



Pragmatic Failures in Cross-Cultural Business Negotiation Interpreting and Countermeasures

QIN Jing^{[a],*}

^[a]Lecturer, Foreign Languages Department, Binzhou University, Binzhou, China.

*Corresponding author.

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Abstract

Pragmatic failures in business negotiation interpreting activities are very important to the negotiation and may have great influence on the process and the result of the negotiation. It is crucial that interpreters enhance their interpreting competence and reduce failures in international business negotiation communication. This paper presents pragmatic failures in details including its definitions, classification and reasons. It also puts forward some tentative countermeasures to solve the problems during the business negotiation. After all, interpreters comprehending the pragmatic failures in interpretation from the perspective of cross-culture may not only help them enhance their communicative competence, but also keep the negotiation goes smooth.

Key words: Pragmatic failures; Cross-cultural business negotiation interpreting; countermeasures

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INTRODUCTION

With the increasing development of the world economy and various exchanges among people from different countries, international business is booming and interpreting makes a great contribution to promoting business negotiation. The interpretation's quality may

affect the process and result of business activity directly. However, when we use different languages to express two or three cultures, we may have mistakes to each other. People start to learn each other under the same cultural background because they have the common sense of values and modes of thinking. In interpreting, people are inclined to be protected by the unknown information and sometimes may avoid each other on the same event. During the interpreting process, interpreters are easily affected by different cultures, leading to different pragmatic failures. The possible and useful countermeasures for pragmatic failures that suggest in this paper can help interpreters gain benefits from the future cross-cultural business negotiation interpreting. Besides, interpreters can enhance their pragmatic and business negotiation competence from the pragmatic perspective.

1. DEFINITIONS OF PRAGMATIC FAILURES

Interpreters can find pragmatic failures with a narrow sense and a broad sense. Jenny Thomas explains that it is a situation that receivers are unable to perceive the speaker's intention: "Pragmatic failure in the narrow sense is the inability to understand 'what is meant by what is said.'" (Thomas, 1983, p.99) Most of the time, the listener is not having responsibility for pragmatic failures for lack of the speaker's pragmatic competence. The pragmatic failure occurs when the speaker fails to delivery the intended meaning that the hearer wanted to know. Pragmatic failure is related to the communicative act principles, violation of interpersonal messages, social norms, ignorance of the discrepancies in social distance, unfamiliarity with values and beliefs unique to the hearer's value. From a broad sense, Riley said, "Pragmatic failure is the result of an interaction imposing the social rules of one culture on his communicative behavior in a situation where the social

rules of another culture would be more appropriate.” (Riley, 1989, p.234) By communicative behavior he thinks that both linguistic and non-linguistic activities are the medium of information exchange.

2. CLASSIFICATION OF PRAGMATIC FAILURES

According to different criterions, different pragmatic failures belong to different groups. So pragmatic failure can be divided into intra-cultural pragmatic failure and cross-cultural pragmatic on the basis of whether the talkers have a common linguistic or cultural background. In consideration of the reason of pragmatic failure, we can further divide it into two categories: pragmalinguistic failure and socio-pragmatic failure (Thomas, 1983, p.101). But, people should know that these classifications are useless unless the pragmatic failure mentioned is based on the linguistic or related to language.

Pragmalinguistic failure is held by Thomas as the clash between L1 and L2 according to the rule that the linguistic differences linguistic from pragmatic power. This kind of failure contains not only “teaching-induced errors” but also “pragmalinguistic transfer”, which speech act strategies are not shifted from L1 to L2 properly. The language users are able to reduce the pragmatic failure through a series of systemic instructor training and improvement. However, the common sense is that pragmalinguistic failure has own skill in most cases. This fact makes it hard to change.

Socio-pragmatic failure originates from not only the different perceptions of the appropriate linguistic behavior but also different socio-pragmatic judgments of the same social factor which comes from a different culture. In cross-cultural exchanging activity, once a speaker insists on socio-pragmatic principles which are rooted in his native culture, his intentions may not be clearly and properly conveyed to his speaking companions so that bring out pragmatic failure. Compared with pragmatically failure, this kind of pragmatic error is more difficult to discover and overcome because the speaker’s beliefs and values are involved in it which results in lots of changes.

3. REASONS OF PRAGMATIC FAILURES

3.1 Different Modes of Thinking

It is a common phenomenon that different people have different modes of thinking because the different cultural backgrounds. People think that language is the main part of culture, and it can express people’s views and reflect different cultural relations. So, cross-cultural communication is usually confined by the modes of thinking. They may think all of natural things having diverse way. We may be affected by the mode of thinking,

especially in our perception. So, if things go on like this, our beliefs and value systems are easily influenced by it. In particular, the eastern world views and western world views are not having the common aspects. It is said that easterners are reserved and moral, while the situation is opposite in western countries. Westerners are inclined to make open statements, but they are lack of the abilities of using nonverbal expression. On the contrary, people in eastern countries may be intuitive who concentrate on the logic and contemplation of the universe. These disparities in the mode of thinking may have a great effect on how to transfer the messages to people in diverse nations.

3.2 Different Value Systems

Value is the major part in cross-cultural communication. In a way, most cross-cultural barriers result from the imparities in value systems. According to different value backgrounds, different people have different behaviors. So people may choose their typical methods to communicate with others. It is obvious that the eastern value system is different from the western value system. Westerners advocate independent and individual behaviors. They put more attention on the individual elements. No matter what they belong to different classes, they treat each other by an equal way. The individual is the most necessary part in society without considering the size of unit. The common sense is the paramount value. But for most of Chinese people, they pay more attention to working together, honest to others and obeying groups. Collectivism is used to tell in-groups from out-groups. In Chinese people eyes, collectivism has four means: first, one should value the groups benefit rather than oneself, especially the views, needs, and goals oneself; second, social customs and duty are decided by the group instead of individual; third, one should share information with others who are member of group; fourth, one should prepare to cooperate with other members in groups.

3.3 Neglect of Context

Because of all kinds of factors during communication, the hearer cannot understand the speaker’s intended meaning directly, then the interpreter has responsibilities to let them know each other clearly by making inferences. This process is not simply conducted by simple decoding but also relies on extralinguistic factors, especially the encyclopedia information, lexical information, logical information and context information (Kasper, 2001, pp.4-6). These factors can express the speaker’s intentioned meaning. It is important for people to have the awareness of the context of conversation. In general, people always habitually divide context into linguistic context and situational context. Due to the uncertain factors in different cultural communication, the comprehension of the context may have great impact on the understanding and interpreting of the interpreter. In fact, even though the same context has the same utterances, it is still has

quite different interpretations. At times, it is not enough to interpret the contextual meaning by personal words and the way of making a sentence. And most of the meaning is expressed by the situation where inferences can be made with larges of knowledge. So, in many instances, on one hand, the context plays a role in the process of limiting the scope of the speaker's intended meaning. On the other, it also confines the scope of the listeners. However, if it is inharmonious between speaker and hearer in the context, the conversation may not go smoothly. According to the complexity of the context, to understand the real meaning of a certain word is very hard.

4. COUNTERMEASURES TO CROSS-CULTURAL PRAGMATIC FAILURES

4.1 Interpreter's Cross-Cultural Awareness

Chinese culture is different from English culture. This situation has been expressed in the above part, causing pragmatic errors during the process of interpretation. Interpretation cannot stay in the life for a long time without language. Culture and language affected each other. Interpretation plays an important role in cross-cultural communication. So the interpreters should improve their awareness of cultural differences between Chinese and English in order to avoid pragmatic failures.

There are two ways to enhance the cultural awareness of the interpreters: to train the cultural understanding and to teach the cultural knowledge. For us, the cultural understanding is hidden and internal. It is learnt from the mode of thinking. But, compared to cultural understanding, cultural knowledge is apparent and external. It is from the pattern of knowledge. Whether from broad sense or from narrow sense, we can also learn about the cultural knowledge. From the broad sense perspective, cultural knowledge is not only related to the organization but also related to the society. Besides, interpreters should to be very familiar to the principles of languages, like different tones in different context, politeness, and the proper speech strategies. Language and culture should be gave the lesson which is regarded one of the ways to put cultural knowledge teaching into practice in the process of interpreting training. For example, there are many courses such as Cross-Cultural Communication, A Survey of English-Speaking countries and so on in college. They are playing an important role in mastering cultural knowledge for interpreters.

For most people, teaching cultural knowledge may be in the lower level in teaching culture. It is apparent that training cultural understanding is in the higher level. Through learn the cultural knowledge, the interpreters can judge things correctly and understand the concept of surroundings. As a result, our knowledge of the world is becoming larger and larger with the help of cultural understanding. If interpreters learn more knowledge

of the world, fewer and fewer difficulties appear in the cross-cultural communication. Misunderstanding could be avoided with the help of cultural knowledge during the process of cross-cultural communication. Interpreters need to be trained to improve their cultural understanding so as to understand cultures from the angle of native speakers. Therefore, interpreters put more emphasis on the cultural competence. Besides, it is important for interpreters to train cultural understanding and teaching cultural knowledge. It is improper way to develop the cross-cultural competence by assimilating into the target culture.

4.2 Construction of Mutual Cognitive Environments

Everyone forms his own special mental representation and cognitive environment with the help of communicating with the physical world. Three main reasons can explain it. First, different people have different humans' perceptual abilities in the effectiveness. Thus, even though people stay in the same physical world and gain information from this same environment, it could not say that they would get the same assumptions. Second, different person have different memories. The memories and the known assumptions affect cognitive abilities which are used to deduce the mode of speaking correctly. Third, everyone has his own way of experiences so that he will gain new information in order to form his cognitive environment.

Mutual cognitive environment is an important factor in the business negotiation. During the negotiating, if both sides learn all the information about the context, the process will go smooth and achieve success; or neither of them will feel it is an easy to continue with the communication, and maybe appear breakdown. So, interpreters need to learn more lexical information, which contains not only semantic meanings of the lexicon but also comprehensive command of linguistic knowledge. Besides, they have to gain more information about the encyclopedia related to socio-culture, customs and habits. Last, the logical inference abilities are also useful way to the mutual cognitive environment. If the two parties share more mutual cognitive environment, the hearer will get more accurate inference from the speaker.

Business negotiation relies on the hearer's ability of understanding the speaker's intention clearly. So, it is necessary for the speaker to make an assumption on the hearer's cognitive environment and discovery ways to show his intentions. With the establishing of optimal relevance, communicative effect will be strengthened, as a result of the pragmatic errors in the cross-culture business negotiations will be reduced.

4.3 Selection of Appropriate Cognitive Contexts

Cross-cultural business communication is a rational communication because it requires people to take part in this activity to discover the hidden meaning of utterances with the help of cognitive structures and cognitive

environments. If utterances are conveyed during the process of negotiation, the language itself may have an important influence in bringing about the meaning expression. Firstly, it produces knowledge scripts. And then the activated knowledge scripts form psychological schemata according to specific contexts. Finally, from the socio-psychological representation's aspect, lines of schemata will be conducted according to communication rules and cultural knowledge (Dan, 2009). That's the reason that cognitive context settles in the ostensive-inferential communication and contains different inferential results.

It is necessary to order information which is brought into exact ostensive-inferential mode in order to deducting and inferring for a successful business negotiation. It is the most important foundation that interpreter understands the optimal relevance between information and context. In other words, people get the maximal context effect with the help of minimal processing effort. In international business communications, people speaking different languages may not be the same cognitive environment and information. Thus it limits the activation of knowledge scripts and the construction of psychological schemata. Negotiators from different countries can't find the equivalent scripts or psychological schemata, thus producing and interpreting utterances with pragmatic failures. From this point, proper selection of cognitive contexts is a must for a successful cross-cultural business negotiation.

CONCLUSION

From the above analysis, we can make conclusions as following: It is complicated that interpreters translate

oral information from one culture to another in the cross-cultural communication. The culture decides the language which people can speak and the way of people speaks it. Literal interpreting is not enough for people who come from different societies to communicate with others. People should comprehend the same word and expression differently, so lastly interpretation is one of activity in the cross-cultural communication. It contains not only the transferring of semantic messages among languages but also the cultural messages. Interpreters should pay more attention to the cultural differences and pragmatic differences among languages for the purpose of avoiding misunderstandings and narrow the gap of these differences. Besides they also need to enhance pragmatic competence and linguistic competence by the practice of cross-cultural awareness. An outstanding interpreter has to serve as the mediator between two cultures. So, the methods to train an interpreter need to be changed from the traditional aspects of linguistic training to enhance pragmatic competence and intercultural competence.

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