

A Comparative Study on the Discourse of Chinese and American Women in Perspective of Intercultural Communication

Gu Jinsong

China Women's University, Beijing, China, 100101

Abstract

Women's discourse symbolizes their social status and social identification. Historically, women's discourse has been always neglected. With the changes of social systems and the struggles which were led by women's organizations, females' awareness of liberty and equality has been raised gradually. At the same time, the gap between the two sexes in terms of social status, social rights is narrowed along with the rapid growth of advanced technologies, which plays an crucial role for women to break through the traditional male-dominated society. As an important and new perspective, the post modernism provides Chinese people opportunities to examine current theories and realities since it was introduced in China. This paper will explore the discourse between Chinese and American women in post-modern era based on the intercultural communication theory and social identity theory.

Keywords: Post-modernism; Women; Discourse; Comparative study

With the development of feminist movement, the rights of women in Western countries have been greatly improved. After the 1980s, the original feminism was replaced by post-feminism. Although China has witnessed idea of equality between men and women gradually spreading into society after the May Fourth Movement, male voice still occupies a dominant position in real life, and women's voice power has not achieved the same status as men. Postmodernism provides an effective critical weapon for Chinese native feminism.

I. The Connotation of the Discourse

During the Spring and Autumn and Warring States period, various scholars were lobbying in different countries. Then, poetry of Tang and Song dynasties were widely spread. They all expressed people's views, reflecting the discourse. It can be seen that the role of the discourse in promoting culture and society is a manifestation of freedom and equality. Having the discourse is a prerequisite for everyone to demonstrate their ability. People express their thoughts, opinions, and emotions and show themselves through language. In human's history, there are matrilineal society, slave society, feudal society, and capitalist society. Except matrilineal society, most of them belonged to patrilineal ones. Women gradually lose their rights to speak in the political, economic, cultural, and family fields. They are not only an accessory in family life, but also are more dependent on men in economic terms, resulting in women's lack of independence. Moreover, because of the influence of the mainstream of society, the discourse of men stipulates the aesthetics of women, and has endowed women with empathetic, meek and respectful characteristics according to their own standards, making people gradually think that these characteristics are the natural attributes of women. Therefore, women's discourse is also determined by men. Patriarchal society realizes its own rights through the control of the Discourse. Foucault believes that discourse and power are inseparable, and where there is discourse, there will

be power, and power is a manifestation of discourse (Foucault, 1969). Women are constrained by various conditions, and their discourse is dominated by men for a long time. At the same time, women's silence is also a manifestation of their loss of discourse. With the development of a society, feminism is constantly limited. Postmodern feminism is a new feminist genre. Foucault, a master of postmodernism, has proposed the relationship between power and knowledge. He believed that power generates knowledge, and knowledge also generates power (Xu, 2010). In the past, feminism paid more attention to specific things and neglected the discourse. Postmodernism has changed from focusing on things to paying more attention to the discourse.

II. The Status Quo of Women's Discourse in Postmodernism

1. Lack of Opportunities for Equal Dialogue with Men

In the current society, due to the dominance of men, women have fewer opportunities to speak up compared to men. Regardless of age, gender, occupation, or education level, as long as the information is received, it is the audience of the society. No matter how one expresses his views, the fundamental purpose is to get the support of the public. As one part of the social group, women should have the same opportunities as men to spread their thoughts and opinions. However, because men dominate the society, they place women more in a subsidiary position, pay more attention to women's daily life, tastes, and other aspects, and ignore women's struggle history, achievements, etc., resulting in the power imbalance between strong men and weak women. In daily life, it can also be seen that the number of women civil servants is less than men, and in families, women who are housewives often account for the majority. In employment, gender discrimination is often obvious, which rarely reflects women's Discourse. In news reports, most of them are from the perspective of men, making women lack the opportunity to have equal dialogue with men.

2. The Lack of Opinions of Female Leaders

In the current society, the discourse is still controlled by men. In China, businessmen such as Ma Yun and Liu Qiangdong, writers such as Feng Jikai and Jia Pingwa, and experts and scholars such as Lang Xianping are regarded as successful elites. However, women's names are rarely seen in these fields. Although the feminist movement has developed rapidly in the United States, men are still the dominant power in politics. Although there are a large number of female audiences in various social media, there is a lack of certain female leaders. In addition, most of the female leaders who rank top are concentrated in the entertainment circle. For outstanding female representatives, they are rarely the same as men in various fields. In postmodernism, women's Discourse is not only reflected in one aspect but also in all the aspects. Like men, they have scientific guidance on public events and public opinions, and it is difficult to reflect their influence on entertainment stars. This also leads to the lack of women's Discourse.

3. Limitation of Fields of Women's Discourse

Compared with men, women are more willing to express their emotions and thoughts and record their lives. They are less involved in the more serious social and people's livelihood, politics, economics and other fields, which also leads to the field of women's discourse limited compared to men. Even if there are female leaders with certain influence in society, they are more concerned by people because of curious psychology, hoping to see the privatization of celebrities. Moreover, men and women also exist huge differences in preferences for social topics. For men, they pay more attention to social news, current affairs, politics, sports, automobiles, etc., while for women, they pay more attention to food, entertainment, tourism, and fashion. In comparison, the field of women's discourse is more limited to women-related fields, and lacks attention to the social and public sphere, which also leads to a smaller influence of women's voice.

III. Reasons for the Lack of Women's Discourse in Postmodernism

1. Women's Collective Unconsciousness Caused by Specific Historical Conditions

In the long history, men have always occupied a dominant position. Whether it is Chinese traditional values such as the three cardinal guides and the five constant virtues as specified in the feudal ethical code or the succession of male monarchs in European and American countries, they all reflect the leading role of men in society. Although in the modern society, male superiority is no longer the mainstream consciousness of society, it is difficult to completely eliminate their influence in all aspects of people's lives under the influence of history (Nie Wen, 2020). With the development of the feminist movement, women's rights and status have been greatly improved, but there are still certain problems. Influenced by history in China, women's attachments to men are a symbol of men's wealth for a long time. After the founding of People's Republic of China, women were given equal political and economic rights with men. However, due to various restrictions, women have not learned to protect and use those rights. Although the May Fourth Movement has liberated women's minds and gradually spread new ideas into society, the concept of equality between men and women has still not been able to completely change social prejudices. Male voice is still in an absolutely dominant position, which has led to women's collective unconsciousness (Wang Jinling, 2001).

2. Women's Lack of Cultural Education and Unsound Social Supervision

The inequality of women's discourse is not only a problem in China, but also a problem around the whole world. From a global perspective, compared with men, women's knowledge level is lower than that of men, and more women live at the bottom of society. Due to the limitation of women's overall knowledge and quality, it is determined that women's use of various methods to receive information is not to realize their own discourse, but to accept the consciousness of men (Cong Xiaoming, 2012). This has also led to women's easier acceptance of male-dominated culture in terms of cultural identity. The low quality of women also restricts the channels for them to express their opinions, leading to the low influence of women's voice. Although all theories in the information society can be disseminated, and the amount of knowledge of all audiences will also be increased, the people with higher social status and cultural level have a higher acceleration of knowledge than the people with lower cultural levels, thus increasing the gap between women and men. Women belong to a group with a lower culture. If the gap cannot be shortened quickly, the discourse in society will gradually decline. In the era of rapid economic development, the discourse has changed from production to post-modern consumption, which means commercializing everything that can be commercialized as much as possible, maximizing profits, regarding the mass as consumers and catering to the consciousness of the mass. Under the premise that the backward image of women has not been completely changed, men occupy a dominant position. In order to pursue high profits, they will also teach women continuous commercialization. With the public identity and cultural identity, gender is more ignored. In addition, due to the lack of a certain social supervision mechanism, the patriarchal awareness of pursuit of economic benefits will continue to enlarge, resulting in the gradual reduction of women's discourse.

IV. Reconstruction of Women's Discourse

Under the background of postmodern feminism, more attention is paid to the reconstruction of women's discourse. It is believed that the reconstruction of women's discourse is a complicated process, which is restricted by ideology, culture and ethics. Women's discourse is not talking to itself, it has to face the public and put itself in the right of society. Postmodernism emphasizes pluralism and it provides effective weapons for

Chinese postmodern feminism.

1. Overview of Cross-cultural Perspective

Different countries and ethnic groups have various historical and cultural backgrounds. Under varied cultural backgrounds, communication and exchanges are necessary. It is not only a collision of languages, but also a collision of values. The values and cultural literacy expressed in cultural works have important practical effects on the exchanges between different cultures (Zhao Haotian, 2017). In the process of interpreting literary works, analyzing literary works from a cross-cultural perspective must find common ground in the domestic and foreign cultures. Under the cross-cultural perspective, it is emphasized that on the basis of understanding and mastering the local culture and the culture of other countries, the culture is used to interpret literary works and strengthen the understanding of different cultures. This approach can help readers better understand literary works and experience the cultural literacy expressed in literary works, thereby better constructing readers' values, allowing them to understand the difference between local and foreign cultures, and applying the knowledge to the appreciation of literary works.

2. Women's Discourse from a Cross-Cultural Perspective

In the research process of women's discourse from a cross-cultural perspective, values are very important contents. The people living in different cultural backgrounds for a long time can easily produce different ways of thinking and values. For example, in the literary work *The Portrait of a Lady*, there are different cultural backgrounds in the United States and Europe, which will cause certain conflicts. This requires people to look at the work from a cross-cultural perspective in the process of interpretation, so as to strengthen the understanding of literary works. In this book, men are the absolute masters and control everything. Although Isabel's cousin Raftchett is a patient, he has a strong desire to possess and is the master of Isabel's fate. In *The Portrait of a Lady*, although his original intention is to persuade his father to give Isabella enough financial support so that Isabel can pursue independence, readers can also feel his selfishness by reading the full text. Due to long-term illness, he is unable to experience many things in life personally. As a result, he hopes to obtain a sense of life experience through his cousin, and regards Isabel as a tool to achieve his goal. Although the financial support has provided Isabel with an opportunity to pursue freedom and independence, it has also brought her a crisis. Raftchet's father once reminded him, but he still chose to do so and did not give Isabel the discourse. After Isabel rejected Lord Warburton, although he did not understand why, he still chose to accept it because he wanted to know what Isabel would do. His mother was the same as him. Just because Isabel has made a different decision compared to common people, it has been regarded as an interesting thing by others. Raftchet knew that his cousin was full of curiosity about life. In order to experience life through his cousin, he provided Isabel with plenty of property so that she could choose the life she loved and add the joy of life to herself. As the author said, Raftchet's peculiar illness did not trap him, but provided him with a broader stage to observe life as a bystander and experience the joy of life. As the one to experience life, Isabel did not have enough discourse out. Although there have always been women's pursuit of freedom and equality in literary works, most of women finally return to marriage. If the patriarchal social system cannot be broken, then women's discourse will never be improved (Zhang Honglei, 2017). The Chinese film *Li Shuangshuang* tells the story of the heroine who is brave, kind, selfless, daring to adhere to principles, and resolutely fighting against selfishness. On the one hand, the heroine embodies traditional Chinese women's role in families; but on the other hand, it also shows Chinese women's pursuit of Gender equality (Gu Jinsong, 2014). However, although China has achieved equality between men and women in law, their inequality still exists in real life. As Western countries entered the post-industrial era, postmodern feminism has also emerged. The postmodern feminism in both the United

States and China has well inherited the tradition of subversion and questioning.

3. Fighting for the Rights of Feminist Groups

According to postmodern feminism, women's discourse has been gradually achieved through constant resistance of feminist groups. In the industrial society, women's awareness of rights has been greatly enhanced, and large-scale women's movements have emerged. However, most of them concentrated in the fields of education and employment, and they still cannot effectively break the discourse for men. In the post-modern society after the 1980s, due to the development of information technology, the intelligence and ability gap between men and women basically no longer exists. The feminist movement has been extensively developed in the 20th century. Women's groups under postmodernism have expanded their original demands, from the relief of underage children and women to anti-war movement. It is precisely because of the continuous efforts and struggles of these feminist groups that the discourse for women under postmodernism can be improved, and the status equality of men and women can be truly realized.

Although the status of women has been improved after most countries have entered modern society, women's voice and thoughts are still greatly restricted in many countries (Wang Ning & Guo Ke, 2018). In the process of feminists' constant struggles for the discourse with men, women's discourse has also been improved, especially in the post-modernist period after the 1980s. Postmodern feminist theory provides a solid foundation for the promotion of women's discourse.

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Biography

Gu Jinsong, Lecturer of China Women's University, Research interests: Cross-cultural and gender sociology.