

'Luck Talk ' in the Celebration of Bai People's Wedding

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Abstract: Bai Nationality is one of 56 nationalities in China, mainly lying in Dali, Yunnan Province, with its own spectacular culture. This study explores Bai people's wedding in Dali, Yunnan Province where participants use 'luck talk ', a coined cultural term, to congratulate on their wedding ceremony. It has explored that luck talk has to do with the cultural meaning of Bai people and speech acts considered to relate to good luck by questionnaires and interviews. It has found: (a) the meaning of luck relates to the worship Benzhu; (b) 4 types of speech acts believed to bring good luck to the newlyweds (greetings and wishes, songs, food, and the sounds of figures).

Keywords: Bai; Luck Talk; Speech Act Theory.

1. INTRODUCTION

Communicative patterns during the wedding ceremony are considered to bring good luck to the newlyweds. However, different cultures have developed a fascinating array of rules, regulations and customs that determine prohibitions and preferences for marriage partners (Ali Z. al-Zu 'abi, 2008:68). Thus, wedding is ritual events which need cultural understanding (Cynthia Dickel Dunn, 2004:348) or as Greertz (1973) describes as 'mode of and for ' cultural reality. For example, for most Americans, the wedding ceremony is celebrated in the church with promise to love (Billy Haselton, 2002:6). And the traditional Japanese wedding customs, known as Shinto ceremonies, involve an elaborate ceremony held at a Shinto shrine with promise to love in the front of Shinto to bring luck to their marriage. There remain many articles about Chinese wedding ceremony (Shang Ye, 2009; Chen Xingjie, 2012; Li Yinhe, 2002) and Bai people's wedding ceremony (Wang Haina, 2012; Yang Yufang). Among these articles on Bai people's wedding ceremony, customs of the wedding ceremony are focused. Yet, few associate wedding ceremony with talks under the perspective of linguistic theories.

This study expresses wedding ceremony in the perspective of two linguistic theories, the celebration of Bai people's wedding in Yunnan province, China. 'Luck Talk 'consists of speech acts to bring good luck to the marriage. The speech acts will be shown in relation with culture. It is known that language and culture are intertwined in a certain event. So are in Bai people's wedding ceremony.

This study has focused on the following two questions:

- (1) What is the meaning of luck according to Bai people?
- (2) What are the speech acts of luck talk considering relating to good luck in Bai people's wedding ceremony?

2. RESEARCH THEORY

2.1. Speech Act Theory

Wittgenstein, the greatest philosopher of the 20th century, once conveyed that language conducts its way only in use. In short, meaning is use. Under the influence of his thought, John Austin in the 1950s proposed the famous theory: Speech act theory. At first, it conducted in two ways: performatives and constatives. Then, it goes with three aspects: locution act, illocutionary act and perlocutionary act.

Locution Act: move vocal organs and produce a number of sounds, organized in a certain way and with a certain meaning. Illocutionary Act: say something is to do something

Perlocutionary Act: be equivalent to speaker's meaning, contextual meaning, or extra meaning. (Hu Zhuanglin, 2008:188-189)

The theory extends in the Bai people's wedding ceremony to better analyze what the participants use utterances for, how they relate to objects and what implied meaning can be elicited from, which helps us have a better understanding of utterances in a particular culture.

2.2. Ethnography of Communication

Speech act theorists and pragmatics generally pay attention to the meaning/implied meaning of language, with little focus on the metaphorical and phatic uses of language from basic consideration, which constitute a major focus for ethnographic description (Muriel Saville-Troike, 2003:13). The ethnography of communication is also adopted in the research. Ethnography of communication regards language first and foremost a way of containing culture matters in itself. Thus, ethnography of communication is adopted in the research. It enables a descriptive, emic view of participants' norms of interpretation, rules of speaking, and rules of interaction (Hymes, 1962, 1964, 1972). Norms of interpretation provides all of the other information about speech community and its culture needed in the communication event (Muriel Saville-Troike, 2003:124), and it relates to rules of use in the prescriptive sense (Shimanoff & Susan, 1980). Rules of speaking refer to socially accepted standards of speaking production within a cultural group. Rules of interaction explore an explanation of the rules for the use of speech which is applicable to the communicative event (Muriel Saville-Troike, 2003:123). Moreover, the ethnography of communication explains language in a cultural system. Every nationality has its own spectacular characters. The adopting of ethnography of communication in the research can widen the understanding of luck talk in the Bai people's wedding ceremony.

The study expresses its focus with the combination of speech act theory and ethnography of communication. It leads to a holistic understanding of utterances in a particular culture, and give us a fully understanding of the utterances.

3. METHODS

3.1. Participants

5 participants (2 men and 3 women) were chosen in the research. Participants are all born and raised in Bai villages in Dali, Yunnan province, immersing into Bai language and Bai culture. Among them, there are two people, a 35-year-old man and a 37-year-old woman, are Chinese teachers of a local high school. The third person, who is 62 years old, is a former mayor of the village. And the fourth person is a 58-year-old woman, retiring from a local private school. The last participant, a 35-year-old woman, is a civil servant in the local government whose responsibility is for the local culture. The mean age was 45.4 years. In the fast developing era of economic and information, young people have long for Han culture and Western culture in China. Thus, in this research, the author mainly chose aged people or middle-aged people with high education and relating to culture, immersing into the Bai culture since they were born.

3.2. Instrument

Doing ethnography of communication research in another culture, one needs to do field work, including observing, asking questions, participating in group activities and testing the validity of one's perceptions against the institutions of natives (Muriel Saville-Troike, 2003:3). The author got some knowledge of Bai people's wedding ceremony during attending several Bai weddings. In this research, the author adopted an open survey, written in Chinese, with oral translation to Bai language if necessary. The introductory paragraph stated: 'the aim of this research is to help us better understand Bai people's talks in the wedding ceremony'. The questionnaire was collected through present of the author and a Bai friend, with explanations wherever needed.

The questionnaire started with a sociobiographical section with questions about sex, age, occupation, living time in Bai village and usage of Bai language. It included the meaning of luck, how the luck relates to the local culture and what speech act they tend to express in the wedding ceremony.

Based on the data collected in the process of the questionnaire, interviews were then adopted. The interviews were face-to-face and semi-structured, which were used to get further and deeply information, both in Chinese and Bai language.

4. BAI NATIONALITY

Bai Nationality is one of the oldest nationalities in China, lying mainly in Dali, Yunnan province. The population of Bai Nationality in Yunnan is about 1,505,644¹, of which Dali occupies 80.22%, namely 1, 207, 800². Bai people mainly live around the *Erhai* which is regarded as 'Mother Lake ', the same as Yangtze River to Chinese. It has been recorded that Bai people appeared in the Erhai area more than 3000 years ago (Chen Zidan, 2002:57). The building of Nanzhao Kingdom by *Pi Luoge* (the builder and king) in the Tang Dynasty and Kingdom of Dali by *Duan Siping* (Fang Tie, 2000:47) in the Song Dynasty marked the two prosperous periods of Dali. At those times, Dali was the center of politics, economy and culture in the northwestern area. The histories of the two Kingdoms have been widely researched by scholars both abroad and at home. Dali immersed into the center China in Yuan Dynasty as a province. Bai nationality has been known to the world since the 1960s by the famous film *Five Golden Flower*³, which is based on the story that happened in the famous festival *Sanyuejie* in Dali. With the spread of the film, the special names of male as '*A Peng*(阿鹏)', and female is '*Jin Hua*(金花)', are familiar to the people in the world. The film hit the world, screening in 46 countries. A national minority as it is, Bai people has its own special culture. The root of its culture is *Benzhu* Worship (Yang Zhiming, 2000:35), widely pursued by Bai people. And the well-known cultural ceremonies are *Sanyue* Street (a ceremony for exchanging goods and making friends between young people through songs), *Ransanling* (a religious ceremony prays for rain) and Firebrand Festival (Yang Ming, 1982:85-87).

5. LUCK TALK

The nature and enactment of 'Luck Talk ' proposed in this study, on the basis of the analysis of questionnaires and interview data, is produced as follows: (1) 'Luck Talk' has to do with the Bai cultural meaning of 'Luck ', (2) 4 speech acts believed to increase good luck.

5.1. Meaning of Luck

The meaning of luck that participants from Bai villages reported was not only from people action but also from outside force. The outside force, also regard as the native worship *Benzhu*, is widely popular in native Bai's mind. In China, a lot people have a strong belief in deity. A participant explained that Bai people believed that luck was from their worship *Benzhu*, or controlled by the worship *Benzhu*. *Benzhu* is to Bai what Christianity is to western people. *Benzhu* means '*Wu Zeng*(武增)' in Bai language, meaning 'our master'. Therefore, it is often said that 'with its owner, master, the Lord', belonging to the village patron deity. The worship *Benzhu* is the core religion of Bai. It has been reported that *Benzhu* worship has a broad and solid mass base, and the masses of *Benzhu* worship is very pious, its activities permeating into Bai people's economy, culture and every aspect of everyday life and ideology(Zhan Chengxu,1990:45). The function of the worship is to pray and look forward to happy and blessed future of Bai (Yang Zhiming, 2000:36). Similarly, another participant reported in this way,

A wedding should includes the pray of *Benzhu*. The bridegroom should go to pray *Benzhu* a day before marriage to look forward to the worship of *Benzhu*. In this way, the newlyweds can give birth to a baby earlier and live a happy life forever under the worship of *Benzhu*. On the other hand, there is something that can be done by people. People who attend the wedding will say some benedictions to the newlyweds, which symbolize luck. The process of wedding is surrounded by blessing songs.

All participants conceptualized the coming of luck in this way. Moreover, it has been recorded that the newlyweds should go to pray the worship *Benzhu* according to the website *Baibubaike* and the article of Wang Haina(2012:140). There was another participant, who described,

In that day, the bride should wear a mirror around the neck, which, under the worship of *Benzhu*, can remove the demon from them and protect them with happiness and safety. Or in some place, a bamboo sieve is put on the door before the arrival of bride with a mirror in it. The meaning of which is the same as above.

Besides, all the participants have mentioned that the date for holding marriage and even the exact time for holding the wedding ceremony are selected based on the birthdays and birthday hours of both bride and bridegroom's family, also known as '*He Bazi*(合八字)'. Under the strong influence of worship *Benzhu*, only *Bazi*⁴ are suitable, the wedding ceremony then will go on, vice versa. It is said that the wedding date and wedding ceremony time should be suitable for all the family members. The accurate time for wedding ceremony according to *Bazi* is called '*Jishi*(吉时)⁵'. In Bai people's mind, under the worship of *Benzhu*, this is a way belonging to the religion that a suitable date and time will bring good luck to the newlyweds. This action can be seen as a way to bring luck to the newlyweds.

Essentially, all participants described luck that was as partly controlled by human conduction and partly by a force from *Benzhu*. In this way, happiness, goodness, wealth, success, and harmony, which were the representations of good luck, would be along with Bai people (Wang Haina, 2012:140).

5.2. Luck Talk

Bai believes that jubilation accompanies the newlyweds throughout the wedding. In the wedding ceremony, luck talk contributes to the jubilation. In this study, all participants considered that language accompanies luck to bring the jubilation of the newlyweds. Four categories of speech acts related to the luck talk are researched: (a) greetings and wishes; (b) songs; (c) Bai words for food; (d) sounds of figures.

5.2.1. Greetings and Wishes

Bai congratulate the newlyweds by expressing greetings and good wishes for the purpose of creating a jubilant atmosphere and bringing good luck to them. A very common greeting, which can also be heard in Han's wedding, *Xin hun kuai le*, meaning a happy wedding, is said to bring happy and luck to their marriage. This type of expression is called illocutionary act by Searle (1977). By producing words, it delivers a hope that the speaker want to express. In this way, it is used to express feelings and greetings to others. Thus, it can express good luck to the newlyweds.

Other greetings and wishes are as follow:

- (1) *Zao sheng gui zi*, meaning to give birth to a child as soon as possible.
- (2) *Bai tou xie lao*, meaning to live together till old and grey.
- (3) *Bai nian hao he*, meaning a harmonious union lasting a hundred years
- (4) *Tian sheng yi dui*, meaning the two persons is doomed to be a couple
- (5) *Jin yu liang yuan*, meaning a perfect marriage of the newlyweds

On the researched greetings and wishes, participants reported that these were common greetings and wishes in the wedding ceremony. Among them, (1) expressed their hope that the newlyweds would give birth to a baby as early as they can. (2) and (3) related to the marriage life of the newlyweds which indicated the happiness, harmony and forever of their marriage life, while (4) proposed something with religion, which sang the destiny of their marriage under the guidance of worship. In other words, it could be explained that the combination of the bridegroom and the bride was written from the time they were born. And (5) said the perfect marriage of the two persons.

These greetings and good wishes to bring luck to the newlyweds were not only expressed by people who came to attend the wedding, but also they were written in red papers. One thing is the character 'Xi', meaning happiness and luck, which was put on the doors, windows and anything that could be put on to. A participant said,

Everything during the wedding will be covered with a red 'Xi' scissor-cut paper⁶ or just a red paper, symbolizing luck and joy, even the plate which is full of food. The red paper with 'Xi' is a necessary thing in the Bai people's wedding ceremony. Red and the character 'X' are said to bring good luck. In this way, it will lead people into an atmosphere of happiness and jubilation and bring good luck.

Another thing was the couplet, which is normally used in New Year. And it has a long history in China. In the period of five Dynasties, about 10th century, people began to carve the names of guardian spirits or deities on the woolen doors to bring good luck (Mary Fong, 2000:226). In the 14th century, during the period of Ming Dynasty, the emperor ordered that all the civil servants should pasted couplets (Sellmann, 1982). Couplets in the marriage, which were written on red paper, were pasted to put on the door to remove the demon and indicated good luck to the new marriage. In Bai people's wedding ceremony, a participant reported that the couple was written with 'Jiang *tai gong zai ci*'⁷ meaning the presence of *Jiang Tai gong* (a politician and strategist in Xizhou Dynasty), or 'Qi *lin zai ci*'⁸ meaning the presence of *Qilin* (an old Chinese mythical creature which can have a life of about 2000 years old), to drive away evil. And in this way, it was considered that it would bring good luck to the newlyweds. All participants reported that these actions were somehow related to the local religion.

Greetings and wishes, along with cultural meanings, both said from people and written in red paper indicated good luck.

5.2.2. Songs

Accompanying with greetings and wishes are songs which are to increase good luck to the newlyweds. Song, a special medium in Bai people's marriage, is considered to express love between the couple and bring good luck to the newlyweds.

In Bai regions, if a male meets a female for the first time and has some affection, they will become familiar to each other by songs (Gao Jingzheng). There is a famous event, *Sanyuejie* (the famous film *Five Golden Flowers* has mentioned this event. It is the place where the actor and actress firstly met each other and fell into love), when young males and females stay together to make eyes at each other through traditional Bai songs. In this way, song plays an important part in the marriage. A participant conveyed,

Songs are very important to Bai. Bai nationality owns a rich and colorful music culture (Yang Xifan,208:45). They will sing songs while they are working in the field, in festivals and in everyday life. In the marriage, songs go with the whole process of wedding ceremony.

Before wedding ceremony, there was an action of setting decorated tent marquee. And after it, with the old traditional Bai tune, *Chuichuiqiang*, *Dabexian* and so on play songs, such as *Long shang tian* (meaning Long flies to the sky) to look forward to a happy, lucky and perfect marriage (Ding Hui, 2010:64).

During the wedding, bride should sing songs with crying before leaving her own home and starting to go to the bridegroom 's home, which was famous known as '*Ku Jia*(哭嫁)', meaning getting married in a crying expression by bride, to present their reluctant to leave their own home and worry about the unpredicted life in the future. A participant added,

It is a way of the bride to express her thanks for her parents ' upbringing. In China, treating one's parents with filial piety is traditional culture in the words of Confucius. So is in worship *Benzhu*. In this way, the bride is said to be filial piety to the bridegroom's parents, which will bring happiness, luck and harmony to their marriage.

Some additional songs will be sung among the wedding,

- (1) *Ying qin tune*, meaning to come to bride home to meet her
- (2) *Chu men tune*, meaning the bride leave her own and starting her way to bridegroom's home
- (3) *Ying bin tune*, meaning the coming of guests.

These selected songs reflected the whole process of wedding, and with the going on of the wedding, the songs would be changed to fit the step of wedding process. Songs, in Bai people's mind, are ways to enhance the jubilant atmosphere and bring good luck to the marriage (Wang Haina, 2002:141).

5.2.3. Food

All the participants conveyed that it was a customary for Bai people to have some particular food in the wedding. In this category, it expressed food must be eaten and explored the linguistic representations that conveyed symbolic meaning of food related to good luck. And in this way, it also created a jubilant atmosphere throughout the wedding ceremony. One participant said,

In the wedding ceremony, some food, whose name sounds like some good luck word in their culture, will be used in the wedding. This food can be used for eating or just as a decoration for the wedding. It doesn't have to be the same character, but it must sound like those characters. It is a way to bring blessing and good luck to the newlyweds. And there is a food named 'Red Rice (*Hong fan*)', made from rice with Red kojic (a food additive) or red color, which must be eaten by the bride to indicate a lifetime luck and happiness.

Particular words, such as dates, pine seeds and walnuts sounded like, or were similar to other characters in Bai people's culture which symbolized good luck to the newlyweds. Dates referred to as early as possible in pronunciation. In Bai people's culture, it expressed people's hope to give birth to a child as soon as possible. While pine seeds with the same pronunciation, indicated the child of the newlyweds. Another word, walnut, was also employed as the emblem of child of the couple. All the participants reported that those three foods must be presented in the wedding to indicate good luck to the newlyweds to have a birth to a child as soon as possible. In China, giving a birth to a child (especially a boy in the old times and some rural places in modern China) is the prior thing that the newlyweds should do. An old saying goes that 3 kinds of behaviors taken by the younger generations which are considered to be disobedient to their parents, with choosing not to have kids to maintain the family being the most severe one. In this way, there is no doubt that several kinds of food relate to give a birth to a child is applied in the wedding ceremony. Some other food symbolizations (Yang Yufan) are:

Food		Meaning	
<i>Lajiao</i>		Pepper	
<i>Jiu</i>		intimacy in the marriage	
<i>Wine</i>		forever marriage life	
<i>Yu</i>		Fish	
		surplus wealth	
<i>Tang</i>		Candy	
		sweetness in life	
<i>Chai</i>		Firewood	
		wealth	
<i>Suan</i>		Garlic	
		good luck	
<i>Cha</i>	<i>Ku cha</i>	It consists with bitter tea, sweet tea and sugar tea	The three kinds of tea symbolizes that life is combined with bitterness and sweetness.
	<i>Tian cha</i>		
	<i>Tang cha</i>		

5.2.4. The Sounds of Figures

In Bai people's wedding ceremony, the sounds of figures play an important role in bringing good luck. The figure 8 and 6 are the two figures that indicate good luck. In Bai's culture, also in Chinese culture, the figure 8 relates to wealth and the figure 6 belongs to the good luck. As a participants said,

In Bai people's wedding, the betrothal gift varies from person to person. However, the amount of each betrothal gift should be related with the figure 8. For instance, a common family will provide the betrothal gift with 8 kilos pork, 8 kilos wine and 8 kilos sugar. In one word, each food betrothal gift should be ended with the figure 8 (8, 18, 28 and so on), which relates to the character 'Fa', meaning wealth. The money the bridegroom gives to the bride should relates to the figure 6, which the pronunciation relates to the character 'Lu(祿)'(LuHsing, a religious character in China, is responsible for happiness and good luck in the folk), meaning happiness and good luck.

All the participants agreed with this phenomenon, the sounds of figure 8 and 6 are very important in Bai's wedding. There was another participant who emphasized that the host could only provide 6 or 8 dishes for the guests in the wedding ceremony, which also contributed to the importance of numbers 6 and 8.

6. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Language and culture are intertwined in the society. Language reflects culture and culture influences language. In the Bai's culture, it has its unique luck talks in wedding ceremony. In this study, the author expressed the luck talks in Bai's wedding ceremony under the speech act theory and the ethnography of communication. Linguistically, it goes a pragmatic, communicative and theoretical

way of luck talk. Culturally, this study provides a glimpse of Bai people's way of thinking and communicating in the concept of *Benzhu*. It was firstly expressed the meaning of luck relating to the culture and religion. Then, the paper was processed in four aspects of luck talks: the greetings and wishes, the songs, the sounds of food and the sounds of numbers. The research has further represented language and culture in Bai.

However, the research still has its limitation. The participants involved in the research are not big enough, which may reduce its validity. This research study is a qualitative study. And there exists almost no studies examining other nationality groups' way of speaking during the wedding ceremony under the perspective of linguistic theories. Thus, future studies can be conducted the wedding ceremonies of different nationalities with both quantitative and qualitative perspectives.

Notes:

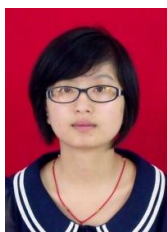
- 1 The population of Bai nationality in Yunnan province comes from Website Baibu <http://baike.baidu.com/link?url=mXKNMf-gC7KwZhyZvD-tuTJnGYI8WEAoOPqeGjotdWRkabTd0K91-hdad3g6pRNdOMvhCoZKeK4UtVOs9oOlzK>
- 2 The population of Bai nationality in Dali, Yunnan province comes from Website Baibu.
- 3 http://baike.baidu.com/link?url=LaZOFZdNyG57d2eCXD1SrFUKnAV3dmFa94hompgSV6SubnycApvw0WvqCEExf6RTJZr_Csd11029k26EnfsRtK.
- 4 *Five Golden Flowers* is a famous movie shot by Wang Jiayi in 1959, mainly starred by Yang Likun and Mo Zijiang. In 1960, in the second session of Asian and African film festival held in Cairo, Egypt, the film caused a sensation, with the director Wang Jiayi won the silver eagle prize award for best director and Yang Likun offered the best actress silver eagle award.
- 5 Bazi (八字): a birth horoscope or a man's power calendar date of birth. It is a kind of numerology in China.
- 6 Jishi(吉时): it is a kind of auspicious hour. The ancient people's adored heaven and earth. They believe that the heaven and the earth run in certain regularity. Sometimes, it is very auspicious, called ji.
- 7 Scissor- cut paper: it is a kind of folk art with scissors or sculpting knife cut on the paper pattern, used for decoration.
- 8 Jiang tai gong zai ci(姜太公在此): it is a traditional Chinese folk. The folk is about Jiang Ziya, a famous strategist in the late Shuang dynasty and early Zhou dynasty (1156BC-1017BC).
- 9 .Qi lin zai ci(麒麟在此): it is a traditional Chinese folk. Since the ancient times, *Qilin* has been regarded as the signs of auspiciousness.

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