

Comparison of High and Low Context Differences between China and the West

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Abstract

Different cultural backgrounds are important factors that affect cross-cultural communication and activities, and understanding cultural differences is crucial for promoting cross-cultural communication and activities. As English majors, it is necessary for us to clarify the differences in context between China and the West from different perspectives. Anthropologist Hall divides culture into high context and low context. It is generally believed that China is a typical high context cultural country, and the way of expression often depends on the background and context, while the West is a typical low context culture, and the way of expression mainly depends on language. This article mainly compares the emotional expressions of male and female protagonists, advertising slogans, poetry, and songs in Chinese and Western films and television, aiming to explore the cultural factors reflected in different contexts of high and low context between China and the West, in order to deepen our understanding of Western countries and promote cross-cultural communication.

Keywords

High and Low Context Culture; Be Reserved and Introverted; Open and Straightforward; Advertising Language; Poetry and Songs.

1. Introduction

The importance of language as a medium of communication is unquestionable. It provides us with opportunities to communicate with others, enabling us to better understand each other in a language communication environment. The linguistic community refers to this language communication environment as context. Context is the place and stage background where people engage in communication activities, and different contexts define different types and methods of communication.(Li, 2021) There are high and low levels of context, and the different levels of context also reflect the different cultural environments in which they are located. To study the issue of cultural exchange between China and the West, one can try to start with context research and explore the differences between Chinese and Western cultures from the perspective of different levels of context.

Today's linguists deeply observe and understand the various features of language, including their usage. They emphasize the social role of language and pay attention to their relationship with the surrounding cultural background.(Li, 2021) By comparing these factors, we can find significant cultural differences between China and the West. China is widely recognized as a country with a unique contextual culture and a typical high contextual culture. Its expression is influenced by various factors such as history, society, and politics. In contrast, the West places more emphasis on practicality and is a typical low contextual culture. Its expression is more limited by external environments.

2. Overview of High and Low Context

The characteristic of high context culture is that people value "context" rather than "content" in the process of communication, while low context culture is the opposite. China has a long cultural tradition, occupies an important position in the high context culture, and is known as the model of Eastern culture, while the culture of the United States and Northern Europe is at a lower context level. The concepts of "implicit beauty" and "minimalist beauty" have been fully reflected in both China and the West.(Lin, 2008) The high context and low context in culture are like the sunny spring and snowy summer and the lowly people in artistic forms. In short, it is a subtle and tactful approach, one that is clear at a glance. Of course, we will not compare the two, as different historical and cultural contexts may form different contexts. This is why learning a language requires delving deeper into its language and culture. At the simplest point, when we do some difficult English reading comprehension, we usually miss the correct answer perfectly, which reflects the difference between two cultures. We always use our fixed way of thinking to carefully consider words and try to figure out the implicit meaning, but in fact, the article expresses itself literally.

The high and low context of culture also reflects cultural diversity, and in this open and inclusive era, countries with different cultural contexts are constantly integrating. Then why does the high and low cultural context come into being? More reason comes from the development of history and culture. In the social stratum with upper and lower levels, being outspoken is the most taboo thing for the lower level. The more complex the social class, the more it will form a high context culture, which avoids the occurrence of contradictions and conflicts. This inheritance of language interpretation ability also plays an essential role in social development. In countries like the United States that have long advocated freedom and equality, they tend to prefer concise and understandable expressions.

3. Comparison of Chinese and Western High and Low Context

3.1. Emotional Expression of Male and Female Protagonists in Movies and TV Shows

Whether it is the ancient Eastern culture or the passion of modern society, love has always been the eternal theme in people's hearts, and even the most important theme in movies and television dramas. Whether it is beautiful love or disharmonious love, it can be displayed in movies and TV dramas. The cultural, personality, historical background, and living environment of China and the West are all different, and these differences are naturally and clearly reflected in film and television works. In China, love and marriage are inseparable. There is an ancient saying that love without marriage is meaningless. Chinese people generally need to understand and get along well when dating, and after marriage, they can help each other and grow old; However, most people in the West only enjoy the pleasure of sexual relationships and do not have great expectations for marriage. Getting pregnant before marriage is a common practice, and even if they get married, it is easy to divorce and reorganize their families.

In terms of the expression of love, there are vastly different ways in China and the West, so love in the East and the West also has different characteristics. The traditional Chinese concept tends to depict love as a gentle and romantic form, and often combines them with the beauty of nature, which is generally more gentle and delicate. In ancient times, according to the regulations of "The Command of Parents and the Words of the Matchmaker", people had strict restrictions on the relationship between lovers, so their feelings towards lovers were often more conservative and introverted, and their expressions were correspondingly reserved and reserved.(Yang, 2014).

It has to be emphasized that under the profound influence of Confucian culture, China has always treated women with an attitude of "men are superior to women". The provisions of "Three Obediences and Four Virtues" also make women more cautious in expressing love, so the implicit expression is particularly prominent. As a classic film and television work, *In Mood for Love* is famous for its unique emotional expression. There is a very famous line in the film, which is that Zhou Muyun asked Su Lizhen over the phone: "If there were an extra ship ticket, would you come with me?" In the film, Zhou Muyun did not directly confess to Su Lizhen, but expressed his feelings in such a gentle and implicit way. As a result, the blank space on the lines provides the audience with infinite imagination space, making the expression of the film and television concise and concise, while achieving a subtle and meaningful artistic effect, which is unforgettable.

Until today, although everyone knows about free love, for many Chinese people, expressing love to someone they like is not an easy task. Most people hesitate and even give up before confessing, ultimately missing out on their beauty. The most classic expression of love is "I love you", which is also quite difficult to say. The overly explicit expression of love is not easy for boys, and it is even more prone to criticism for girls, which may lead to criticism of "this girl is not reserved at all" and "shameless".

In the West, people tend to express their feelings directly, which is a more direct and open way of expression. There has always been a reverence for love in Western culture, and the concept of "equal love" and "love to the fullest" has deeply influenced people's views on love. Western men and women have relatively free communication, society respects free love, and family interference is minimal. With the development of the times, more and more people are willing to share their true thoughts with their loved ones and openly express their love without worrying about any form of pressure, such as being ridiculed or morally condemned by society. In the West, such behavior has received widespread recognition and praise. Whether male or female, when they first meet, their eyes are tightly fixed on each other. They convey deep emotions to each other through simple and gentle words and even actual actions.

Compared with Chinese culture, western culture attaches more importance to Love at first sight, and they prefer to experience good feelings in love rather than being tied by marriage. Therefore, love and marriage in Western culture are often unrelated. For example, Joey, the hero of the famous American Sitcom *Friends*, loves to enjoy love very much, so we can see that he can always express his love and even have various affairs with women of all kinds when he first meets them, but he is eager to get rid of them soon. It can be said that in love, Westerners only ask for what they once had, not for eternity. In the movie *Forrest Gump*, lines such as "I wanted to be your boyfriend." "I don't know why I love you. But I do." "I can't help it, I love you." can make the audience see the love between the male and female protagonists at a glance. They always express their love openly, afraid of missing each other.

So it's easy to see that in Chinese television and film, male and female protagonists always have to go through various twists and turns, misunderstandings, and twists and turns before finally getting together. However, in Western films and TV, male and female protagonists are likely to confirm each other's intentions in the first episode, which is also why many Western audiences do not like watching Chinese films and TV, thinking that the progress is too slow.

3.2. Advertising Language

Due to the increasing integration of economies and trade around the world, understanding the cultural differences and consumer needs of different countries has become increasingly important. In modern society, due to the progress of economy and social culture, advertising has become a part of life. Without advertising, the market economy will not be able to achieve rapid growth and development. One of the main elements of advertising is its slogan, which not only reflects the social background of the time but also reflects the characteristics of the era.

Advertising, as an important communication tool, has become an essential component of information in today's society. However, due to the different historical backgrounds and cultural environments between China and the West, the values and concepts of Chinese and Western people have undergone significant changes, resulting in a sharp contrast in their advertising slogans.(Yun, 2012) For example, China belongs to a country with a high context culture, so implicit and tactful words with deep meanings are often seen in advertising language, with the aim of achieving subtle identification and understanding between both parties in the language. In contrast, Western countries, especially the United States, as typical low context cultures, tend to use clearer and more understandable language to convey information, with extreme words such as "unique" and "best" being ubiquitous in their advertising language. (Li, 2021).

In the context of Chinese and Western cultures, the expression methods of advertising language are also vastly different. In a high context cultural context, advertising language is more gentle and implicit, adept at using emotional thinking, and emphasizing the role of summarizing and summarizing. Therefore, Chinese people tend to describe all information in an implicit and detailed manner to showcase diverse possibilities. By observing changes in the situation, the audience can infer important information or purposes hidden within it.(Li, 2021).

For example, the advertising slogan of Nongfu Spring in 1998, "Nongfu Spring is a little sweet", confirms the implicit and introverted nature of the Chinese advertising slogan. "Natural" has always been the core of the brand of Nongfu Spring. "Nongfu Spring is a little sweet", labeled as "natural", shows the sweet characteristics of the drink in a unique way from the perceptual level, as well as the concept of being from mountains. 'A bit sweet' not only provides consumers with actual feelings, but also allows them to deeply understand the perceived and experiential value of 'nature'. The same is true of the 2008 advertising slogan "We don't produce water, we are just the porters of nature". The brand put aside its identity as a producer and claimed to be just the porters of nature, again highlighting the "natural" brand tone, and expressing the sweetness and nature of Nongfu Spring from the side.

However, looking at the advertising language in the West, one can see its differences from China. Westerners prefer linear thinking in low context cultures, as they excel in describing objective phenomena through rational thinking and are able to summarize themes in concise language. In contrast, Americans place greater emphasis on expressive skills and use language as an important tool for communication. In the communication process, we will focus on what has already been said, rather than secretly pondering over what has not been said. Even if the situation changes during communication, they will maintain a clear expression.(Li, 2021).

For example, the advertising slogans of the famous American beverage brand Coca-Cola in different years are as follows:

1929- The world's best drink;

1937- American Happy Hour;

1938- Thirst does not need the other;

1939- Only Coca-Cola;

1940- Most easy to understand thirsty;

1942- Only Coca-Cola; Coca-Cola is always only buy the best;

1943- American lifestyle the world symbol ---- Coca-Cola.

The Coca-Cola Company has always adhered to the goal of the highest quality products. It has invested a lot of money to create an impressive brand image, which is also the basis for its continuous development and growth. The owners of Coca-Cola are well aware that only by creating a friendly atmosphere can consumers truly integrate into Coca-Cola's culture. Most of these advertising slogans contain absolute persuasive words such as "only" and "the most",

expressing their confidence in their own products and emphasizing the innate linear thinking and sense of confidence of Westerners.

3.3. Poetry

Traditional poetic art has a long history, which includes a profound understanding of human nature, praise of nature, and exploration of the unknown. The traditional Chinese poetic art has a long history and has been continued to this day. Traditional Chinese poetic art emphasizes the expression of inner truth and ideas, and showcases the artistic charm of Chinese tradition through techniques such as depicting nature, narrating history, and praising national traditions. The language style of Chinese is relatively obscure, but its language ability and literary cultivation are both strong. In contrast, British and American poetry typically conveys the author's thoughts and feelings through the narration of events and the shaping of objects. Traditional Chinese literary works excel in conveying the author's feelings and ideas through the grasp of the details and details of events.(Lv, 2014).

For example, Li Yu's "Senna occidentalis River":

Dreaming leisurely and distant, the ancient country of the Southern Tang Dynasty is in the clear and refreshing autumn. The vast and boundless rivers and mountains are shrouded in a faint autumn color, and deep in the beautiful reeds lies a solitary boat. The melodious sound of the flute echoes in the moonlit high-rise buildings.

The poem delicately expresses the poet's sentimental feelings of autumn contemplation. The most wonderful thing is that the author did not express his feelings directly and wrote about his homeland. Instead, by describing seemingly ordinary things such as a reed flower, a solitary boat, and the sound of a flute in the southern country, he was able to express his sad state of mind vividly and empathetically.

In contrast, Western poetry is more direct and open. For example, modern British and American poetry often focuses on depicting the psychology of lonely people in capitalist society, directly expressing the meaning they want to express, which is more in line with the psychological and thinking characteristics of Westerners.

For example, the Russian poet Lemontov's "Motherland":

I love my country, but with strange love!

Even my reason cannot defeat it.

Whether it's the glory brought by blood,

Whether it is filled with proud and devout tranquility,

Whether it's the sacred rumors of ancient times,

Dreams that cannot evoke comfort in my heart.

But I love - I don't know why--

Its desolate and indifferent stillness on the grassland,

Its endless forest swaying with the wind,

Its surging river water, like the sea;

I love to ride the car up the small path between the villages,

Through the vast night with a slow gaze,

Thinking of my night place, welcoming me,

The trembling lights in the deserted village by the road;

I love the light smoke rising from the wildfire,

A large convoy of horses and carriages overnight on the grassland,

On the small hills in the pale yellow fields,

The two shimmering birches.

I hold happiness that no one knows,
Looking at the threshing ground filled with grains,
A farmhouse covered with straw,
A small window inlaid with relief window panels;
And on holiday nights with dew,
In the laughter of the drunken farmer,
Watching the dance accompanied by whistles,
I can see straight into the middle of the night.

Lemontov expressed his deep love for his country in passionate language, completely refuting the false and decadent patriotism advocated by the Tsarist ruling group. He emphasized that only by closely combining one's own soul with the spirit of loving the land of the motherland and the workers can true patriotism be achieved. He did not use exaggerated language to praise Russia's glorious history and heroic military achievements, nor did he use fancy language to praise Russia's beauty. On the contrary, he used a simple tone to showcase Russia's natural scenery. This poem perfectly combines the beautiful scenery with the author's fervent longing for his hometown, expressing a strong sense of patriotism in a powerful form.

3.4. Songs

A song is an artistic form that combines lyrics and score. Through music, we can clearly feel the uniqueness of a country or a nation, and express an emotion or idea through music. The difference between Chinese and Western music stems from their environment and the rich traditions they possess.

For example, the Chinese song "Love Like Air":

Happiness is like blooming in full bloom;
Love stays in autumn and sighs alone;
It's raining heavily in September;
Wet my thoughts;
After the rain, the petals scattered all over the ground;
Make it a bookmark and hide it in your diary;
Time fades, past events fade brightly;
Leave traces of yellowing;
Our love is as light as air;
And I still can't afford it;
The past keeps piling up in my heart;
If you don't understand how to cherish;
Missing will expire;
Our love is as heavy as air;
The more I want to escape, the more addicted I become;
And memories are too crowded for me to breathe;
Can only embrace the air;
Pretend it's you;
Never far away;
Happiness is separated by glass;
Seemingly beautiful but untouchable;
Maybe you passed by;
Leave only one trace in my life.

This song symbolizes the flowering period and depicts a fleeting happiness. The blooming of flowers brings sweet memories, and the withering of flowers also brings a sense of sadness. (Yang, 2014) It reflects the Chinese people's pursuit of practicality, stability, and introverted nature in love, as well as the irreparable sadness when happiness fades. In traditional Chinese culture, love is a deep emotion that requires the heart to feel and give, but it does not necessarily need to be expressed in words. Sometimes, we should integrate love into every subtle action, as excessive language can only make the other party feel hypocritical. The expression methods in Chinese songs are closely related to cultural background. In Chinese culture, people usually do not express love directly through verbal means, but rather tend to integrate love into some natural scenes, such as lotus flowers and broken willows.

On the contrary, in the West, people tend to bravely express their love. They will loudly announce their intentions, often say I love you to their loved ones, and are more passionate about pursuing the depth and persistence of love. They believe that as long as you have the courage to love, you can make love even better.

For example, the English song "I Love You 3000":

Baby, take my hand;
I want you to be my husband;
Cause you're my Iron Man;
And I love you 3000;
Baby, take a chance;
Cause I want this to be something;
Straight out of a Hollywood movie;
I see you standing there;
In your hulk outerwear;
And all I can think;
Is where is the ring
Cause I know you wanna ask;
Scared the moment will pass;
I can see it in your eyes;
Just take me by surprise;
And all my friends they tell me they see;
You're planning to get on one knee;
But I want it to be out of the blue;
So make sure I have no clue;
When you ask;
Now we're having dinner;
And baby you're my winner;
I see the way you smile;
You're thinking about the aisle;
You reach in your pocket;
Emotions unlocking;
And before you could ask;
I answer too fast;
And all my friends they tell me they see;
You're planning to get on one knee;
So now I can't stop thinking about you;

I figured out all of the clues;
So now I ask;
No spoilers please;
And I love you 3000.

This song expresses a strong sense of love for a loved one in the most straightforward words. Comparing one's beloved to Iron Man and Green Giant deepens the admiration for one's beloved; Comparing their love with the love in Hollywood movies highlights their romantic love like a movie; The most famous lyric in the song, also known as the song title "I love you 3000", is even more romantic, using the usual straightforward way of Westerners to generously express love to those they love.

4. Conclusion

People from high context cultures may feel bored and verbose when they hear detailed information provided by people from low context cultures. On the contrary, people from low context cultures may be more willing to accept detailed information, hoping for clear and detailed expression. Faced with vague and ambiguous limited information, they may feel at a loss. Therefore, in order to enhance our cross-cultural communication skills, we not only need to understand our own culture, but also to understand the other party's culture and learn to empathize. By delving deeper into the differences between the two cultures, we can establish an inclusive and respectful way of communication, thereby promoting smooth and friendly interactions among people from all ethnic and cultural backgrounds around the world.

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