The Cross-Cultural Pragmatic Failure and the Implications of Foreign Language Teaching Based on Embodied-Cognitive Blending

Huang Zijian, Kong Linglin

Mudanjiang Normal University, Mudanjiang, 157000, China

Abstract: *With the language researches going advanced, the shortcomings of cognitive linguistics (CL) have gradually emerged. Based on this, Chinese scholar Wang Yin combined theories of language philosophy, cognitive linguistics, etc. to construct Embodied-Cognitive Linguistics (ECL). He revised and localized the foreign Conceptual Blending Theory (CBT) to the theory of Embodied-Cognitive Blending (ECB). The ECB has a batter interpretation. It explains language-related problems from the perspective of the processing and blending of "body experience" and "cognition", which is quite helpful to the research in the fields of Chinese and foreign literature interpretation, cognitive construction analysis, cognitive construal process, syntactic and pragmatic phenomenon research, discourse analysis, foreign language teaching, etc. In this paper, the author intends to analyze pragmatic failure in cross-cultural communication from the perspective of the ECB, then draws implications to foreign language teaching based on the ECB to help foreign language learners reduce pragmatic failures in cross-cultural communication.*

Keywords: *Embodied-Cognitive Blending; Cross-Cultural Communication; Pragmatic Failure; Foreign Language Teaching*

1. Introduction

In recent years, with the continuous development of Cognitive Linguistics (CL), more and more scholars begin to pay attention to the field of CL. Chinese scholar Wang Yin developed "Embodied-Cognitive Linguistics" (ECL) based on the theoretical foundation of CL and used ECL to revise the Conceptual Blending Theory (CBT) to be "Embodied-Cognitive Conceptual Blending" (ECB). This theory helps to conduct cognitive analysis of various phenomena in language learning and use, providing theoretical guidance for researches of language.

In the field of second language acquisition, second language learners will inevitably produce pragmatic errors in the process of cross-cultural communication due to a lack of knowledge of the target language, cultural differences, etc., which can lead to difficulties and failures in communication between both listeners and speakers. In order to assist foreign language teachers in reducing cross-cultural pragmatic failures in communication, this article intends to figure out the cognitive reasons of cross-cultural pragmatic failures among second language learners from the perspective of Professor Wang Yin's ECB and discuss how to help students reduce cross-cultural pragmatic failures in foreign language teaching based on ECB.

2. Where does ECB come from?

The ECB is developed by using ECL to revise and integrate the theory of CBT. It is a theory based on CL. Any scientific research and development are based on a certain theoretical foundation. The development of the CBT depends on its philosophical and linguistic foundations.

"Philosophy is the cradle of linguistics" [1]. "Philosophy is the leader of all disciplines. Any small changes in philosophy will affect all disciplines"[2]. The development of linguistics relies on philosophy. Western philosophy has always been occupied by empiricism. It had a significant impact on the development of other disciplines [3]. Lakoff and Johnson proposed the theory of "experiential philosophy"[4]. The core of this theory lies in the experiential nature of the mind, the unconscious nature of cognition, and the metaphorical nature of thinking[5], which has also become the philosophical theoretical foundation of cognitive linguistics.

For a long time, influenced by Western rationalism, linguistic researches have mostly focused on formal studies such as structural representation and coding combinations. The traditional school believed that sentences are sequences of words. Then, structuralism linguistics was born. It regarded language as a closed structural system. But structuralism linguistics itself has some defects. In order to solve such problems, Chomsky proposed Transformative Generative Grammar based on structuralism grammar. Later, Cognitive Linguistics (CL) developed. CL believed that language is not an autonomous system that must be characterized according to the specific process of mental cognition. It criticized Chomsky's syntactic autonomy and "linguistic innate theory", emphasizing the close connection of language components such as syntax, semantics, and vocabulary, and attempting to establish a more psychologically realistic linguistic system from the perspective of human cognition. But CL also has its limitations. For example, CL presupposes that language exists before comprehension, which conflicts with the assumption that language originates from usage, etc. [6].

Based on the theoretical basis of "experiential philosophy" and the shortcomings of CL, Chinese scholar Wang Yin revise CL to Embodied-Cognitive Linguistics (ECL), whose core principle is "reality-cognition-language" [7]. This core principle highlights the foundational nature of "experience", pointing out that language is based on "body experience" (reality - the interaction and experience between humans and the world) and processed through "cognition" (cognition - the cognitive processing of humans). "Body experience" is more inclined to the objectivity of language and criticizes Chomsky's TG theory; "cognition" strongly criticizes the viewpoint that language is a true reflection of the external world, reflecting human subjectivity and differences[7].

After Lakoff and Johnson, Fauconnier and Turner proposed the Conceptual Blending Theory (CPT). In this theory, conceptual blending is the core of CBT, which is a cognitive operation similar to analogy, categorization etc. It is dynamic (the theoretical model is shown in the figure 1 below) [8]. In human cognition, there are three major psychological spaces: Input Space, Generic Space, and Blend Space [9]. The generic space contains the common attributes of input and has the function of categorization. The entire input space layer consists of two input spaces - Input Space 1 and Input Space 2. The correspondence between generic space and input space arises from shared information. The information in the input space will be "blended" or "mapped" to the integration space for conceptual integration under the role of categorization. However, the 'mapping' process is selective. An important point of this theory is that an Emergent Structure (a square in the integrated space shown in the figure) is generated in the blend space, which "emerges" during the process of conceptual integration [8]. Throughout the entire process, conceptual integration involves three operations: composition, completion, and elaboration. Combination refers to the projection of information from the input space into the blend space, improvement refers to the mutual matching of information, and expansion involves semantic recreation, which further deepens the process of improvement.
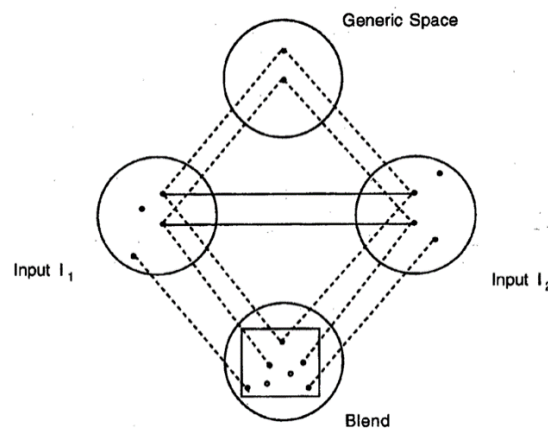

Figure 1 The Model of Conceptual Blending Theory

The CBT promoted the development of CL and cognitive science[10]. However, Chinese scholar Wang Yin thought that the CBT is not that perfect. In fact, the CBT does not clarify where the input and the concept come from. Based on this, Wang Yin, based on the core principle of ELC, proposed a revision of the CBT - changing the "generic space" in CBT to "five senses perception and categorization". The two input spaces were modified as "embodied space" and "cognition space". The principle of categorization was added to the generic space to establish an integrated relationship between "embodied experience" and "recognition". After the integrated operation of "embodied space" and "cognition space", "emergent structure" or "innovative structure" appeared in the integrated space[7].

3. Cross-Cultural Pragmatic Failure under the Theory of ECB

The proposal of the ECB can be said to provide a new perspective for understanding cross-cultural pragmatic failure, expanding the transfer and application of the theory.

3.1 Cross-cultural Pragmatic Failure

Cross-cultural pragmatic failure was proposed by Thomas [11]. Pragmatic failure refers to the inability of the hearer to understand the meaning of the speaker's words. In order to understand the speaker's intention, the hearer must consider both contextual and linguistic cues. The term "cross-cultural" implies that pragmatic failure not only occurs in interactions between native and nonnative speakers, but also in communication between two individuals without a common language or cultural background. Thomas pointed out that there are two types of pragmatic failures in communication: one is Pragmalinguistic Failure, which is caused by foreign language learners using the target language that does not conform to the language habits of native speakers or using native language expressions to express the foreign language [12]. There are two sources of Pragmalinguistic Failure: errors induced by teaching and pragmatic transfer. The former is easier to understand, while the latter can be seen as an example:

A (British people): Are you going shopping?

B (Chinese): Of cause.

In Chinese, "of cause" is a positive response. But in English, "of cause" often means a negative response. Therefore, when B answers A's question, his speaking habit of mother tongue will be inevitably transferred to the target language. Therefore, A will think that B's response is offensive. Another is sociopragmatic failure, which is caused by different social and cultural factors. It is related to values. For example, when Chinese students communicate with foreigners, they usually ask questions that are about the privacy, such as salary, age, etc. There are many reasons for pragmatic failure. The author searched for the researches about analysis of pragmatic failure in the past 6 years on CNKI(China National Knowledge Infrastructure). Dubtsova explained the causes of pragmatic failures from cognitive perspective: communication failure may be caused by differences in the linguistic and behavioral knowledge structure of general principles of communication behavior among communicators[13]. Chinese scholars conduct research Based on the practical situation of foreign language teaching. They believed that the reasons for pragmatic failure include the following aspects: cultural differences, thinking patterns, negative transfer of mother tongue, differences in values, and other nonlinguistic factors[14][15][16][17][18][19][20]. From this perspective, in recent years, a large amount of Chinese scholars has been explored the causes of pragmatic failure around these factors. Few conducted researches based on cultural and linguistic categories.

3.2 Analysis of the Causes of Cross-Cultural Pragmatic Failure Based on ECB

From the previous description, it can be seen that CBT helps to explain various semantic and pragmatic phenomena, promoting the development of CL. Therefore, this paper intends to analyze the causes of pragmatic failures based on Professor Wang Yin's theory of EBT proposed to revise the CBT, in order to expand the application of cognitive theory in pragmatics.

In normal communication, both sides have a mechanism which can categorizes the pragmatic context. However, they have experienced the process of communication in reality, forming perceptual knowledge in the "embodied space", and corresponding and mapping with rational knowledge in the "cognitive space", and be categorized in the categorization space, and matching the pragmatic situation. At the same time, "embodied" experience and "cognitive" experience are integrated into the blend space, forming a concept for output. Then, a cognitive process of communication is completed.

As mentioned earlier, in actual communication processes, pragmatic failure can be divided into two types. One is pragmalinguistic failure, which is caused by foreign language learners using the target language which does not conform to the language habits of native speakers or using native language expressions to express the foreign language. Another is sociopragmatic failure, which is caused by differences in social and cultural factors in the actual use of language and is related to people's values. In the process of communication, learners are forced to use language habits or expressions that do not conform to the native language of the target language to communicate with the target language communicator due to the lack of corresponding rational experience in the "cognitive space" of the brain and the pairing of perceptual experience received in the "embodied space", resulting in incorrect

conceptual integration in the blend space, leading to pragmalinguistic failures. Due to factors such as sociocultural differences, learners are unable to immerse themselves in the target language society and are unable to come into contact with the target language social group and sociocultural environment. As a result, learners are unable to form a perceptual understanding of the target language sociocultural environment. Before engaging in cross-cultural communication, learners already lack the corresponding "embodied" experience and are unable to integrate concepts correctly in the cognitive blend space, resulting in sociopragmatic failures. In addition, it is also possible that individual concepts in "embodied space" or "cognitive space" are not integrated and directly mapped to the blend space, or that an incorrect concept emerges after integration due to the insufficient amount of emotional and rational experience in "embodied space" and "cognitive space", leading to pragmatic failure.

4. How can Pragmatic Failures be Reduced in Foreign Language Teaching According to ECB?

Language acquisition is very complex. From the perspective of ECL, language acquisition is not what Chomsky said. There is no so-called language acquisition device in human mind. ECL follows the principle of "reality-cognition-language" and stand the view of "denotational semantics". It points out that under the mutual matching and integration of "embodied" experience and "cognition", people establish the relationship between language and the world, through denotation, constantly imitate, and under the guidance of adults, from simplicity to complexity, they gradually acquire the structure and meaning of language, and at the same time, they may produce new sentences in the integrated space that they have not been exposed to[21]. Throughout the entire learning process, ECL emphasizes the principle of embodied-cognitive salience - that is, language learning should follow the principle of embodied-cognitive salience and oppose mechanical learning and memorization[22]. From the perspective of CBT, the process of language acquisition and learning is a process of conceptual integration, involving the integration of psychological space. In the process of language learning, learners concretize, program, and visualize abstract thinking, and process it to generate new semantic structures. Learners, based on their own knowledge, process and integrate the information from the input space through association and construction, and map the input information to the blend space for conceptual integration through combination, improvement and expansion, creating a new structure in this process[23].

Professor Wang Yin, a Chinese scholar, localized the theory and, from the perspective of CL, revised the CBT into the ECB. Since it was born, it has been continuously developed. More and more researchers focus on this theory and apply it to various research fields, such as Chinese and foreign literature interpretation, cognitive structure analysis, cognitive construal process, grammatical and pragmatic phenomenon research, discourse analysis, foreign language teaching, etc. It can be seen that this theory has strong explanatory force and its role in foreign language teaching and pragmatic phenomenon analysis cannot be underestimated. Therefore, this paper will explore how to reduce pragmatic failures in foreign language teaching from the perspectives of "embodied experience", "cognition", and "blending", based on Professor Wang Yin's theory of ECB.

The "interactive perception" and "cognitive processing" of human beings towards real life not only determine the content of discourse, but also the way language is expressed[24]. Firstly, from the perspective of "embodied experience", the needs of real life and practical experience should be emphasized. Teachers ought to actively explore new teaching ideas in the process of language teaching. By guiding students to perceive, interact and practice with the real world and experience objects or events in person, students can gain direct experience of the target language and target language society, thus enhancing learners' understanding of the target language culture, and analyzing and learning the language from this perspective. Teachers should abandon the that are complex and dull teaching methods.

Secondly, from the perspective of "cognition", teachers should not only focus on the perceptual understanding of "embodied experience", but also teaching target language knowledge to students, actively applying the principle of salience to let students understand the conventionality and frequency of the target language, finally enhancing familiarity with the use of the target language and improve learners' understanding of target language metaphors, idioms, and irony [25]. In the process of language teaching, based on the "use-based" principle, students should be taught target language knowledge in a real context to enhance their language competence.

From the perspective of "blending", according to Fauconnier and Turner [26], the language output is essentially the output of conceptual blending - constructing a partial match between two input spaces, selectively projecting from these language inputs into a new blend space, and dynamically developing "emerging" structures in this process. In foreign language teaching, teachers should enhance students'

categorizing ability, in short, cultivate students' ability to find common ground from various things and classify them. This is crucial because in the actual communication process, if students lack categorizing ability, they will be difficult to sum up, sort out, match and integrate direct experience in "embodied space" and indirect experience in "cognitive space", and learners' creativity in target language learning, that is, language emergence (or innovation) ability will be greatly affected. This leads to pragmatic failures in cross-cultural communication among learners. Therefore, in foreign language teaching, for reducing learners' cross-cultural pragmatic failures, teachers must focus on the process of categorization and enhance their conceptual integration ability.

In summary, the process of language use is actually the creative integration of different concepts. The use of language should not simply involve understanding and memorizing the form and meaning through simple patterns. However, language instructors often ignore pragmatics and focus on the language form, leading to learners' pragmatic failures. Therefore, language instructors should follow the ECB to guide students understand the knowledge of semantics and pragmatics while guiding students to learn language form and meaning, at the same time, integrate the knowledge and culture of language into the foreign language teaching to strengthen categorization and conceptual integration, assisting students in enhancing their pragmatic abilities and reducing pragmatic failures in cross-cultural communication [27].

5. Conclusion

The ECB integrates CL and CBT, emphasizing the combination of direct and indirect experience in language learning. It not only "repairs" the shortcomings of CL in language pragmatic research, but also mends the deficiencies in the practical level of CBT and provides a new research perspective on interpreting the pragmatic failures and guiding foreign language teaching. It's expected that the foreign language teachers can apply the ECB to real teaching, following the core ECL principle of "reality-cognition-language", and guiding students' language learning, so that students can learn more pragmatic knowledge to experience and understand the target language culture when learning the form and meaning of the target language, and finally reducing cross-cultural pragmatic errors. In addition, it will undoubtedly be of great benefit to reduce cross-cultural pragmatic failures if future researches can explore and apply deeper theories of CL.

References

[1] Robins R H. A short history of linguistics[M]. Routledge, 2013.
[2] Wang Yin. Cognitive Linguistics and Embodied-Cognitive Linguistics May Be a Pilot Science Again [J]. Contemporary Foreign Language Studies,2022,(2):83-92.
[3] Wang Yin. Cognitive Linguistics [M]. Peking University Press, 2021.
[4] Johnson M. Philosophy in the flesh: The embodied mind and its challenge to western thought[M]. Basic Books, 1999.
[5] Lakoff G, Johnson M. Philosophy in the flesh: The embodied mind and its challenge to Western thought[J]. 1999.
[6] Liu Yang. Basic Theories of Cognitive Linguistics and Its Limitations[J]. Journal of Science and Education, 2012,No.214(22):113-114.
[7] Wang Yin. Embodied-Cognitive Linguistics in the Viewpoint of Postmodernism [J]. Foreign Languages and Literature,2014,30(6):61-67.
[8] Fauconnier G, Turner M. Conceptual integration networks[J]. Cognitive science, 1998, 22(2): 133-187.
[9] Yu Jianbo. The Semantic Cognitive Mechanism of Online Catchwords Based on Conceptual Blending Theory [J]. Language Planning,2021,No.473(17):67-69.
[10] Ma Ruixiang. The Scientific Value of Conceptual Integration Theory[J]. Social Science Journal, 2008, No.175(2):40-43.
[11] Thomas J. Cross-cultural pragmatic failure[J]. Applied linguistics, 1983, 4(2): 91-112.
[12] Shen Zhifa. A Review of Pragmatic Failure in Cross-Cultural Communication [J]. Journal of Xinzhou Teachers University,2005, (5):110-112.
[13] Dubtsova O, Petrenko V, Kovalenko O, et al. Lingua-Ethological Causes of Communicative Failures: Pragmatic Aspect[J]. Journal of Educational and Social Research, 2020, 10(1): 143-151.
[14] Liu Shurong, Li Qisi, Chen Xi. A Study on the Influence and Optimization of Pragmatic Failure on Emotional Turn in Intercultural Communication Practice [J]. Comparative Study of Cultural Innovation,2023,7(8):26-30.

[15] Wang Hanzi,Zheng Hong. An Analysis of Pragmatic Errors in Intercultural Communication in Business English [J]. Comparative Study of Cultural Innovation, 2022,6(19):38-41.

[16] Wang Ziqing. The Influential Factors of Pragmatic Failure in Chinese Language Communication in Cross-Cultural Communication [J]. Modern Communication,2017,No.468(22):89.

[17] Chen Zhiling. Analysis of the Courses and Countermeasures of Pragmatic Mistakes[J]. Journal of Jiamusi Vocational Institute,2017,No.180(11):287-290.

[18] Cheng Yanfang. The Reasons and Pragmatic Errors that Affect English Chinese Language Communication in Cross cultural Communication [J]. Journal of Jiangxi Vocational and Technical College of Electricity,2022,35(1):134-135+138.

[19] Zhou Yangquan. An Analvsis of Chinese FL Learners' Pragmatic Failure [J]. Journal of Longdong University,2017,28(6):43-46.

[20] Kang Hongjun,Zhang Lufang. The Causes and Avoidance Methods of Pragmatic Failure in Cross cultural Communication [J]. Ability and Wisdom,2017(33):225.

[21] Wang Yin. Embodied-Cognitive Blending Theory and a Perspective of Language Acquisition from EBT [J]. Foreign Languages Research,2022,39(1):1-6+54+112.

[22] Wang Tianyi. The Principle of Embodied-Cognitive Salience and Language Research and Teaching: A Resurvey on Embodied-Cognitive Teaching Theory and Practice [J]. Journal of Tianjin Foreign Studies University, 2023,30(2):48-58+111-112.

[23] Xu Shanyan. An Analysis of the Essence of Applied Linguistics from the Perspective of Conceptual Blending Theory [J]. Modern Communication,2021,No.551(9):187-189.

[24] Wang Yin. An Analysis of Embodied-Cognitive Linguistics from Philosophy of Language [J]. Foreign Languages Research, 2019, 36(3):26-30+112.

[25] Giora R. On the priority of salient meanings: Studies of literal and figurative language[J]. Journal of pragmatics, 1999, 31(7): 919-929.

[26] Fauconnier G, Turner M. Conceptual blending, form and meaning[J]. Recherches en communication, 2003, 19(19): 57-86.

[27] Fernández Amaya L. Teaching culture: is it possible to avoid pragmatic failure?[J]. Revista Alicantina de Estudios Ingleses 2008, 21 (2): 11-24.