

A Politeness Principle-Based Study on Subtitle Translation for Business Greeting Videos

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Abstract

With the continuous development of the global economic integration process, economic cooperation and exchanges worldwide are also increasing. People need help to meet and negotiate with their trading partners in person. Greeting videos have become a cheap and effective communication medium in place of in-person meetings. Following the principle of politeness helps to promote and develop relationships with customers and plays an active role in facilitating new business. This paper discussed the politeness principle of Western and China, which later on was used to analyze the source text selected in the opening ceremony of Sino Canada Health Engineering Institute. Combining the characteristic of subtitle translation, this paper then gives an opinion on the translation of the chosen source text in the hope of correctly translating the business greeting videos and matching the videos with appropriate subtitles while illustrating the importance of the politeness principle.

Keywords

Greeting Videos, Politeness Principles, Subtitle Translation, Business Translation

1. Literature Review

In the early 1970s, the British scholar Brown and Levinson co-authored the universality of language use: Politeness phenomena, proposed a general theory of cross-cultural politeness phenomena; its core is that we often say “face” they considered polite society of regular communication, namely “rational man” with face demand, to meet the need of the face of all sorts of rational behavior. Their view is called “face preservation theory”. On this basis, the linguists Leach (Leech) using cost-benefit analysis theory to discuss the polite asymmetry, namely speech ACTS on the profits and losses of the speaker and the hearer. Po-

lite, he argues, is to benefit others as far as possible, try to make my injury, form the benefit of others and make themselves cheated in proportion to the degree of the relationship. Based on this view, the politeness principle was designed for the six directions:

- 1) The appropriate principles: less as far as possible, let others damage, and benefit others as much as possible.
- 2) Liberal principles: as far as possible for your good, allow yourself as much as possible.
- 3) Recognition criteria: belittle others less as far as possible, as much as possible praise others.
- 4) Modest principles: praise yourself less as far as possible, degrade yourself as much as possible.
- 5) Consistent principles: to minimize their disagreement with others, try to increase their consistency.
- 6) Sympathy principles: minimize the apple of discord between oneself and others and improve his sympathy with others.

English education expert Professor Gu Yue Kingdom in China's "politeness, pragmatics and culture", summarizes the four primary factors of Chinese cultural manners and summarizes the five on the background of Chinese cultural politeness principles: 1) fall own statue of the rule of man; 2) call guidelines; 3) cultured principles; 4) seek common rule; 5), say, line criteria.

2. Background Introduction

Thanks to the technology today, by producing such videos, the speaker can easily express their heartfelt words without actually spending time to be on site. The outbreak of the Covid 19 epidemic has made travel extra tricky and has become the leading cause for the absence of many large-scale multinational occasions. Consequently, greeting videos are commonly seen at social events today.

Greeting videos on festive business occasions can also be considered intercultural social communication and will, in a way, bridge the gap between two business partners. As crucial as it is, translating such videos needs translators to pay special attention to emotions and manners to deliver accurate and appropriate corresponding translations and eliminate the probability of misunderstanding.

In 1944, the concept of "face" was initially introduced from China to the word by Chinese anthropologist Hu Xianjin (Ren & Liu, 2020). The American sociologist Erving Goffman then put forward the "face theory" from the sociology perspective in the 1950s. He believes that "face" is a positive social value that people effectively win for themselves in social interaction; it is the individual's self-expression. He also proposed that the face project is an interactive process, and the best way not to lose face is not to hurt other people's faces. Later, Goffman discussed interpersonal relationships in more detail based on this concept, which provided much data for sociolinguistics studies.

However, it was Brown and Levinson formally introduced the face theory to

the discussion of linguistics. In 1987, Brown and Levinson published the paper: *Universals in language usage: politeness phenomena* which, for the first time, systematically discussed the theory of politeness and face based on Goffman's previous studies. According to Brown and Levinson, the look is a personal image that every society members wish to earn. They believe this unique image can be damaged, maintained or enhanced. Even with different cultural background today, the face theory, as they mentioned in their paper, have its universality. People engaged in communication always have two types of faces: cheerful faces (expect to win other people's affection, love, appreciation and respect) and hostile looks (the desire for their behavior is not interfered with, and they would have their freedom to choose). After conducting a systematic study of "face", Brown and Levinson suggested that every conversation threatens the cheerful face and negative face. Therefore all verbal behavior is a threat to the front. Politeness conversation, on the other hand, protects the face and reduces the level of face-threatening behavior.

To a certain extent, the politeness principle is proposed to explain some phenomena that the cooperative guide cannot explain. The Cooperative Principle was presented by the linguist Herbert Paul Grice in his book "Logic and Conversation". According to the cooperative principle, communication through language requires both parties to follow the four directions, which are: the Maxim of Quantity, the Maxim of Quality, the Maxim of Relation, and The Maxim of Manner. To achieve the purpose of communication, both parties can deliberately violate these principles by speaking of matters that are not true or speaking of irrelevant issues. The cooperative code only explains that the communicator intentionally violates the norm to obtain particular conversational goals. Still, it needs to explain why the communicators speak in such a way.

Leech proposed the politeness principle based on the face theory by Goffman and Brown, and Levinson to explain the indirectness of conversations that the cooperative guide cannot explain. British linguist Leech studies pragmatics from a rhetorical perspective (Zeng, 2022). He divided pragmatics into general pragmatics and social pragmatics. The former studies the conversational principles that constrain the process of verbal communication and focus on the different roles these informal principles play in other societies and cultures. He proposed the rhetorical regulations of general pragmatics include two significant rhetorics: interpersonal rhetoric and discourse rhetoric. The politeness principle is one of the essential pragmatic principles in interpersonal rhetoric studies. In 1983, Leech listed six politeness principles according to the characteristics of British culture, which are: The Maxim of Tact (minimize the cost to others, minimize the benefit to others); The Maxim of Generosity (reduce the use to self, minimize the cost to self); The Maxim of Approbation/Flattery (minimize dispraise of others, maximize praise of others); The Maxim of Modesty (minimize recognition of self, maximize dispraise of self); The Maxim of Agreement (minimize disagreement between self and others, maximize agreement between self and others); The Maxim of Sympathy (minimize antipathy between self and others,

maximize sympathy between self and others).

Looking back at China, the Chinese have a different set of politeness principles throughout the long history of its language and culture. Chinese scholar Gu Yueguo put forward four characteristics of Chinese politeness in 1990: respectfulness, modesty, attitudinal warmth and refinement. He explained that respectfulness is self-respect and appreciation for each other; modesty refers to another way of degrading oneself and respecting others; attitudinal warmth is expressed as caring, considerate, and hospitable; refinement relates to manners and conversation. He combines the characteristics of the politeness principle in different cultural backgrounds with the features of Chinese politeness (Qin & Ruan, 2022). The politeness principle became one of the essential principles in explaining the meaning of the conversation.

Although politeness exists in Chinese and Western cultures, the content and priority are different. The Western emphasizes the freedom of individual behavior and the satisfaction of self-wishes, representing a self-centered social value. While the Chinese, on the other hand, believe that the individual's needs should not surpass their social status or class, which represents the values of an individual belonging to the society. In Western culture, the Maxim of Tact is a core concept of the politeness principle, while Chinese people follow the maxim of self-belittling and respecting others. In Chinese culture, this maximum is widespread and acknowledged since the Chinese have always believed that the upper and lower class have its own principles to follow, the noble and the lowly have their duties, the elder and the younger have their rank, and the rich and the poor have their limits. For example, in Chinese Han culture, the younger generation can not call the elder's name directly (Dai, 2022). While in Western countries, however, especially the British and American countries, the younger generation calls the elder's name directly. Although there are many similarities between Chinese and Western politeness standards, the differences are also evident (Ren & Liu, 2020). Therefore, in translation practice, attention must be paid to the relationship and interaction between the polite principles in different languages or cultures to ensure the source text and the target text would cope with the corresponding politeness standards.

Through the previous studies on the translation strategies of business letters, the translation strategies of business letters need to be further strengthened. In this thesis, the author should focus on the English-Chinese translation strategy of business letters to help our country find more appropriate translation strategies (Betti & Yousif, 2022). I hope to find out the obstacles in translating and communicating business letters at home and abroad to facilitate friendly cooperation between the two sides of the trade.

3. Politeness Principle and Greeting Videos Translation

The politeness principle, as the basic principle of interpersonal communication, can help people deal with interpersonal relationships and is a common pheno-

menon in social touch, which can also be applied in business translation and has been introduced to business translation. Many studies have shown that translators following or applying politeness principles made significant differences in business translation. However, greeting videos have recently become popular on business occasions due to the travel difficulties caused by COVID-19. A matching and appropriate subtitle for such videos is significant because minor mistakes might lead to misunderstandings or even be offensive.

Greeting videos on festive business occasions are often used to express congratulations or sincere emotions or wishes to each other. These videos are generally drafted as soon as the event occurs and should be sent out in time. The most significant feature of such videos is to congratulate and celebrate each other; the relationship should be warm and straightforward, the language should be clear, fluent, and short, and the length of such videos should be manageable. Speakers in such videos should deliver an appropriate and accurate short speech based on their status. And by having such videos, hope and encouragement would be given to the audience by praising the congratulatory achievements, significant contributions and spiritual qualities. Therefore correctly translating the subtitle for such videos helps to leave a good impression on the audience and may even assist in moving along the business.

Unlike other written translation works, subtitle translation has its standards. First, unlike reading a book where the reader could read the words repeatedly, the language in videos is transitory audio that cannot be re-watched. This means the translation of the subtitle needs to be easily understandable and clear for the eye. Secondly, in subtitle translation, the length of the target text was constrained by the screen's space and the source text's size. The appropriate length of the target text might affect the whole image of the video since the video is a combination of print, audio and subtitle. On the other hand, shorter sentences will be challenging for the audience to watch in a limited amount of time.

The following four source texts were selected as examples from the opening ceremony of the Sino Canada health engineering institute (SCHERI), which are translated based on the translation standards of the subtitle and the politeness principle.

Source text 1: Hello, on behalf of the province of Manitoba. Thank you, Micheal Zhang, for inviting me. The people of the province of Manitoba have had a relationship with your region for over 20 years in agriculture, exchange, education, trade, and hospital interaction.

Target Text 1A: 大家好，我代表马尼托巴省，感谢张博士邀请我讲话。曼尼托巴人民与贵省在农业，交流，教育，贸易和医院互动方面建立了超过 20 年的关系。

Target Text 2B: 大家好，我代表马尼托巴省，感谢迈克尔张邀请我讲话。曼尼托巴人民与贵省在农业，交流，教育，贸易和医院互动方面建立了超过 20 年的关系。

The speaker followed the tact and generosity maxim by thanking Mr. Zhang for giving him a chance to deliver a speech on such an occasion. By showing ap-

preciation for the opportunity to provide an address, the speaker showed his respect to Mr. Zhang and gave him the benefit.

On the other hand, in Chinese culture, special attention is paid to others. People in China are required to respect others, be humble to themselves, and respect and love each other among equals. Family members in China cannot be called by their names directly. In addition, at work, Chinese people always refer to others by their surname and title combined. Such as Secretary Li, Manager Liu, and Director Chen. While Westerners establish an unfettered and harmonious interpersonal relationship with others and rarely address friends and acquaintances as “Mr., Madam”. They think this will create a sense of distance, so regardless of their social status and age, they like to call each other by their first names, even parents and children. So here in the source text, the speaker calls Mr. Zhang Micheal Zhang instead of the Dean. However, in the target text 1A, “Micheal Zhang” was translated as Doctor Zhang, which is more appropriate in Chinese Culture. In target text 1B, “Micheal Zhang” was directly translated, which could seem offensive and disrespectful, which violated the speaker’s intention.

Source text 2: I’d like to thank particularly thank SHERI for giving us this opportunity to show our true partnership with SHERI and Cuberessa that we’re doing and supporting here at the Lawson and health research institute, Thank you.

Target text 2A: 在这里，我要特别感谢 **SHERI** 给我们这次机会，劳森与 SHERI 和 Cuberessa 是真挚的合作伙伴，我们也会继续在劳森健康研究所给大家提供支持，谢谢。

Target text 2B: 在这里，很高兴 **SHERI** 给我们这次机会，劳森与 SHERI 和 Cuberessa 是真挚的合作伙伴，我们也会继续在劳森健康研究所给大家提供支持。

In Source text two, the speaker followed the generosity maximum. Cuberessa and SCHERI are two companies working together due to the same business goal. However, in the source text, the English speaker expressed his gratitude for allowing him to work with SHERI, while in reality, the two companies were equally important in this cooperation. The speaker tried to benefit the other party by giving all the credit to SHERI and manifested politeness in the sentences.

In the source text, the speaker thanked SHERI twice in one sentence. This is very obvious in western culture. Westerners more frequently use apologies and appreciation than other places in the world. Usually, they will feel polite to show their preferences as long as they think you have helped them. This behavior gradually became a custom, and the word “thank you” was their habitual answer, and it did not contain much gratitude. However, Chinese people feel incomprehensible or slightly annoyed by friends constantly saying “thank you”. In Chinese culture, showing appreciation for every trivial matter only exists for strangers, and by doing that, one may upset and estrange the other. In addition, compared with the straightforward way of expressing gratitude in the West,

people in China said their appreciation more euphemistically. In countries like the United Kingdom and the United States, expressions of gratitude can be expressed as “Thank you”, “Thank you a lot,” and “Thank you very much”. When others help one, people are more likely to say phrases like “Well done”, “I’m sorry to bother you”, and “I’m so sorry, I need your help” instead of the phrases’ thank you directly. While translating source text 2, the speaker and the company SCHERI were merely at the beginning of their cooperation and barely knew each other. Hence in the target text 2A, both “thank you” were directly translated to show respect and leave the original meaning intact. In target text 2B, however, the first “thank you” was translated as “happy to have the opportunity”, and the second “thank you” was not restated in the source text, which could be identified as disrespectful or condescending.

Source text 3: It is a great pleasure for me to participate in this conference at the University of Science and Technology in Hefei, china. I’m presenting our ideas and opinions on interactive MRI robotics and link technologies.

Target text 3A: 非常荣幸能够参加中国科学技术大学的科学技术大会。今天，将给大家介绍术中核磁机器人技术，其扩展技术，以及我们的观点和想法。

Target text 3B: 非常荣幸能够参加中国科学技术大学的科学技术大会。今天，将给大家介绍我们关于术中核磁机器人技术以及其扩展技术的观点和想法。

The source text3 also followed the generosity maximum by referring the participation of the meeting as a pleased opportunity.

Normally, 3B is the accurate version of the translation. However, taking the characteristic of the subtitle into consideration, the second sentences are too long for the audience to read. Hence, in target text 3A, the last sentence was divided into three parts which is much easier for the human eye to comprehend in a limited amount of time.

Source text 4: I’m the president of the bioscience association of Manitoba, BAM and Manitoba. Look forward to **supporting** the brain pet here in Winnipeg, the province of Manitoba has had an ongoing relationship with the Anhui province grow over the last 20 years in the areas of agriculture exchange, hospital interactions, and now medical product development. On behalf of bam, **we wish** Anhui province and Cubresa every success in this new exciting project.

Target text 4A: 下午好。我叫金·克莱因。我是曼尼托巴省和曼尼托巴省生物科学协会(BAM)的会长。过去的 20 年中，马尼托巴省与安徽省一直保持着长期的合作关系，包括在农业交流，医院互动以及现在的医疗产品开发方面。我们期待未来能够在温尼伯支持脑 PET 项目。我们谨代表 BAM 祝安徽省和 Cubresa 在这个令人振奋的新项目中取得圆满成功。

Target text 4B: 下午好。我叫金·克莱因。我是曼尼托巴省和曼尼托巴省生物科学协会(BAM)的会长。我们期待未来能够在温尼伯支持脑 PET 项目。过去的 20 年中，马尼托巴省与安徽省在农业交流，医院互动以及现在的医疗产品开发方面一直保持着长期的合作关系。我们谨代表 BAM 祝安徽省和 Cubresa 在这个令人振奋的新项目中取得圆满成功。

The source text 4 followed the agreement maximum and by brought out the cooperation between the province of Manitoba and Anhui, the same goal between the two parties was emphasized and this will minimize the disagreement between the two parties.

Translation an activity which converts one language to the others. Each language has formed its own unique cultural characteristics in the long history development process. People of different cultures produce a communication rules according to their own customs and habits. Different cultures have different rules of communication. In addition, there are also significant differences in the way of thinking between Chinese and Westerners. In Chinese, people talk step by step and the purpose of one paragraph is usually mentioned at last. When people talk, the content is usually tortuously. On the contrary, when westerners talk, they tend to get straight to the point and then the cause of the point follows through. Therefore, we should pay attention to these differences when translating, so that the target text conforms to the thinking and speaking habits of the target audience or reader, that is, we should pay attention to the appropriateness of translation. In the source text 4, the speaker as a westerners, points out the ultimate goal, which is to support the Brain PET project in Winnipeg, and the reason for this support comes after. However, while translating such paragraph, the translator should help to shape the target text in a way that Chinese people would think, which is shown in target text4A. Target text 4B, however, translated the source text in its original order which can be confusing for the Chinese audience to comprehend in a short limited amount of time.

4. Conclusion

The politeness principle is the basic standard of interpersonal communication; it could help people deal with interpersonal relationships and is a common phenomenon in social touch. Politeness is also an essential part of pragmatics. Introducing politeness into the translation of business greeting videos will help translators understand the source text more correctly. On extensive and severe occasions, abiding by the politeness principle will improve the quality of the target text and achieve better and more accurate results.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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