

Cultural Differences between English and Chinese Figures of Speech in Sitcoms: Take Home With Kids and Growing Pains as Example

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Abstract

Due to the differences in cultural background, social customs and religious beliefs between China and the United States, the languages of each country show their unique differences. This difference not only comes from the construction and expression of the language itself, but also is deeply influenced by the cultural and historical background behind it, and different languages may produce different perspectives and interpretations when understanding and expressing the same thing. Rhetorical patterns, as an important part of language, can be analysed to explore the Chinese and American cultural differences behind them. Sitcoms were introduced to China in the 1990s and have now become an indispensable cultural form in modern entertainment life, and their dialogue relies on a variety of Figures of Speeches to set it off. This paper compares the two popular comedies Home With Kids and Growing Pains in China and the United States, and analyzes the most frequently used and representative rhetorical patterns, such as metaphor, euphemism and hyperbole, from the dialogues of the characters in the comedies, and gives the reasons for the differences behind them. By exploring the obstacles in cross-cultural communication, we can realise the harmonious communication of cross-cultural communication.

Keywords

Figure of Speech; Sitcom; Cultural Differences

1. Introduction

Rhetorical grammars occupy a pivotal position in rhetorical studies, and their structural uniqueness enables us to flexibly use diverse rhetorical techniques to achieve precise and infectious semantic expressions.

1.1. Background of the Study

Culture is a difficult concept to define. According to available statistics, there are more than two hundred different interpretations. However, no matter how complicated these definitions are, they all reveal a common phenomenon: the cultures of different peoples not only display their own unique characteristics, but also contain universal commonali-

ties. In people's daily life, from living habits to emotional thinking to hobbies, many cross-cultural similarities can often be found, and these commonalities provide the basis for intercultural communication and understanding. As the two languages are rooted in different ethnic backgrounds, they each carry unique geographic cultures, historical traditions, living environments, religious beliefs, and aesthetic concepts, which together have shaped two very different cultural systems. These cultural differences are inevitably reflected in the various communication processes of language - listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation. Therefore, it is especially crucial to correctly recognise and understand the differences between Chinese and English in transnational language learning and communication activities.

1.2. Research Significance

From the perspective of cultural differences, this paper takes the domestic sitcom *Home With Kids* and the foreign sitcom *Growing Pains* as examples, analyses and compares the most frequently used and representative rhetorical patterns in the English and Chinese languages from the lines in the play, such as metaphor, euphemism and hyperbole, and finds out the cultural differences reflected in the English and Chinese rhetorical patterns in the process of sorting out and expounding on these rhetorical patterns. In the process of organising and discussing these rhetorical patterns, we will find out the cultural differences between English and Chinese rhetoric.

2. Current status of domestic and international research

Hofstede's Dimensions of Cultural Differences provides a framework for studying cultural differences. Nowadays, the communication between different cultures is getting closer and closer, and different scholars will continue to conduct more in-depth research in this area.

2.1. Domestic Research Status

By the time the thesis was completed, through the search of the China Knowledge Network (CNKI) database, the number of research literature on the topic of "cultural differences" reached "47,549". This figure has been increasing since 2007, which shows that there are relatively more studies on the topic of cultural differences in the academic world. After combing through the relevant literature, it is found that the research content mainly focuses on "Chinese and Western cultural differences", "intercultural communication", "intercultural communication", "translation research" and so on.

In Deng Xiaomang's book *Dance of the Spirit - The Performativity of Chinese and Western Personality* (2009), the author takes the contrast between the psychology of Chinese and Western cultures as the main line, and analyses in depth such philosophical elements as human self-consciousness, personality traits and the concept of freedom. Through a progressive analysis, the book finally focuses on the performance of contemporary Chinese people in terms of self-knowledge, inner exploration and self-reflection, thus developing an in-depth discussion. Lai Hongling (2012), *Cultural Differences between China*

and the United States from Hofstede's Model of Cultural Dimensions concludes that the cultural differences between China and the United States are particularly significant in the three core dimensions of power distance, individualistic tendencies, and long-term orientation. Liang Shuming's book *Chinese and Western Cultures and Their Philosophies* (2020) mainly raises and addresses the following questions: what is orientalisation? What is Westernisation? What are the qualities of Chinese, Indian, and Western cultures? What is the relationship between culture and life? Can Eastern and Western cultures merge, or what is the way to do so? What are the future cultures of the world and what are our attitudes today? These books will help us to analyse the differences between Chinese and American cultures in a more informed way. Of course, only understanding the cultural differences between China and the United States is one-sided, and we have to look for comparative studies on Chinese and American sitcoms if we want to analyse the cultural differences reflected in the English-Chinese Figures of Speeches in sitcoms. Therefore, this study will take the cultural differences between China and the United States reflected in rhetorical patterns as the direction of the study, and take the cultural differences as the theoretical basis. Taking sitcoms as a starting point, we point out the differences in expression between English and Chinese languages through examples, and compare and contrast English and Chinese rhetorical patterns from a cultural point of view.

2.2. Current situation of foreign research

With the changes in the international environment, many foreign scholars began to pay attention to the topic of "Cultural differences" in the 1970s. The wide application of empirical research methods brought a more scientific and systematic research method to the field of cross-cultural research. One of the most influential figures in this field is Hofstede, whose famous book *Culture's Consequences* investigated the cultures of different countries, and the data in the book provided later scholars with the basis for understanding the values of different countries. His *Dimensions of Cultural Difference* provided a framework for the study of cultural difference and is often used to describe the impact of a society's culture on its members. In 1977, Schwartz made the first strict distinction between "cultural value dimensions" and "cultural value types", separating the two. This move minimized the impact of environmental change on the respondents but was influenced by the subjective thinking of the respondents.

In more recent times, the Swedish sinologist Torbjörn Lodén has put forward the view that the differences between Chinese and Western cultures are not that great. People sometimes over-exaggerate the differences between Chinese and European cultures, treating superficial differences as the essential difference between the two. This way of presentation may overlook the deep-seated commonalities and mutual influences between the two cultures, thus limiting our comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the two cultures.

In modern times, foreign research on cultural differences has begun to adopt a multidisciplinary perspective to study cultural differences as a whole without fixed boundaries. Cultural research stands on the position of the general public and puts the results in the

hands of the general public. Islom Karimov, *Exploring the Cultural Differences between Chinese and Western Cultures in Chinese Language Education* (2021), summarises the differences between Chinese and Western cultures around him based on his own experience of learning Chinese. All of the above literature can help us better understand the current research on cultural differences abroad.

3. Sitcom

Sitcom is a form of comedy that emerged during the golden age of American broadcasting (1920s to 1950s) and is now widely accepted around the world

3.1. Definition and Linguistic Features of Sitcoms

3.1.1. Definition of Situation Comedy

Sitcom, is a unique form of comedy performance. The roots of comedy can be traced back to the radio era, and today it has found a wider stage on the television screen. Sitcoms are notable for their fixed cast of stars and one or more relatively fixed settings, such as a family living room, a busy office or a schoolyard full of laughter. The plot usually revolves around one or more of these fixed scenes, allowing the audience to experience humorous situations with the characters in a familiar setting.

3.1.2. Linguistic features of sitcoms

- More dialogues. For example, in *Home With Kids*, grandma says: “You can't be a man without suffering!” Xia Yu: “Can you ride on someone's head by eating bitter?” This example exemplifies the humorous and witty nature of sitcoms. This dialogue was originally bland, but it creates a humorous effect because of Xia Yu's misunderstanding. This form is similar to the comic relief in comedy, which makes the audience smile.
- The use of dialects. With increasing art forms combined with language elements in traditional Chinese art forms, The artistic element of language winning in traditional Chinese art forms continues to grow, dialects from various regions have brought unprecedented linguistic artistic charm to sitcoms; for example, in *My Own Swordsman*, Tong Xiangyu is set with a Xi'an accent, and Li Dazui is set with a northeastern accent. The dialect is not the same as Mandarin, and some of the pronunciations are more unique and fun to listen to. Whenever they pronounce their lines in their respective accents, they come with their hilarious effects and the audience's experience of watching the comedy is greatly enhanced.
- Vivid images, rich corpus, and a variety of rhetorical devices. metaphors and exaggerations, such as the examples given in this article, are indispensable in the language of sitcoms. The use of rhetorical devices, you can make a banal words interesting, such as *Home With Kids*, Liu Xing often said to take “belly to belly” this exaggerated statement to describe themselves very hungry, if he just plainly said he was very hungry the audience may not be able to have a sense of immersion. He used the rhetorical device of exaggeration, the whole picture more vivid image up, Liu Xing this charac-

ter image in the audience's mind is also more three-dimensional.

3.2. Home With Kids and Growing Pains

3.2.2. Home With Kids

After his divorce, Xia Donghai (Gao Yalin) a scriptwriter for books for children returns to China with his son Xia Yu (You Haoran) and is reunited with his daughter Xia Xue (Yang Zi), who grew up in China. Later, Xia Donghai marries Liu Mei (Song Dandan), the head nurse of a hospital. Liu Mei lives alone with her son Liu Xing (Zhang Yishan). In this reunited family of five, both husband and wife are very concerned about the mental and physical health of their children, but the different ways of education and the mischievousness of the children lead to many hilarious but thought-provoking stories.

3.2.3. Growing Pains

On Long Island, New York, USA, lives this family. The father, Jason Seaver (Alan Thicke), is a psychiatrist. To support his wife Maggie Malone Seaver (Joanna Kearns) in her return to work as a journalist, Jason decides to work at home. In turn, he has more time to spend with his three children: his eldest son Mike (Kirk Cameron), 15, is a total troublemaker and a constant source of annoyance to the family; his second daughter Carol (Tracy Gould), 14, is an honors student, but she seems to be a bit out of touch with the world as she excels in her studies. The youngest son, Ben (Jeremy Miller), is a quick-witted, sometimes mature adult who is a nine-year-old. Jason's advocacy of inspirational parenting works wonders in this family, which lives in harmony. A story of love and growing up accompanied by laughter, this is the Seaver family's story of growing up. After Shanghai TV introduced *Growing Pains* in 1990, the show has been continuously broadcast on TV stations across China, becoming the earliest exposure to European and American sitcoms for Chinese audiences. It can be said that *Growing Pains* has influenced a generation of people, not only accompanying us in our childhood but also guiding us in the direction of our lives.

4. A Comparative Study of Figures of Speech in Home with Kids and Growing Pains

Rhetoric is a language art. In the western countries, rhetoric is closely related to the development of democracy. Ancient Greece and Rome firstly set up schools of rhetoric and conducted democratic elections through rhetorical speeches. The domestic rhetoric, on the other hand, mainly focuses on the study of rhetorical grammars.

4.1. Culture and Figures of Speech

4.1.1 Overview of rhetorical grammars

Wu Xiufang (2019: 2) mentioned that “figure of speech is a special method of some rhetorical descriptions used to make speech more effective in the expression”. Figures of speech are an important part of rhetoric and occupy a certain position in rhetoric. All figures of speech have a certain format, essential features that distinguish them from other

patterns, and their rhetorical functions and principles of application. There are 63 major categories and 79 sub-categories of rhetorical devices in Chinese. Common rhetorical devices include metaphor, Hyperbole, personification and so on. In English, on the other hand, English rhetoric contains two aspects: Communicative Rhetoric and Aesthetic Rhetoric. Communicative rhetoric is characterized by brevity, clarity, precision, fluency and expressiveness. Aesthetic rhetoric, on the other hand, is characterized by vivid imagery and colorful language.

4.1.2 The relationship between culture and rhetoric

Rhetoric has its origins in classical Greek, as the Latin phonetic “ars bene dicendi” suggests, and is understood as a linguistic technique of expressing oneself appropriately to persuade the listener. Figure of speech can be said to be the color of culture, making monotonous words appear colourful and wonderful, and it is also the wing of literature, giving the reader infinite artistic reverie. Culture without figure of speech can be described as monolithic. Figure of speech gives culture its different colors, while culture can also be said to be the carrier of figure of speech, presenting different kinds of figures of speech to us.

4.2 Comparative Analysis of Chinese and English Rhetorical Patterns from the Perspective of Cultural Differences

4.2.1 Metaphor

A metaphor is the use of thing A to describe thing B to be represented by the similarities that exist between different things. There are three key parts to a metaphor, the subject, the metaphor and the metaphor. Metaphor can be used to make a big point easy to understand, making it more accessible and giving a more tangible representation of something that is not easy to imagine. Metaphors can make generalizations more visual, making it easier to understand things and draw a mental picture of them. Metaphors can also be used to decorate a piece of writing, making sentences more lively and appealing to the reader.

For example:*Home With Kids* :

“Your mother is not a tigress.”

In this sentence, Xia Donghai compares Liu Mei to a mother tiger.

Growing Pains :

“What about mom? What if she's mad?”

“Mike, your mom's not an ogre.”

In this sentence, Maggie is compared to an ogre.

The examples above both use metaphors to describe the frightening image of the mother in the mind of the child, but the metaphors used in the two works are very different. In *Home With Kids*, the author compares the mother to a fierce beast, the tigress, which is a common metaphor used in Chinese to compare fierce women. On the other hand, In *Growing Pains*, compares the mother to an ogre, like an ogre or a vampire, which is a common image of a ghost in Western works and is often used as a metaphor for an in-

timidating character. As we can see, although the rhetorical metaphors between Chinese and English are the same in meaning and roughly the same in structure, there are still some differences between the Chinese and English language systems, for example, the types of metaphors are very different, and the reasons for this difference are:

- Customary reasons: Chinese people avoid talking about ghosts and monsters, so there are few references to such things in Chinese, whereas in Western countries, ghosts and monsters are more often described as ghosts and spirits, as in the above example, whether the mother is compared to a tigress or an ogre, they are more appropriate metaphors in both China and the West and do not have a psychological impact on children;
- Religious reasons: Buddhism has a deep-rooted influence on our country, so many of our national idioms come from Buddhism, such as “Boundless merit”, “Establish one’s life purpose”. For example, parents sometimes call their children “Ancestors” in *Home With Kids*, while in the West, religion is mainly dominated by Christianity, so Many Western metaphors are derived from the Bible. For example, Christians believe that a wooden cross can turn good fortune into good fortune, so the idiom for avoiding calamity is touch the wood;
- Natural environment differences, most of China is mainly land-based, like the ancient poems in which metaphors are mostly depicted in natural landscapes, such as: “The sudden spring wind combs all night through the trees, And the frozen branches clatter like jade in the breeze.”, etc. For example, when Liu Xing hears the name “Liu Xing II”, he immediately uses “Hybrid Rice” as a metaphor in *Home With Kids*. As the birthplace of English, Britain is an island nation, and the British people love the sea, so many of the English expressions are related to the sea, for example, In *Boardwalk Empire* Season 3, the cast expressed bewilderment with this: “ I’m all at sea over here.”

4.2.3 Euphemism

Euphemism is known as a euphemism in English, and is derived from the Greek euphēmizein where eu- means well and -phēmē means speaking, which together mean “to speak well”. Wei Jianfeng(2019) argues that euphemism is an elegant form of language that people have created to reduce the unpleasant associations that arise from straightforward wording and to make communication smoother.

In both Chinese and English euphemisms, words that are difficult to say are expressed more euphemistically but the differences in values, ways of thinking and language expressions between the English and Chinese peoples also make the forms of euphemism very different between the two peoples.

For example: *Home With Kids*:

Wild Boy: “I love you.”

Xiao Xue: “Go, go to my room.”

Liu Xing & Xia Yu: “Wow, boyfriend!”

Xia Donghai: “This is too”

In the face of Xia Xue's suspected early love, early love is a bad thing in the Chinese mindset, especially for roles such as fathers and daughters, so Xia Donghai, as a Chinese father, uses euphemisms when it comes to Xia Xue's bad practices like this.

Growing Pains:

“Jason, you are not ready for total responsibility.”

“I mean, face it, the boy is 15.”

This sentence Maggie is euphemistically expressing that Jason is still young, only 15 years old, still just a brat, not strong enough to take all the responsibility.

In the above case, Maggie is euphemistically saying that Jason is only 15 years old, indicating that he is still young, which does not require the audience to think carefully to understand what she means, and Chinese people like to think and push, as Xia Donghai as a Chinese father, and will not be in front of all the children's face to blame his daughter for her mistakes, but can only euphemistically express their own ideas, so this mode of thinking embodied in the language is Therefore, this mode of thinking is reflected in the language, which is a kind of implicit and euphemistic expression. Usually we need to go through the surface meaning to appreciate the profound connotation. It can be seen that there are obvious cultural differences between China and the West in the use of euphemisms.

The reasons for these differences are:

- Western culture emphasizes individualism, stressing the independence and creativity of the individual, preferring to let him develop freely, without or with less restraint from social, political and religious forces, and even when using euphemisms it does not require the other party to go to great lengths to guess what he wants to say, whereas Chinese culture emphasizes collective harmony and does not highlight the individual, as in the above-mentioned case of In the case of Home With Kids, Xia Donghai does not want to ruin his relationship with Xia Xue, so he does not directly point out Xia Xue's mistakes.

Expressions are different; we often say that Westerners tend to think more simply and straightforwardly express themselves, for example, in *Growing Pains*, when Mike introduced his friend to his mother Maggie, Maggie immediately replied: “He has a certain carefree charm.” While Chinese people like to ponder and push, usually we are required to push repeatedly to understand the meaning of the speaker, for example, Xia Donghai in the face of Xia Xue suspected of early love, he wanted to criticize Xia Xue, but could only politely express: “This is too”

4.2.4 Hyperbole

Li Xiandong (2012:1) mentioned that “exaggeration is a way of deliberately exaggerating or reducing the image, characteristics, role and extent of something to achieve a certain expressive effect”. Hyperbole can be divided into the “ordinary” and the “over-the-top” categories. Hyperbole is a figure of speech device that uses the richness of imagination to purposefully enlarge or reduce the image of something based on objective reality in to enhance the effect of expression. It refers to the use of exaggerated words to describe

things to stimulate the imagination of the reader or listener and to strengthen the power of what is said.

For example:*Home With Kids*:

Liu Mei: “ What's wrong with you, Xiaoyu?”

Xiaoyu: “ I'm going to start making an effort!”

Xiao Yu exaggerates the fact that he is going to start working hard by saying that he is going to be powerful, giving the impression that he will never give up until he achieves his goal.

Growing Pains:

Ben: Mom's right. nothing good can happen when you sit down to pay the bills.

The word nothing is a typical use of the negative to express hyperbole in English. nothing gives a clear sense that nothing good can happen when you sit down to pay the bills.

Hyperbole is used very frequently in English, mainly to highlight the essential features of something, to give a strong impression or to warn or inspire. However, an analysis of the use of exaggeration in *Home With Kids* shows that most of the exaggerated expressions come from the children's language, and the adults rarely use hyperbole.

The reason for the above differences is that the use of hyperbole is different due to different cultural backgrounds. Westerners always give people an image of enthusiasm and exuberance, whether they are adults or children, most of them are used to using hyperbole to express their feelings, Words like certain, absolute, and nothing are common on *Growing Pains*, as well as any other TV show. But the Chinese have always been about modesty. For example, when a foreigner praises a Chinese person's beautiful dress, as is our Chinese custom, we would reply: it is just so-so: “My dress isn't nice, It's ugly.” The different cultural backgrounds have created differences in the way we use hyperbole in China and the West.

4.3. Major Reasons for Differences in Figures of Speech

4.3.1. Difference in Religions

The religions of traditional Eastern cultures are mainly Confucianism and Buddhism, while the religions of Western cultures are mainly Christianity and Judaism, which are very different in terms of belief systems. In Eastern cultures, Confucianism and Taoism are dominant, emphasizing “benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and faith”, and rituals and rituals, while in Western cultures, Christianity is dominant, emphasizing “science, freedom and human rights” and the pursuit of individuality and opportunities. Western culture is dominated by Christianity, which emphasizes “science, freedom and human rights” and the pursuit of individuality and opportunities. The difference in moral values is that the Eastern culture emphasizes “benevolence, righteousness, propriety and wisdom” and believes that to be a decent person, one must respect morality and manners, while the Western culture emphasizes “freedom and human rights” and believes that everyone has the right to pursue their ideals and dreams. This is one of the biggest differences between the two cultures. This is one of the biggest differences between the

two cultures. In the above example, whether it is a euphemism or an exaggeration, the West uses them directly and clearly, while the Chinese need to repeatedly refine them to understand the meaning of the other side.

4.3.2 Difference in History

In the course of our thousands of years of history, Confucianism, represented by Confucius and Mencius, has had a profound influence on the world. This is why the culture of community has always been at the heart of our culture. For example, common sayings such as “Do good to others”, “Do not do unto others as you would not have them do unto you”, “Fortune and misfortune follow each other” and the common saying “As the saying goes”. The act of quoting language is a regular and continuous cultural phenomenon of the group, which focuses on harmony, so the Chinese focus on making each other comfortable and not arguing with others in the way they speak. Even if it is the other person's fault, to save each other's face, the Chinese will use euphemisms to tell the other person, and will not directly point out the other person's faults. In Western cultures, there is a greater emphasis on individual heroism and liberalism, on emancipation and the realization of personal values. We often see the word “individualism” in English literature, and human rights and heroism are evident in Western literature. For example, the popular Marvel Universe series promotes Western heroism by creating superheroes who give the impression that they can save the world, so hyperbole is common in a Western language.

4.3.3 Difference in Thinking Habits

China is influenced by traditional cultural thinking, “humble oneself and respect others”, “humility” and “modesty” are all traditional virtues that China reveres and are expressions of Chinese polite habits. When we compliment a person, the party being complimented usually expresses politeness in a self-effacing or self-deprecating manner. In the West, however, the opposite is true; their compliments are more specific and generally contextualized to the other person's actual situation, rather than out of politeness. When praised by others, people in the West will also express their gratitude and accept it gladly, but we often think that Westerners are not humble enough in this way, and Westerners cannot understand Chinese self-effacement or self-depreciation and think that we are not sincere enough. Here would be an example author saw in class, where a foreigner came to visit a Chinese person's home and the foreigner complimented the Chinese person's wife on how nice she looked, to which the Chinese person replied, “Where, where.” For us Chinese this is an expression of modesty, but the foreigner would be confused and thinking, “Is he asking me to say exactly what is beautiful?”

5. Conclusion

Sitcoms are easy to understand and can bring us joy at the same time. It is not a bad thing to learn about the differences between Chinese and Western cultures in the process of watching dramas. In this paper, we take the rhetorical patterns of dialogues in two sitcoms with similar themes in Chinese and English languages, namely, Home With Kids

and Growing Pains, as an example, and analyze the influence of Chinese and Western cultural factors on the use of rhetorical patterns by taking cultural differences as an entry point. There are some similarities between Chinese and Western cultures, but due to the influence of different factors such as history and culture, geographic location, religion, and life background, different languages are created. Rhetoric is not only a linguistic phenomenon, but also a cultural phenomenon. It carries the cultural precipitation of a nation for many years. Rhetoric is slowly accumulated and repeatedly summarised in different cultural practices, which contains different cultural characteristics. Its existence makes language play a greater role in human culture.

Intercultural communication is the theme of the times. Although there are differences between Chinese and Western cultures, we should develop in seeking common ground while reserving differences, and at the same time establish a high degree of cultural self-awareness and cultural self-confidence to promote the healthy development of our own culture, to occupy a dominant position in cultural exchange. The most important thing we can do to overcome the barriers to cross-cultural communication is to seek common ground while reserving differences and respecting different faiths and cultures, which are an important expression of cultural heritage and influence the lives and work of different peoples. As cultural exchanges between China and the West continue to grow, we are taking the best from them and removing the worst. However, it is more important for us in China to transform the good culture we have absorbed into something applicable to us, and thus to promote our progress and development, than to absorb and learn from Western culture rigidly. The purpose of cultural exchange is not to accept differences, but to find the common ground between the two cultures, to innovate and develop similarities, and to promote the development and progress of our own culture and the all-around improvement of our national strength.

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