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## Критические замечания преподавателей в китайском и русском учебном дискурсе

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**Аннотация.** Целью данной работы является выявление критических замечаний преподавателей в китайской и русской аудиториях с акцентом на определение этнокультурных особенностей. Для достижения этой цели было проведено обширное анкетирование, направленное на выяснение частоты и языковых особенностей критических замечаний, используемых китайскими и русскими преподавателями. Научная новизна исследования подтверждается тем, что впервые проведено сравнительное исследование использования критических замечаний китайскими и российскими преподавателями в академической среде. В статье определены лингвокультурные особенности критических замечаний преподавателей и измерены соответствующие частоты в различных аудиторных ситуациях. Предпринята попытка объяснить особенности критических замечаний китайских и российских преподавателей через культурные ценности и контекстные условия. Результаты показали, что обе группы используют прямую и косвенную критику. Тем не менее были отмечены определенные культурные различия: китайские преподаватели чаще используют прямую критику, чем русские. Установлено, что эти различия обусловлены культурными ценностями и ролевыми позициями преподавателей в Китае и России. Данное исследование дает ценное представление о комплексном взаимодействии между языком, культурой и педагогической практикой, позволяет пролить свет на различие критических замечаний преподавателей в китайских и русских аудиториях.

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## Teachers' critical remarks in Chinese and Russian classroom discourse

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**Abstract.** The purpose of this paper is to examine the performance of teachers' critical remarks in Chinese and Russian classroom settings, with a focus on identifying the ethnocultural characteristics associated with critical remarks. To achieve this goal, a comprehensive questionnaire was administered, designed to investigate the frequency and linguistic patterns of critical remarks employed by Chinese and Russian teachers. The scientific novelty of the study is supported by the fact that it was the first time that a comparative study focusing on Chinese and Russian teachers' use of critical remarks in academic settings was conducted. The cultural linguistic features of teachers' criticism have been identified and the corresponding frequencies within different classroom situations have been measured in the article. The characteristics of Chinese and Russian teachers' performance of criticism through culture values and contexts have been considered and explained. The findings revealed that both groups used direct and indirect criticism. Nonetheless, certain cultural variations were noted, with Chinese teachers using direct criticism more frequently than Russian ones. We suggest that these differences are due to cultural values and teachers' role positions in China and Russia. This research provides valuable insights into the intricate interplay between language, culture, and pedagogical practices, shedding light on the distinctive features of teachers' critical remarks in Chinese and Russian classrooms.

### Introduction

The relevance of this study is that the academic exchanges between Russia and China are growing, and at the same time, the international interactions between Russian and Chinese students and teachers are also increasing. However, students and teachers from different cultural backgrounds may encounter great communication challenges within a more globalized and internationalized higher education setting, which adds to the context complexity of classroom discourse. Therefore, it requires both teachers and students to improve their communicative and pragmatic competence. For this reason, there are a lot of research works which focus on communication problems in Sino-Russian intercultural educational settings (Новикова, Новиков, Рыбаков, 2015; Perfilieva, Shi, Novospasskaya et al., 2020). Even though

the majority of them concentrated on the language and cultural characteristics of Chinese and Russian teachers and students, there are few investigations on the comparative aspect of critical remarks made by Chinese and Russian teachers in classroom settings. The act of critical remarks, which can be defined as “an illocutionary act whose illocutionary point is to give negative evaluation of the hearer’s (H’s) actions, choice, words and products for which he or she may be held responsible” (Nguyen, 2005, p. 7), is considered to be an effective tool to regulate students’ misbehaviors and help students to facilitate learning outcomes and academic achievement. Thus, teachers’ critical remarks can be performed with positive intention. However, due to the nature of criticism, which Brown and Levinson (1987) claim to be intrinsically face-threatening, as well as the culture-specific styles of language performing, it is likely to be negatively perceived and even damage teacher-student relationships. What is more, the expression of speech acts and the strategies used by teachers may differ between cultural contexts (El-Dakhs, Ambreen, Zaheer et al., 2019). Thus, it is necessary to investigate the act of critical remarks in cross-cultural classroom settings and probe into the most conventional communicative styles of Chinese and Russian teachers’ criticism.

To fulfill the aim of this study, it is necessary to focus on the following tasks. Firstly, we investigate the frequency and linguistic patterns of Chinese and Russian teachers’ use of critical remarks; secondly, we identify the mitigation strategies employed to soften the imposition and face-threat of criticism; finally, we explain the characteristics of criticism performance through cultural values.

The study was conducted comparatively by employing both quantitative (frequencies and percentages) and qualitative (mitigation strategies) methods.

**Theoretical basis.** This study is based on an interdisciplinary approach, which includes Linguistic Pragmatics, especially the Theory of Speech Act (Searle, 1975), Cross-Cultural Pragmatics (Thomas, 1983), Theory of Politeness (Brown, Levinson, 1987; Larina, Ponton, 2022), Cultural Studies (Hofstede, 1984; Hofstede, Hofstede, Minkov, 2005), and the study of teacher-student interaction covering the speech act of criticism (Alemi, Maleknia, 2023; Agustina, Cahyono, 2016; Deveci, Midraj, El-Sokary, 2023; El-Dakhs, Ambreen, Zaheer et al., 2019; Li, Seale, 2007).

The findings of this study hold practical implications and can be utilized in various educational contexts. The results can inform the teaching practices and methodologies in universities and institutions focusing on humanities. Specifically, the materials and insights from this study can be incorporated into special courses and seminars that delve into theoretical, practical, and comparative aspects of Second Language teaching (SL) and intercultural communication. The data obtained from this study can be applied in the development of textbooks, teaching aids, and instructional materials. The findings can also guide the creation of training programs for teachers, emphasizing the importance of communication strategies and fostering positive teacher-student interactions.

## Discussion and results

The Discourse Completion Task (DCT) was used as the main data collection tool in this study. A six-item DCT in Chinese and Russian was presented to Chinese and Russian students, respectively. The DCT was divided into two parts: Part 1 was aimed at gathering demographic information from participants, and Part 2 comprised six situations that were considered to occur frequently in teacher-student interactions. They were: 1) late arrival of students; 2) talking during class; 3) irregular homework completion; 4) lack of participation in class discussion; 5) inappropriate speech; 6) unsuitable appearance for academic/university environment. In each case, students were asked what the teacher would say in an identical situation. It is important to note that while teacher-student interaction can occur at various levels both within and outside the learning environment (Wangia, Otonde, 2020), we limited ourselves to the classroom settings in this study.

A total of 121 university students participated in our study and filled in the questionnaire. The participants ranged in age from 18 to 30 and included 67 Chinese and 54 Russian students. Furthermore, there were 30 males and 37 females among these individuals for Chinese, compared to 19 males and 35 females for Russian.

Except for a few invalid responses, we received from the students almost 700 teachers’ critical comments, which served as the corpus for the current study. Then, in order to gain a more thorough and in-depth understanding of how Chinese and Russian teachers use critical remarks, the two sources of students’ responses were compared using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Within the context of Searle’s (1975) indirect speech act theory, we restricted our quantitative analysis to primarily focusing on direct and indirect forms of criticism. It has been observed that teachers in Chinese and Russian use both direct and indirect criticism. However, there was a difference in the frequency of use between the two groups, with Chinese teachers employing direct criticism more frequently than Russian teachers in each of the six scenarios, particularly in situations 3 (irregular homework completion) and 6 (unsuitable appearance) (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** Frequency and percentage of direct and indirect critical remarks used by Russian and Chinese teachers in classroom discourse

Situation*	Direct critical remarks (%)		Indirect critical remarks (%)	
	Chinese	Russian	Chinese	Russian
1	72.4	68.4	27.6	31.6
2	80.6	54.7	19.4	45.3
3	57.2	11.4	42.8	88.6
4	67.4	43.3	32.6	56.7
5	69.8	58.3	30.2	41.7
6	44	8.7	56	91.3

\* The six situations are: 1) late arrival of students; 2) talking during class; 3) irregular homework completion; 4) lack of participation in class discussion; 5) inappropriate speech; 6) unsuitable appearance for class environment.

Following that, examples of critical remarks from teachers will be provided, and each particular strategies' case for dealing with causing disruption behavior from students will be covered.

### **Situation 1. When students are late for class**

This section examines teachers' critical remarks of students' tardiness. According to the findings, both Chinese and Russian teachers tend to criticize students in this domain. They use imperatives in both positive and negative forms to request punctuality from students. However, unlike Chinese teachers, who regularly use bare imperatives to make criticism (1), Russian teachers frequently use the "Please + the imperative" pattern to adapt their criticism (2).

(1) *Come earlier next time.* / 下次来早点儿。

*Please come on time.* / *Пожалуйста, приходите вовремя.*

(2) *Don't be late next time.* / 下次不要迟到了。

*Please don't be late next time.* *Пожалуйста, не опаздывайте в следующий раз.*

It is also worth noting that Chinese and Russian teachers have comparable preferences for making critical remarks more indirectly by asking for explanations (3) and by being ironic / joking (4) in this situation:

(3) *Why are you late?* / 为什么迟到?

*Why are you late?* / *Почему опоздал?*

(4) *You came so early!* / 来得挺早!

*I'll send you to cut down wood in Siberia.* / *Отправлю валить лес в Сибирь.*

### **Situation 2. When students talk in class**

According to our data, in this situation, both Chinese and Russian teachers resort to positive and negative forms of imperatives to demand that students should stop talking in class and concentrate on the lesson (5); and imply that students' talking has a negative impact on the teaching activity, thus it is prohibited and requires modification (6). Furthermore, both Chinese and Russian teachers employ the "Please (Chinese: 请, Russian: пожалуйста) + the imperative" pattern to criticize students (7):

(5) *Attention!* / 注意听讲!

*Be quiet.* / *Тихо.*

(6) *Don't disturb other students.* / 不要打扰其他同学。

*Please don't interfere with the class.* / *Пожалуйста, не мешайте вести занятие.*

(7) *Please listen carefully.* / 请注意听讲。

*Please stop talking.* / *Прекратите разговаривать, пожалуйста.*

In addition, it is noteworthy that in this situation, Russian teachers can use conventionalized indirect critical remarks, such as "Can you (please)..." Such question with modal verbs pattern of criticism leads to an interpretation that the teacher intends to request the students to stop talking in class (8).

(8) *Can you be quieter?* / *Можно потише?*

*Can you please be quieter?* / *Можно потише, пожалуйста?*

Furthermore, certain Chinese and Russian teachers employ the ironic technique to deliver critical comments (9). Another similarity is that both criticize students by offering opinion / presenting an alternative suggestion (10). In this scenario, we propose that these critical remarks might be interpreted negatively.

(9) *It's good for communicating.* / 交流交流挺好。

*Where are we... on the street?* / *Мы где находимся... на улице?*

(10) *Why don't you come up and speak?* / 要不你上来讲?

*If you want to talk, you'd better get out of the classroom and not interfere with the class.* / *Если вы хотите разговаривать, вам лучше выйти из аудитории и не мешать занятию.*

### **Situation 3. When students don't do homework regularly**

In terms of direct criticism, we noted that both positive and negative imperatives are used by Chinese and Russian teachers to emphasize their urge for students to accomplish schoolwork on time. The modification phrase "please" can also be found in these examples (11).

(11) *Hand in homework on time.* / 按时交作业。

*Please finish your homework on time.* / *请按按时完成作业。*

*Don't do like this next time.* / 下次不要这样了。

*Please bring your assignments on time.* / *Пожалуйста, выполняйте задания в срок.*

In terms of indirect criticism in this situation, Chinese and Russian teachers are strikingly similar in the way they express critical comments on students' tardiness for homework, including asking the reason for the irregular homework completion (12); giving hints by suggesting the negative consequences of failure to hand in homework on time, such as dropping scores or difficulty at the exam (13); and indicating homework completion as the standard or general rules (14).

(12) *Why don't you do your homework?* / 为什么不做作业?

*Why is there no homework again?* / *Почему опять нет домашнего задания?*

(13) *If you don't hand in your homework on time, you will lose the marks.* / *如果不按时交作业, 会扣平时分。*

*You will have difficulty in taking the exam.* / *Вам будет сложно на экзамене.*

(14) *Homework is also a kind of learning.* / *做作业也是一种学习。*

*Homework must be done.* / *Домашнее задание необходимо выполнять.*

### **Situation 4. When students don't participate in class discussion**

Regarding students' negative class involvement, most Chinese and Russian teachers are inclined to urge students to participate more actively in the discussion by using bare positive imperatives and the "Please + the imperative" pattern (15).

- (15) *Be more active.* / 积极一点。 / *Будьте активнее.*  
*Please take part in the discussion.* / 请参与课堂讨论。 / *Включайтесь в работу.*

In addition, it is also noticeable that the strategies of asking for reason (16) and involvement (17) were commonly employed both in Chinese and Russian classroom.

- (16) *Why don't you discuss with others?* / 为什么不和大家一起讨论?

*Why don't you participate?* / *Почему не участвуете?*

- (17) *Let's have a discussion.* / 我们一起来讨论讨论。

*Let's join the discussion.* / *Включаемся в работу.*

Interestingly, teachers in the two cultures demonstrate the same tendency by indicating the value of classroom debate in motivating students and increasing enthusiasm, despite the implementation from opposite perspectives (18, 19).

- (18) *Class discussion is beneficial for your study.* / 课堂讨论对你们的学习有好处。

(19) *Silent students will not receive extra credit for the seminar.* / *Дополнительные баллы за семинар молчуны не получают.*

Also, unlike Chinese teachers, Russian teachers may choose to use rhetorical questions to express their dissatisfaction with the low participation of students in the classroom (20):

- (20) *Have you prepared for the lesson?* / *Вы готовы к уроку?*

**Situation 5. When students use inappropriate speech manner**

Concerning the more individual component – teachers' critical attitudes towards students' inappropriate speaking manner (calling another student by a demeaning nickname), data reveals that teachers are likely to make critical comments in a direct way (21, 22).

- (21) *Apologize to your classmates.* / 向你的同学道歉。

*Stop it!* / *Перестаньте!*

*Please show your respect to the other student.* / 请尊重他人。

*Please be more polite.* / *Будьте вежливее.*

- (22) *Do not call others by nicknames.* / 不要给别人起外号。

*Please don't swear like that at the university!* / *Не ругайтесь так в университете!*

Some indirect critical comments were also found out. First of all, teachers in both cultures intend to trigger students' introspection on the behavior of addressing others in an impolite way by means of asking the reasons (23). Secondly, they will resort to stating the standard or general rules to make it clear that it is improper to behave like this (24).

- (23) *Do you think it is appropriate?* / 你觉得这样合适吗?

*Why do you express like that?* / *Почему Вы так выражаетесь?*

(24) *Using hurtful nicknames and joking about others is impolite and disrespectful.* / 给别人起外号或者开玩笑是不礼貌, 不尊重人的。

*You are actually at the university.* / *Вы вообще-то в университете.*

**Situation 6. When students' appearances are not suitable for class environment**

Similar to Situation 5, in this context we aim to focus on how teachers comment on the way students dress. The most striking finding is that 91.3% of Russian teachers choose to express their attitudes in an obscure and implicit way. By contrast, 56% of teachers in Chinese classroom tend to use indirect criticism, while 44% adopt the more direct style (25).

- (25) *Don't dress like this next time.* / 下次不许这么穿。 / *В следующий раз так не одевайтесь.*

Meanwhile, some resemblances and inclination in the indirect use of critical remarks in terms of students' inappropriate appearance were also noted: both Chinese and Russian teachers are likely to use ironic criticism (26); by referring to the general regulations in the classrooms, Chinese and Russian teachers aim to indicate that it is students' obligation to obey university rules and dress appropriately (27); by using rhetorical questions to express their disagreement and disapproval of the ways students are dressed. As shown in (28), we regard this criticism as an ironic rhetorical question which will consequently result in students' more intense feeling and be accepted negatively.

- (26) *Keep yourself warm.* / 注意保暖。

*You came to the university, not to the beach.* / *Вы пришли в университет, а не на пляж.*

- (27) *Students should dress more formal and proper in class.* / 课堂上着装要得体。

*This is university, the dress code should be observed.* / *Это университет, следует соблюдать дресс-код.*

- (28) *Do you think it is appropriate to dress like this?* / 你这样穿好吗?

*Did you come to university or to a disco?* / *Вы в университет пришли или на дискотеку?*

After the processing and decoding of data, we observed some similar tendencies as well as different characteristics of Chinese and Russian teachers' use of critical remarks in their interaction with students in all the six situations. Both Chinese and Russian teachers employ the direct and indirect use of critical remarks. Additionally, in comparison with Russian teachers, Chinese teachers tend to make more direct critical comments. As can be seen in Table 1, despite the fact that the specific frequency varies across situations, in each situation the total frequency of using critical remarks directly in Chinese classroom is higher than in the Russian one. Especially in Situation 3 (Irregular homework completion: Chinese teachers – 57.2%, Russian teachers – 11.4%) and Situation 6 (Unsuitable appearance for class environment: Chinese teachers – 44%, Russian teachers – 8.7%), Chinese teachers use direct criticism almost five times more often than Russian teachers. Also, among the direct critical remarks, we can observe that Russian teachers use etiquette terms, like “*please*”, more frequently compared to Chinese teachers to soften the criticism and show respect to the student, while still conveying the message that the student's behavior is not acceptable.

Furthermore, when teachers try to avoid the direct expression of criticizing students and resort to some softer or implicit devices for performing the act of critical remarks, generally they employ various strategies. For example, Russian teachers show the possibility of using **conventionalized indirect critical remarks**, such as “*Can you (please)...*” (8), these critical remarks with modal verb patterns are more formal, polite, and “face-saving”. They may be favorably recognized and accepted by students.

There are also **non-conventionalized indirect critical remarks**, which can be found both in Chinese and Russian teachers’ discourse, we classified them as follows: a) *being ironic / joking* can be used to offer critical comments (3, 9), which involves expressing one’s thoughts by saying the opposite or expressing negative attitude; b) *presenting option* (10), which refers to teachers delivering the intention of criticism by providing a way for students to make a choice. According to our observation, it will threaten students’ faces and is unlikely to be welcomed warmly. This finding may conflict with Brown and Levinson’s (1987) theory that giving option functions as a negative strategy and it avoids enforcing the hearer’s response and minimizes the imposition; c) *rhetorical questions* (20, 23) are applied to indicate teachers’ dissatisfaction with students and it is not expected to be answered; d) *indicating standard* (13, 19, 27) is preferred by teachers in the two cultures for the reason that by referring to the general regulations in the university settings, Chinese and Russian teachers aim to indicate that it is students’ obligation to obey university rules and dress appropriately; e) *asking for reason* (4, 12) is also appreciated by both Chinese and Russian teachers. By virtue of asking students to provide explanations for inappropriate behavior, teachers modify and mitigate their criticisms by suggesting to students the validity of their criticisms; f) *offering hints* (18) and *stating involvement* (17). The former refers to pointing out students’ mistakes by mentioning something seemingly unrelated, while the latter means teachers attempt to include students in one group by employing an inclusive “we (us)” form to shorten the distance with students and to soften their criticism.

## Conclusion

As a result of the study, we have come to the following conclusions.

First of all, we found that both Chinese and Russian teachers make criticism in the direct and indirect style, and they all use politeness strategies. While Chinese teachers’ style appeared to be more direct compared to the Russian one, they use direct forms of criticism more frequently and without modification. In contrast, Russian teachers are more likely to employ indirect criticism and etiquette phrases like “please” when giving direct criticism.

Secondly, in this study, we identified eight types of mitigation strategies, which were employed by both Chinese and Russian teachers, containing positive politeness strategies (stating involvement; asking for reason), negative politeness strategies (asking a question; indicating a criterion; giving an option), off-record strategies (being ironic / joking; offering hints; a rhetorical question).

We suggest that these differences are due to cultural values and teachers’ role positions in China and Russia. On the one hand, in a country with a large power distance, such as China, students are expected to defer to the authority of the teacher, and direct criticism may be considered an appropriate way for the teacher to exercise their power and keep the classroom orderly. On the other hand, students may be more likely to challenge authority in a society with a smaller power distance, such as Russia, and the use of etiquette terms like “please” may be a way for the teacher to show respect and acknowledge the student’s individuality while still asserting their own authority as a teacher.

Further research is needed on a wider material including natural communication and students’ perception of teachers’ critical remarks and their appropriateness in two cultural contexts.

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