the language characterized of them—often in the derogatory sense, like Pentagonese, journalese, federalese, etc (Wang, 1987). Here is one more example, it is said that diplomat GU Wei-jun was once on his journey to America in a ship. Right then, an American went up to him and asked "Are you Chinese, Japanese, or Vietnamese?" Mr. GU answered calmly, "I am Chinese." Just as he returned to his seat with a smile on his face, Mr. GU asked, "Are you donkey, monkey or Yankee?" Yet because of the influence of selfish departmentalism, each nation has its own terms to discriminate peoples from other nations. In Chinese, we also have some unfriendly and discriminative indirect addressings, like *lao mei* (American), *mei guo gui zi* (American), *mei guo lao* (American), for Americans; *ri ben gui zi* (Japanese), *xiao ri ben* (Japanese), *wo kou* (Japanese) for the Japanese; *hei gui* (Nego), *fei zou hei ren* (Negro) for the African; yang *gui zi* (foreigners), *lao wai* (foreigners), *man yi* (foreigners) for all the foreigners. All these are the application of "power" and "farness" theories in addressings between nations.

3.2 Between Genders

Language is a mirror of society. The gender discrimination is not a natural process. Instead, it is a reveal of social value. Language itself is innocent, but while in use, its users add their value or extra meaning to it. Here, the gender discrimination is mainly the one against the female. In America, ladies are usually described to be animals: chicks, birds, kittens, cows, pigs, dogs, horses, bitch, etc; or to be all kinds of fruits or desserts: cake, tomato, tart, sugar, honey, cheese, sweetie, etc. In people's life, ladies are praised in the following way: "What a dish!", or "Good food!", or even "Delicious woman!" (Yao, 2003). In Chinese, there are also numerous terms used by the Chinese to bias against the female: ban *lao xu niang*(middle-age woman), *nv liu zhi bei* (ladies), *mu lao hu* (the female), *er hun sao*(a woman who remarries), *huang lian po*(wife), *xiao jie* (Ms—this term originally was used as a direct addressing, but since it was imposed the derogatory meaning, it is now usually used as an indirect addressing.), *ying zhao nv lang* (call girl), *wu nv* (a girl who earns her living by being men's dance-mate), *ju wu ba* (a big-breasted woman). However, as mentioned above, language itself is innocent. Its derogatory meaning is added during the usage by its users. A case in point is the word *xiao jie* (Ms), which had no definite object to refer to since all girls working in the imperial palace and whose serving their masters were all called *xiao jie*. After 1949, only whose who were born into wealthy families could be addressed as *xiao jie;* then at the very beginning of reform and opening up, this term was used to show respect for those young ladies of social status. Till the late 1980s, all kinds of night clubs and Karaokes are springing out like mushrooms, and almost all ladies there are properly dressed and behave properly, so they deserve the name of *xiao jie*. But because of the competition among them becomes more and more severe, some owners begin to hire those young and beautiful ladies to attract more customers. Since then, the term *xiao jie* was gradually used to refer to those ladies only. Finally, ladies are quite unhappy if they are called *xiao jie* and people are hesitant to use this term. From all these, we can see the meaning of *xiao jie* undergoes the transition from neutral to commendatory and to derogatory. In fact, almost all the discrimination attached to these terms are added socially by the users.

3.3 Between Different Occupations and Age-Holders

Job division is a natural social phenomenon, which is also a good chance for the individuals to exhibit their talents. But because of the effect of selfish departmentalism, people usually try to grade jobs. In doing so, a kind of discrimination is attached to some of the jobs. Especially, sometimes people gain their face at the cost of other people's face. According to Foucault's (1999) "power" theory, different job-takers exhibit their "power" over others through the different indirect addressings for others. For example, the cops, street girl, call girl, and so on and so forth in English; in Chinese the terms as *chou lao jiu* (teacher), *ni tui zi* (farmer), *jiao shu jiang* (teacher), *chuan bai da gua de* (doctor), *na shou shu dao de* (seagon), *nong min*(peasant), *min gong* (farmer worker), *gan na hang de* (prostitute), *jie fang jun* (soldier), *bing ge ge* (soldier), *sha da bing* (soldier), *bang bang*(a man who earns his living by carrying things for others), etc. The discrimination against different age-holders mainly comes from the indirect addressings for the old and the young. As one American linguist says, the terms used to address the woman over 70 can reveal people's attitude toward the female, for instance, we have the three terms for her: "the old lady", "the old woman", and "the old witch", among which the last one strongly reveal people's scorning attitude for lady. Similarly, in Chinese, we also have such kind of discriminating words like: *zao lao tou* (an old man is good for nothing), *lao ge da* (an old and useless man), *lao dong xi* (an old man), *lao bu zhong yong de* (an old and useless man),*lao chu nv(*an old spinster), *lao bu si de*(an old man is never too old), *lao nv ren* (an old woman) *mao tou xiao huo*(a green young man), *ru chou wei gan de* (a green young man), *huang mao ya tou* (a raw young woman), *zui shang wu mao, ban shi bu lao de*(a young man can do nothing well),and so on. At the same, one interesting phenomenon is that originally lao was associated with the well experienced, the sophisticated, therefore, if a middle- aged is addressed *lao zhang* (Mr. zhang), *lao wang* (Mr. Wang), he would be quite happy. And if he is really somewhat old, he might be happier if addressed *wang lao* (Mr. Zhang), *zhang lao* (Mr.wang), because this is closely related with the traditional Chinese virtue-respecting the old and caring the young. But in the western society, because of the severe competition, young people are usually more competitive than the old and they may even be biased against (Tang, 2004). Judging from all these, the conclusion can be made that the Chinese character *lao* carries both the negative and the positive meaning while in the west, "being old" is usually a bad thing which is regarded as "having less time to spend". Now, in the modern society, since the great pressure coming from the job market, people are becoming more and more aware that "being old" is not cherished by society any longer! For example, in the job market, some employers hold that if a perspective job applicant is above 35, he or she will be thought to be too old. Therefore the discriminative meaning in the Chinese character *lao* is firmly founded on facts.

4. Solutions

Language is a convention. Since its users have known that there exists discrimination in language, they try to avoid it. Nowadays, people have got the following ways.

4.1 Changes on Word Building

As some scholars point out, since the suffix "-ese" carries some discriminative meaning, we can simply put them away. Therefore, we can change Taiwanese into Taiwaner, Japanese into Japanish. In the same way, shall we change Chinese into Chianan or Chinish?

4.2 Changes on Indirect Addressings between Different Regions

Furthermore, as reported by the Beijing Youth Daily, the Fengtai government issued one policy forbidding the government officer calling the farmer worker as *da gong zai*, *da gong mei*; young lady as *xiao jie*; and the baby-sitter as *xiao bao mu*. Instead, all the people from other places should be addressed *tong zi* (comrade). In the similar way, Jiangxi province and Zhejiang province also adopted the same policy, for example, the latter called the farmer workers working there as *lai hang chuang ye zhe* (persons trying their fortune in Hangzhou).

4.3 Changes on Indirect Addressings between Nations

At the same time, because of the discrimination imposed on the less developed countries by the developed ones; because of the fear given to the developed countries by the developing ones, together with the imbalance between different areas, discrimination in the indirect addressings have become more and more complex. But we are quite glad to see that in Indonesian president campaign, all the five candidates claimed that they would never use such discriminative term as Cina, instead, they would choose to use such neutral terms as Orang Tionghoa, Tiongko.

4.4 Changes on People's Mentality

Of course, judging from the terms themselves, we can see that the indirect addressings are becoming "better", or "high sounding", but these ways are simply like what people do with euphemism. To be specific, if people still

feel terrified with death, or still feel reluctant to talk about sex, it is self-deceiving to use the terms as follows: pass away, expire, depart, go to heaven, be gone to a better world, or an affair, intimacy, get into trouble, and so on (Hu, 1995). Anyhow, this at least shows that people have been aware of this kind of phenomenon. Although this is only a beginning, it is a good one for the better. If only we are mentally aware of the discrimination, it will not be long for us to get rid of it. As *QING Xiu-bai* (1996) points out, if we want to eradicate discrimination against women, we have to discard such kind of idea in our mind first. In the same way, the reform in language must be based on the one in society. Therefore, the only way for us to get rid of discrimination in indirect addressings is to make the addressor and the addressee equal in all round.

5. Conclusion

It is obvious that language is all-inclusive, and it is ever-changing. So, to study language, we have to adopt the synchronical and diachronic method. With the development of society, the discrimination in some words are disappearing. For example, the saying that "whose who hold scalpels live a poorer life than whose who hold the shaves" does not work any longer. Therefore, *na shou shu dao de* (surgeon) is no more a discriminative terms. On the contrary, surgeon is the profession that everyone likes to take. Also, *jiao shu jiang* (teacher) was once looked down upon, whereas now, more and more youngsters dream to be teachers because teaching plays a more and more significant role in any country's construction and also in the competition between nations. From all above, conclusion can be made that it is impossible for us to list all discriminative words, and it is also impossible to describe language statically, and it is also impossible to prescribe language by any government or authority. What we are doing here is to make people aware that it is necessary for them to avoid using those discriminative indirect addressings in their communication. If we always address our Japanese friends *xiao ri ben*, or *wo kou*, it will not only enlarge the mental distance between the Chinese people and the Japanese people, but also cause the unhappy feeling between the two peoples. All in all, proper indirect addressings are beneficial both interpersonally and internationally.

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