



Undergraduate assignment feedback form

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The Power of Speech: How Does Speech Affect People's Lives

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Respected provost and Miss Deng, good morning! My name is Xinyu Wang. Today I will share my topic with you, which is The power of speech: How does speech affect people's lives.

Let us look at the outline. The first part is Introduction, the second part is Consider your words very carefully before you speak them, the third part is Never discuss the shortcomings of others, and the final part is Conclusion. Let us begin with the first part.

I. Introduction

Speech is the most basic communication tool and medium between people and society. It convey one's emotion and attitude, and it plays an important role in social life. Normally, people might think that speech is talking to others, that is something that everyone can do. However, my point is that everyone can do it, but not everyone can do it very well. In the Chapter Chushi 處世 of the *Changli juyao* 常禮舉要, eight of the fifteen sentences are related to speech. It illustrates how important the cultivation of speech is. Also, as early as more than 2,000 years ago, Confucius attached great importance to speech cultivation and it ranked second among the four subjects of *Kongmen* 孔門. Confucius puts virtue first, followed by speech, which shows us the significance of speech. As the Chinese saying goes, 'Good words make people warm like a fire in the cold winter, while bad ones make people feel cold even in the hot summer.' Therefore, words are a double-edged sword, which can bring people both blessings and disasters. As long as we can use it in a right way, such as saying more good things and less negative things, we could always be popular and successful. This article will analyze the pros and cons of language use from two aspects.

II. Consider your words very carefully before you speak them

The *Changli juyao* 常禮舉要 state that ‘The mouth is the source of disasters and calamities. Consider your words very carefully before you speak them.’¹ The influence of the speech is far more powerful than we imagined, It could help people to better handle complex interpersonal relationships in different circumstances. In this era of information explosion and freedom of speech, people seem to be increasingly irresponsible for what they say. Especially on the Internet, such as some public social platforms such as Tieba 貼吧 and Weibo 微博, some young people make some radical remarks without any hesitation. When they play online games, they abuse each other without fear. Gradually, they will develop a bad habit of speaking without thinking carefully which will bring them many negative effects and even irreparable disasters. Therefore, the cultivation of speech is particularly important in today's society. Therefore it is said in the *Geyan lianbi* 格言聯璧 that ‘Self-cultivation is based on purity of heart; the first essential thing for interacting with others and circumstances is to speak carefully.’ 修己以清心為要，涉世以慎言為先。² Xun Zi 荀子 also said that ‘Words can bring people misfortune and deeds can bring disgrace on people, so a exemplary person will never let his guard down on his words and deeds.’³ It can be seen that Chinese ancestors believed that the cultivation of speech was the first important thing of getting along with others in the society. If people do not speak carefully and always insult and belittle others or make inappropriate jokes to others, they may hurt others and cause a lot of enmity and resentment. For instance, according to a report of The Mercury news,⁴ an 18-year-old American boy (Matthew Thane) was shot dead at home just because of a dispute with another man in an online game. In order to avenge him, the murderer drove 1,700 miles to his home and killed him. Also, disasters caused by careless speech were common in history. For example, Emperor Xiaowu of Jin(CE 266 – 420), Sima Yao 司馬曜, died because of speaking carelessly. He joked with Zhang Guiren 張貴人 after drinking, jokingly saying that

1 Li Bingnan. 李炳南, : *Daily Manners: Essentials of Courtesy* 常禮舉要

<<http://online.sfsu.edu/rone/China/manners.htm>> [accessed 16th November 2020].

2 Jin Lansheng 金蘭生, *Geyan Lianbi* 格言聯璧 (Taipei: Heyu chubanshe, 2012), p.91.

3 Original text: ‘言有招禍也，行有招辱也，君子慎其所立乎！’ Wang Xianqian 王先謙, *Xunzi Jijie* 荀子集解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1988), p.7. Trans. by myself.

4 ‘Alleged killer drove from East Bay to Texas over possible gaming feud murder-suicide’: <<https://www.mercurynews.com/2020/08/20/alleged-killer-drove-from-east-bay-to-texas-over-possible-gaming-feud-murder-suicide/>> [accessed 16th November 2020].

she was nearly 30 years old and her appearance was not as good as before, so she could be dismissed at this age. But Emperor Xiaowu of Jin never thought that a drunken joke would cause Zhang Guiren to kill him. It can be seen from this that from the ancient times to the present, no matter whether it is a common person or an emperor, if they are not careful with their own words, disasters are inevitable. Therefore, the *Taishang Ganyingpian* 太上感應篇 state: 'Misfortune and blessings do not come to us without reason, we bring them by ourselves.' 太上曰：禍福無門，惟人自召。⁵

III. Never discuss the shortcomings of others

Confucius said: 'Speaking ill of others everywhere, this is a villain.' 揚人之惡，斯為小人。⁶ the *Geyan Lianbi* 格言聯璧 states that: 'There is no more disaster than to speak ill of others.' 禍莫大於言人之非。⁷ It is a bad behavior to speak others' shortcoming. If people always like to reproach others, it will bring them negative effects and even get them killed. The Ma Jiajue 馬加爵 incident⁸ that rocked the country sixteen years ago is a strong proof. The reason for this tragedy was Ma Jiajue's revenge on someone who hurt him in words. What happened was one of his classmates ridiculed Ma Jiajue for cheating while playing cards and blamed him for his bad quality, so some friends did not call him when they had birthday party. These words hurt Ma Jiajue deeply. In the end, he decided to retaliate with murder. So, when Zigong 子貢 asked his teacher. 'Has the exemplary person his hatreds also? Confucius said. 'He has his hatreds. He hates those who proclaim the evil of others.'⁹ In today's society, everyone wants to succeed. No matter where you are, what profession you have entered, having good interpersonal relationships is important, because it can help you on your way to success. In the words of Buddhism, it can help people to avoid bad luck. However, The most

5 Li Changling 李昌齡, *Taishang Ganyingpian Tushuo* 太上感應篇圖說 (Shanghai: Xuelin chubanshe, 2004), p.9. Trans. by myself.

6 Wang Guoxuan 王國軒, Wang Xiumei 王秀梅, *Kongzi Jiayu* 孔子家語 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2009), p.124. Trans. by myself.

7 Jin Lansheng 金蘭生, *Geyan Lianbi* 格言聯璧 (Taipei: Heyu chubanshe, 2012), p.91. Trans. by myself.

8 'Ma Jiajue 馬加爵': <<https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E9%A9%AC%E5%8A%A0%E7%88%B5>> [accessed 16th November 2020].

9 Original text: '子貢曰：君子亦有惡乎？子曰：有惡。惡稱人之惡者。' Liu Baonan 劉寶楠, *Lunyu Zhengyi* 論語正義 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990), p.707. Trans. by myself.

important step of getting and maintaining good relationships is to avoid discussing others' shortcomings. Dating back to the Tang 唐 Dynasty, Guo Ziyi 郭子儀 set us a good example. Every time Guo Ziyi met with guests, his womenfolk stayed with him. Once Guo Ziyi was sick and Lu Qi 盧杞 went to visit him. But this time, Guo Ziyi did not allow all the womenfolk go to the reception hall with him, and received Lu Qi alone. After that someone asked the reason, Guo Ziyi said, 'Lu Qi is a vindictive person and has an ugly face. So, if I take my womenfolk to meet him the womenfolk must ridicule Lu Qi's face. He would take it to heart around ever. After Lu Qi success in the future, our whole family will not be survived.' Guo Ziyi's cautious attitude to words deserves people to follow and admire. Because it can prevent trouble before it happens.

IV. Conclusion

To summarize, because humans are social beings, people have to communicate with others after they are born. So, the way to speak is an indispensable practice in everyone's life. In fact, those offensive words, sarcastic word only are the surface, what we should consider deeply is the mentality of these words. They may come from our selfishness, hatred or desire to control. Therefore, the ancients always used a motto that 'often thinking about yourself, and do not talk about others' to warn themselves. I believe that as long as people have better state of mind and always think twice before speaking, they would be lucky with their speech.

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