Analysis on Pragmatic Failures in Cross-Cultural Business Negotiation Interpretation

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Abstract: As economic and social development deepens, cross-cultural communication is also gaining more and more attention. English interpreting is an integral part of international business negotiations. Pragmatic failures in business negotiation interpreting can directly affect the quality of negotiation communication, and sometimes even lead to misunderstandings and the breakdown of negotiations. Reducing the pragmatic failures in interpreting in negotiations and improving interpreting skills can play a positive role in facilitating international trade negotiations. Based on Leech's and other scholars' research on pragmatic failures, this paper discusses the manifestations of cross-cultural pragmatic failures in business negotiation interpreting from the perspectives of pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic failures, and analyzes the causes of the resulting pragmatic failures in detail. Interpreters should not only focus on language ability and interpreting skills, but also on the cultivation of intercultural awareness and pragmatic competence and thus promote international business negotiations.

Keywords: Pragmatic Failures; Cross-culture Business Negotiation; Interpretation.

1. Introduction

With the development and expansion of the global economic market, business negotiations, as the most important part of international business, are rapidly evolving and becoming more frequent. They are considered not only as economic cooperation and exchanges of interests, but also as cross-cultural communication between negotiators from different cultural backgrounds. However, due to differences in culture and the languages used, it is sometimes not possible to communicate effective language information properly. In the field of business negotiation, interpreters often have to reduce the differences between the mother tongue and the target language as much as possible and use the most appropriate language to express the closest effect on the mother tongue, to achieve equivalence of pragmatic effects. Business interpreters are widely used in various international business activities, such as international business negotiations, business receptions, business meetings, etc. Therefore, the ability of the interpreter to translate comfortably and accurately between two languages and two cultures in an instant directly affects the success of the cooperation between the two sides of the trade. If there is a lack of intercultural communication competence, or a lack of sensitivity to different cultural differences, then it will manifest during business interpreting. That is to cause pragmatic failures and become a barrier to communication.

2. Pragmatic Failure

2.1. Definition of Pragmatic Failure

The concept of pragmatic failure began with the famous pragmatician Jenny Thomas, in the "Cross Cultural Pragmatic Failure" in 1983. In her term, pragmatic failure is defined the inability to comprehend what is meant by what is said. In He Ziran's view（1997）, pragmatic failure refers to the communicative failure caused by improper expression, rather than the performance error in the phrasing and phrasing process. Therefore, a pragmatic failure is not the same as a grammatical error. In the context of cross-cultural language communication, the appropriateness of a non-native speaker's discourse is far more important than its grammatical accuracy. According to Leech (1983), if a non-native English speaker makes grammatical mistakes, he may at most expose his weaknesses in spoken English. He would be considered a poor speaker of the language, and in most situations, native speakers would not blame him. However, if he makes a pragmatic failure, he may behave badly, be rude, be unfriendly, or even appear aggressive because he is unable to express what is being said and understand what is being heard.

2.2. Categories of Pragmatic Failure

According to the research in Leech's sortation about pragmatics, pragmatics would be sorted into pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics. Based on the research of Leech, Thomas argues that pragmatic failure has two classification: pragmalinguistic failure and sociopragmatic failure. In Jenny Thomas' view, pragmalinguistic failure refer to the equivalence of Chinese and English vocabulary and translation into another language according to the expression in the mother tongue, so that the listener cannot understand the speaker's intention and is prone to misunderstanding. Pragmalinguistic failure occurs when S (the speaker) gives a particular discourse a pragmatic competence that differs from that most commonly used by native speakers of that language, or when speech acts are incorrectly transferred from one language to another. In Jenny Thomas' view, socio-pragmatic failures refer to the use of different language standards due to lack of understanding and attention to the social and cultural differences between the two sides of the communication, resulting in the other party's inability to understand the meaning. Identity, culture, context, and familiarity with the topic are all related. Socio-pragmatic failure concerns the social conditions that are placed on language when it is used.

3. Manifestation of Pragmatic Failures in Cross-culture Business Negotiation Interpreting

Based on Thomas' theory, pragmatic failures in business

interpreting can be divided into following two parts. This article analyses the pragmalinguistic failures and sociopragmatic failures in business interpreting with forms.

3.1. Pragmalinguistic Failures in Business Negotiation Interpreting

Pragmalinguistic failures result from inappropriate transfer of linguistic equivalence structures from the native language to the target language. There are some forms to illustrate pragmatic failure.

3.1.1. Misunderstanding of Information

Pronunciation, intonation and accent are significant but unavoidable issues in business interpreting. For interpreters, in order to successfully convey information, excellent Chinese and English pronunciation, intonation and professional listening skills are essential. Therefore, a poor accent may affect the performance of the interpreter. Besides, as people from all over the world congregate in international business transactions, encountering speakers with a strong accent in business meetings and negotiations is inevitable.

Although English is a common language, it is various in different countries. On the one hand, for those who are native English speakers, those who come from the US and Canada may have difficulty communicating with people who are in the UK, Australia and New Zealand. As there are still subtle differences between the various English languages. For example, "underground" or "tube" of British English is equivalent to "subway" of American English. On the other hand, even people who are in the United States sometimes have communication barriers because the United States is so big that people from different area may have trouble in understanding each other because of their different dialects.

However, this difference is not large enough to affect the daily communication among those who are native English speakers. For people from China, India, Europe, Japan and Africa, whose native language is not English, may have accents with national characteristics. Therefore, a qualified interpreter should be familiar with various English accents and be able to distinguish them from Standard English pronunciations. Sometimes the speaker's accent could prevent the interpreter from understanding the original language. We can consider the following example in Feng Jianzhong's "Translator Jokes and Anecdotes".

An American has a business with a Taiwanese who does not speak English. After a business meeting, they usually play golf. Americans would politely say "Your turn, please." Each time they kick a ball, and the translator just sends the message to the Taiwanese in Fujian accent (a dialect of Mandarin) that "请发球." However, after playing for a few rounds, the American got angry and said to the translator "please pay attention to your wording!" The translator felt confused. After communication, it turned out that the Americans misunderstood the pronunciation of "fuck you" in "发球" in Fujian dialect, because the two pronunciations are the same. (Feng, 2007: 166)

Therefore, the incorrect transfer of similar pronunciations can sometimes cause pragmatic failures of languages from the native language to the target language. To eliminate such failures in business negotiations, the interpreter should be familiar with the various accents of the source and target languages. In addition, interpreters cannot ignore the accuracy of their own accent and pronunciation, which will provide the perfect bilingual speech for business negotiations.

3.1.2. Misinterpretation of Business Vocabulary

Within a language, words and expressions have many meanings. Some meanings used in business are used figuratively or widely and are very different from their ordinary meanings. For example, the term "truck" is commonly referred to as a vehicle that transports goods. However, it also has a less commonly used meaning of the part below the train carriage that powers the train's movement. Misunderstandings can arise if the interpreter does not have the technical knowledge in this area and interprets it as a means of transportation. Technically "serial number" should be interpreted as "license number" when referring to software and "serial number" when referring to hardware.

Another example (records of Siemens and Digital China's negotiation meeting in June 2006):

"We request you to issue a letter of guarantee as a bid bond."

Interpreter: 我方要求你方出具保函作为投标票据。

The word "Bond" originally means "票据，债券", but in this situation, it should be interpreted into "投标保证".

Suggested version:

我方要求你方出具保函作为投标保证。

The misinterpretation of the meaning of "bond" in some concrete situation shows the lack of the interpreter's professional business knowledge and the misunderstanding of context.

3.2. Sociapragmatic Failures in Business Negotiation Interpreting

Sociopragmatic failures appear when communicators ignore the social and cultural differences between them in cross-cultural communication. People from different language or cultural communities have unique indispensable part of culture. Thus, each language has its own thinking patterns, social values, and social beliefs and so on. Therefore, in cross-cultural communication, sociopragmatic failure is inevitable. Here are some forms.

3.2.1. Cultural-related Expressions

Each country has its own unique culture due to its geography, social values, customs, beliefs and living habits. Language and culture are closely tied, so each language has its own unique cultural expressions, such as proverbs, idioms, slang, etc.. Those unique expressions contain rich cultural connotations, which are obstacles and challenges for interpreters to understand and interpret in business negotiations.. Therefore, interpreters should be familiar with cultural expressions in the source and target languages to reduce sociopragmatic failures. There are some examples.

1.我们不仅要打造长三角经济圈先进制造业基地，还要在基地实现一条龙生产。(From a business negotiation in west lake expo in 2010)

Interpreter: We will not only build an advanced manufacturing base in the Yangtze River Delta economic circle, but also realize one dragon production in the base.

In the above interpretation, the westerners cannot understand the meaning of "one dragon production". That is because the character of the dragon is completely different between Chinese culture and Western culture. It symbolizes divinity and power in Chinese culture, while in Western culture it is the embodiment of evil. In this case, "one dragon production" is culturally relevant and refers to "integrated production", so if the phrase is interpreted as "dragon production", Westerners will be confused and may even have negative associations. The connotation of some expressions

should be highly valued by interpreters to reduce socio-pragmatic failures.

Suggested version:

We will not only build an advanced manufacturing base in the Yangtze River Delta economic circle, but also realize one integrated production in the base.

1.我方不会打白条。

Interpreter: .We will not give white paper.

In Chinese culture, "打白条" is a cultural expression that means "don't spend money for something". If we interpret it literally as "white paper", Westerners may be confused because there is no such thing as a white paper in their culture. But in fact, "打白条" in Chinese is equivalent to IOU, which is homophonic "I owe you".

Suggested version:

We will not give IOU.

3.2.2. Expressions of Figures

One of the toughest hurdles in interpreting is the representation of figures. The differences between the English and Chinese language and culture make people show marked differences in their use of numbers. This might not be a problem in written translation, but it can be a huge problem in interpreting. In almost every occasion, such as various seminars, business negotiations or press conferences, numbers come up frequently and constantly. Therefore, it is very significant for the interpreter get familiar with ways of counting figures in different cultures when understanding and reconstructing the target language.

Chinese numbers are four digits, but English numbers are three digits. For example, the number "123456789123" ,in the Chinese counting culture, it is divided into 1234,5678,9123 (1 千 2 百 3 十 4 亿 5 千 6 百 7 十 8 万 9 千 1 百 2 十 3). While in the English counting system, numbers are divided into 123,456,789,123 (1234billion, 456million, 789thousand, and 234). For interpreters, because of the negative transfer of different culture counting system, it is very difficult to interpret the figures above ten thousand at once.

Therefore, within limited interpreting time, numbers inevitably become a burden on the interpreter's memory. In business negotiations, if a number is misunderstood, it will bring huge economic losses to both parties. Thus, interpreters should master some strategies and have some training.

In addition, numerical expressions in Chinese may contain connotations once they are paired with other words, which may lead to sociopragmatic failure. For example, "我方的产品已经遍布五湖四海." In this sentence, the words "五" and "四" cannot be interpret into "five" and "four". "五湖四海" is a figurative expression which means all around the world. Therefore, the appropriate interpretation should be: Our products have reached each corner of the world.

4. Analysis of Causes of Pragmatic Failures

4.1. Differences in Thinking Mode

Thinking mode, which is refer to a way of thinking or the way people contact the world, varies greatly from country to country. Different regions, social values, customs, beliefs, religions and other factors may make each culture have its own way of thinking. Different ways of thinking are actually a reflection of cultural differences. Diverse cultures may see the world in very different ways. These differences can also be reflected in language. Language is essentially the embodiment of human thought, which in turn is a psychological reflection of the world around us based on analysis, generalization, reasoning, and judgment. As the world's two major civilizations, Chinese and Western ways of thinking are completely different. The former is subjective, intuitive, and synthetic, while the latter is objective, logical, and analytical. Because of these distinctions, Chinese tend to be humble, reserved, and collective, while Westerners tend to be direct, reserved, and personal. For example, the Chinese adhere to the principle of "rationality first" or to generalize before entering the subject, while Westerners usually go directly to the subject with the result as3 the starting point. Therefore, cross-cultural communication is often limited by thinking patterns. They may see the problem in a completely different way, which may create some conflicts in the communication.

4.2. Ignore of the Context

Context refers to the constitutive knowledge shared by the listener and the speaker. The knowledge shared is divided into two aspects: the language they use, and the knowledge of the world. Without such knowledge, linguistic communication cannot take place; without it, linguistic communication cannot be understood from a pragmatic point of view. Context determines how the speaker uses the language and how the listener interprets what he says. Without a specific context, no language can be completely understood. Therefore, context is the basis of communication and ignoring it will undoubtedly lead to pragmatic failure and intercultural disintegration of the communication process. In business interpreting, the interpreter's job is to convey the real intention of the utterance by considering the given context and adjusting accordingly. In addition to the linguistic meaning of utterances, non-linguistic factors such as facial expressions and body language also should be considered.

Interpreters sometimes generalize utterances regardless of ambiguity in words and expressions. However, even the same expressions may have different interpretations if we change the context. Therefore, context plays an important role not only in confining the scope of the speaker's true intentions, but also the listener's expectations. If we can consider context, there is less chance of cross-cultural communication failing in business interpretation.

4.3. Differences in Living Habits and Values

The Chinese people value more about interpersonal relationships, while Westerners pay more attention to efficiency. When Chinese people treat their clients, they often take them to different places for entertainment and meals. In the process of hospitality, they gradually establish a good connection with their clients, thus laying a good foundation for trade cooperation between the two sides. In contrast, companies in Western countries will conduct direct business negotiations or visit factories on site. They are concerned with reality. Therefore, inevitably, there will be some arguments when making plans. In such cases, translators have to communicate the two different cultural customs and values, rather than using direct translations, which may cause misunderstandings and thus affect the economic and trade relations between the two sides. In addition, in the process of conversation in our country, we usually get closer to each other and exchange some life-related and more private topics. For example, "What's your age?", "Are you married?" etc. However, for Westerners, these questions are relatively

private, and are usually not touched upon in business talks, only by close friends. Westerners are more direct and straightforward in what they do and usually do not bring their own feelings into their work. Therefore, to avoid misunderstandings, it is important for interpreters to clearly explain the cultural differences between the two countries.

4.4. Negative Transfer of Mother Tongue

Negative transfer of the mother tongue is a significant factor contributing to pragmatic failure in business interpreting. Mother tongue interference is closely related to pragmatic failure in international trade negotiation interpreting activities. English learners should comprehend their own knowledge of their second language, and strengthen a cognition of the mother tongue and target language system. In the cross-cultural communication of business interpreting, without realizing it, people become infected with their own mother tongue and use words and grammatical habits from their own mother tongue, resulting in pragmatic failures and misunderstandings in business communication. For example:

The Westerners: Thank you for your reception.

The Chinese: Never mind. It is my duty.

The answer from the Chinese is an honorific expression in Chinese. If the interpreter directly translates it into "Never mind. It's my duty." There will be a pragmatic failure. First, "Never mind" has some consolation and persuasion meanings, which is inconsistent with the context; Secondly, "duty" refers to "responsibility, obligation", but the use of "duty" in this context will make foreign businessmen feel that the tone is too important, and he would feel embarrassed. For this reason, it should be interpreted into "You're welcome. It's our pleasure." which is more appropriate.

5. Feasible Solution to Pragmatic Failures in Cross-culture Business Interpreting

5.1. Promoting Interpreter's Cross-cultural Awareness

Language and culture are mutually connected in intercultural communication. Language is a medium for culture and language is an integral part of culture. Interpreting is an act of intercultural communication. In cross-cultural business interpreting, interpreters face difficulties in conveying language and culture to business parties with different cultural backgrounds, and therefore interpreters play a crucial role in business negotiations. A qualified business interpreter should have a certain degree of professionalism and sensitivity to the cultures of various regions of the world. They should be more familiar with social values, cultural customs, religious beliefs and living habits under different cultures than others should. In addition, they should also be able to make a general comparison and induction between different cultures. This not only helps interpreters improve their judgment accuracy and language sensitivity between different cultures when translating, but also enables them to convert between languages more flexibly and appropriately. As an important cultural medium, interpreters cannot stop learning new cultures and accepting new things. They not only need to constantly apply what they have learned, but also do their part for business interpreting activities in terms of reducing pragmatic failures.

5.2. Eliminating the Negative Transfer of Mother Tongue

Correct use of grammatical knowledge can be effective in facilitating business English communication, but if used inappropriately, it can cause linguistic errors that can affect everyday communication. In Chinese syntactic structure, the adverb is a common form of verb, but in English its position is more flexible, for example, " He read quickly" and " He stopped slowly to stop eating". Verbs that modify the completion and manner of a verb are usually placed after the actual verb. However, Chinese people are unwittingly affected by negative native language transfer of English and are therefore likely to translate sentences that do not match their syntax and grammar. Secondly, translators need to use as few direct translations of English as possible, and try to choose the free translation method according to the local customs and cultural allusions of foreign businessmen in the business English communication, to accurately express the content of both sides of the business English communication.

5.3. Selecting Appropriate Cognitive Context

Cross-cultural business communication is a rational form of communication that requires people to find the underlying meaning of words through their own cognitive structures and cognitive contexts. If the conversation takes place while negotiating, then language itself has a great influence on it. Firstly, it is a knowledge script. On this basis, the activated knowledge script constitutes a pattern of thought according to a specific context. Finally, in terms of psychosocial representation, we will reason and deduce based on the laws of communication and cultural knowledge. This is why in thought communication there are cognitive contexts and contain different reasoning outcomes. For business negotiations to run smoothly, it is necessary to categorize the information that enters the accurate reasoning model so that it can be reasoned and inferred. This is key for interpreters to understand how information best relates to context. That is, one gets the best contextual impact with the least amount of processing work. In international business interactions, the cognitive environment and information available to different language speakers is not entirely consistent. This constrains the learning of languages and the development of ways of thinking. Negotiators across countries fail to discover corresponding scripts or modes of thinking and are therefore unable to generate and interpret the actual failed language. Therefore, the correct cognitive context is essential when conducting cross-cultural business negotiations.

6. 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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