Intercultural Logical Analysis of Business Communication From Daoism and Vagueness

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Abstract
This paper discusses the interconnection between the Daoism and vagueness. On one hand, it summarizes the viewpoints of vagueness proposed by numerous scholars, displaying the function of such expressions, stressing the affirmative role; on the other hand, it launches the term into the Chinese first philosophy Daoism, revealing the links of these two good brothers. Then, the paper argues about the insights of the logics put forward by the Chinese and the Western professionals, drawing on the conclusion that the Daoism is concerned with the Dao of vagueness. It is a fuzzy set as well as logics of dialectics with reversion reasoning. The two high context terms resemble the cultures of the East and West. The integration can contribute to the success in business communication. No universal way can guide the business interaction; our heart and soul can soften all the discrepancy and conflict. Harmony can be achieved through a variety of Daoes, each cultural group bearing their own vagueness, silence, rhetoric, and reasoning. The logics of the Dao in business communication are in your eyes, your mouth, your hands, and your heart and soul in particular.

Keywords
Dao, vagueness, logics, intercultural, business communication

Business communication, one means of the wealth of common communications, renders the most significant role in business activities. It involves countless factors, such as personality, traits, resilience to the environment, employing and interpreting of the vague language; one’s thinking modes including one’s logics and reasoning. Anyway, such talks authored by scholars from a great number of fields cannot go without the cultural analysis. Intercultural communication is essential and fundamental in one’s success in business. Whoever embraces the essence of the Daoism and the appropriateness of the vagueness will take the lead in the fierce competition.

Chinese Daoism manipulates the vague language, whose logics are a fascinating and complex project. These two twin notions have witnessed a rising body of discourse analytic and pragmatic studies. The Dao perhaps is the most admirable term in the Chinese thought or idea. Just like any communication, such a highly-dependent context term can be interpreted in terms of abstract perspective or specific term (Jin 2010: 17-19). The Daoism can be considered as a metatheory in Chinese philosophy while vagueness is a need and must in the intercultural communication. These two brothers can be weighed from the similar...
perspectives. How to take advantage of the vague language can be perceived as one of the labels in identifying your potential in the interaction, and whether we obtain the spirit of the Daoism is sure to be a sign of an anchor in the negotiation.

**VAGUENESS AND DAOISM**

The way of vagueness can be of a gap-filler, an approach, or just a failure. Vagueness originates from L. Zadeh’s fuzzy set in mathematics. It is widely utilized and applied in a myriad of disciplines. Such practice honors it a somewhat ontology for the language and the communication. Vagueness or ambiguity is a property of linguistic items, one essential element in any language. The criterion or criteria to specify such event is also ambiguous and vague. There are cases of obscurity, vagueness, generality or non-specificity, multiple applicability, metaphorical usages, etc. (Catherine 2008: 21-22). They can be conduits for or means of communications, killing the embarrassment or other discomfort that precision fails to perform. They are very much what you make of them. It can be understood that every word is born ambiguous or vague. Sure, it is sometimes reflecting the swimming mind and thoughts, which is not the focus of this paper.

A pioneering work is recognized in Joanna Channell’s book *Vague Language*. She points that interest in vagueness in language use and meaning has arisen in a number of disciplines: literary criticism, linguistics, psychology, philosophy… a complete theory of language must have vagueness as in integral component (Channell 1994: 5). Wittgenstein (1953) suggests that words are like blurred photographs often exactly what we need (Channell 1994: 6). Ullmann (1962) points out that vagueness is itself rather vague and ambiguous. Some of them are inherent in the very nature of language whereas others only in specific circumstances (Channell 1994: 6). Ambiguity has traditionally been identified where a sentence has two or more competing but distinct meanings attached to it, whereas vagueness is seen where distinct meanings cannot be identified (Channell 1994: 35). Confusing vagueness with ambiguity may lead to false attribution of polysemy. It is important to understand that a sentence or an utterance can be both ambiguous and vague (Channell 1994: 37-38). Vague language is not bad or wrong, but nor is it inherently good. Its use needs to be considered with reference to contexts and situations, when it will be appropriate, or inappropriate (Channell 1994: 197).

In reality, the probing into the essence of vagueness can be traced back to the Stoics. It employs the term ambiguity rather than vagueness. Actually, they are interchangeable. Stoics constructed at least one definition of ambiguity that one and the same linguistic item can mean or signify two or more different things (Catherine 2008: 1). The stoic motivation for studying ambiguity might be called pragmatic, but not in the sense that it contributed to some narrowly practical goal... The point was that seeing or missing an ambiguity could make a difference to one’s general success as a human being (Catherine 2008: 3).

In truth, vagueness undergoes in many manifestations. One of the typical codes is silence. Nakane (2007) argues that silence has often been associated with “Asian” or “Eastern” cultures in intercultural communication, in contrast with the association of the “West” with articulation and volubility (Nakane 2007: 1). It is widely reported and arguable that the Asians are passive, unwilling to air their values. This is often criticized in the communication. Sure, there is a host of negative points about vagueness. Ambiguous or vague utterances often interfere sound reasoning. If a word has manifold implications, it is ambiguous. If it is vague, it means it has no certain bounds; and if it is impossible to clarify the possibilities, the uncertainty arises (Layman 2012: 64). Nevertheless, it is admitted that if it has no affirmative role, vagueness shall not
be defined as a kind of interference with, or failure of communication, which reflects an important conceptual link with the understanding of the utterance. Such a function can compare with its equivalent Dao in the Chinese philosophy.

The Dao in Chinese can be addressed as one of key and critical terms of the vagueness employment in the West. There are Dao’s implications such as the being, the essence, the energy, qi, the root, the law, the principle, the truth, or the wisdom. Such renderings are vaguely and broadly interpreted. Quantities of Lao Zi’s ideas appear to be engagingly suggestive, polysemous, and somewhat ambiguous rather than articulate (Wang 1998: 2). The Dao is often likened by modern scholars to the noumenon of the universe and the essence of all things in occidental terms. The two elements of the Dao is Wu (being-without-form) and You (being-within-form), just like the two sides of one coin, the former invisible and abstract of the state without becoming the actuality, the latter visible and concrete of the manifestation (Wang 1998: 7). Have substance (You) and have vacuity (Wu) are inseparable and interdependent (Wang 1998: 7), and it holds true to the vagueness and precision. Any bird has its form of the Dao. Vagueness has its own Dao, a good brother of precision, a filler-up of the situation. Yet, the Dao is in itself a vague term, whose uncertainty and boundlessness make it an equivalent of the vagueness.

The Chinese saying goes like Tao that can be daoed is not universal and eternal Tao. Tao cannot be fully termed, such metalanguage, is highly context, a fussy set of an abstract matter as well as a specific one. Such vagueness troubles and fascinates the Chinese thousands of years. The Daoism’s ontology can be attained from vagueness. In another word, the Dao share more implications with the term vagueness or ambiguity. In practice, what matters is the employment of vagueness and ambiguity to avoid the embarrassments, or to achieve the strategy in the communication.

LOGICS AND THE DIALECTIC DAO OF THE FUZZY LOGICS

Originally logic was conceived of as a tool to study the logical properties of natural language. The analysis of logical form can be carried on at different levels or with different degrees of fineness.

Language and thinking are complex and complicated, where a certain logics or philosophy cannot illuminate all the events. Many scholars put forward their understanding about the definition, form, and process of the reasoning. Logics are intrinsically of pluralism (Chen 2013: 19). Logics can be classified as traditional and modern. The former starts from the Aristotle’s reasoning to the being of mathematical logics, which draws on the daily language, whose vagueness and ambiguity make it a theoretical flaw; the latter includes the mathematical reasoning and inductive probability logic, which employ the symbols and the mathematical device, a more precision broad in-depth study (Zhao 2014: 7). The formal logic focuses on the formality of the thinking and its rules, while the didactical logics goes to the process of the thinking and the relevant laws (Sun 2006: 32). That is to say, the former stresses the static study, the latter dynamic. Logical system, also termed as formal system or logical calculus, consists of four features: consistency, validity, soundness, and completeness (Xiong 2011: 11-12). The message design logics model argues that individuals have different logics that are used for dealing with these conflicting goals (Miller 2007: 110).

Some others discuss it from etymology in Chinese. In ancient Chinese, Luo Ji (logics) is a compound term. Luo is similar to the word Xun (following). Ji means He (unity, harmony), Ji or Ju (gather together). In modern Chinese, Luo Ji has three implications: the law of thinking, the objectivity, and the study of logics (Guo 2014: 1). The Chinese term originates to seek for the law, the rule, the way, which underlies the connotation of the Dao. The Dao of logics is nothing,
which can be something. Hence, the Daoism is of logics. The certain rule demonstrates certainty, no eternal rule uncertainty. The Dao De Jing possesses an intrinsic structure and rigorous logic of its own (Wang 1998: 5). Just like any philosophy, the Daoism has its own reasoning, logic of dialectics, whose essence is the reversion. In nature and human society, everything is doomed to roll downhill once it reaches the acme (Wang 1998: 8). It is advisable to be contented with what we have, killing the avarices and ambition, which is the Dao of the human life. This carries the similar features as vagueness and precision, whose movement of the Dao can be reversion and interchangeable. Plus, as Dao De Jing demonstrates, “Weakness is the function of the Dao”, we can also say, “Vagueness is the function of the Dao”. The Daoism is a somewhat fuzzy logic, an eccentric logic, an abnormal logic, a reversion logic, which answers the question of what the Dao is with what is not. It is also of the dialectical logic, there being so many couples like You and Wu, Yin and Yang, Dao (the way) and De (ethics and the actualization).

Fortunately, such philosophy is echoed. Kenneth Burke (1968) notes that “There are no negatives in nature, where everything simply is what it is and as it is” (Burke 1968: 9). This introduction of the negative makes our perception of the world and our behavior in the world much more complex (Miller 2007: 98). Burke believed that not just life is like a drama but that life is drama. Burke (1935) believed that the drama of life is motivated by guilt. Burke conceived of guilt as a way to refer to a variety of negative process—anxiety, embarrassment, shame, disgust—that permeate the human condition (Miller 2007: 99). Burke’s view is similar to the spontaneity in the Daoism. In the process of growing and developing, the individual will encounter hardships, setbacks, such embarrassment and guilt are the stepstones, spurring one’s movement. This is another dialectic logic, which reminds us to be patient and keep calm in business communication; the better understanding of the other party is time-consuming and complex, a temporary retreat undergoing the further advancement. Burke’s theorization points to the inherently rhetorical nature of symbolic action. Burke (1976) saw rhetoric as a process of persuasion, symbolic action designed “to produce effects ‘beyond’ the act, as when exhorting the audience to favor this cause rather than that” (Burke 1976: 67). Burke saw rhetoric as a process of creating, re-creating, and drawing on identification (Miller 2007: 100). In daily communication as well as the business communication, the full employment of the rhetoric can better persuade others to identify with us through more interactions, negative and positive talks.

The logic of dialectics is a type of fuzzy logic, a set of negatives and positives, certainty and uncertainty hard to define, a process of reversion.

THE DAO OF BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

There is no universal rule for the business communication, whose Dao undergoes nowhere but the bottom of our hearts. A wealth of such vague expressions can be displayed in distinctive ways. Sound communication is far from easy, but it is something that anyone can do well. Most importantly, good communication is all about being intentional. Kevin Thomson, chairman of the Marketing & Communications Agency Ltd, in Marlow, England, says that “winning the hearts and minds” of employees is the most important factor in business success today (Locker 2005: 3). Bennett (1986) proposes a six-stage model (denial of difference, defense against difference, minimization of difference, acceptance of difference, adaptation to difference, integration of difference) known as the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS), labeling the first three stages as ethnocentric, and the last three stages as ethnorelative. However, there are a number of controversial issues involved: Such sequential stages are not necessary to follow rigidly, identity
development varying (Spencer-Oatey and Franklin 2013: 158-160). Very much like Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, it is arguable to comply with the supposed levels. Intercultural identity development is not necessarily more challenging than the intracultural acceptance, one’s values, personality, or reasoning works better. Our identity is growing and developing with the context, with the community, which is a fuzzy set, who we are is always puzzling, we having a reasonable mind or a swimming one, even our moods and emotions playing the decisive role. Agreement or contract, or any harmony or unity owes to the openness to all likes and dislikes, disregard of the race, sex, ethnics, and age. Equality is born from our heart and soul, our acts instead of our mouth, empty talks only resulting in unpleasantness, disagreement, even resentment, or hatred. Mutual understanding and respect produce happiness and harmony, which is the anchor of the Daoism. Tolerance to all the differences will assist us in living in the global village; vagueness to the specific behaviors highlights the consideration of humanities. The brains and commitment contributes as much as or even more than the hands and muscles in business. Patience, understanding, and love enrich us to have the energy, stamina, and inspiration to do the job. This is the Dao of the communication; all of us have our own values, thinking modes, which can be reflected in our interactions with others. Whoever we are, our intent and attempt will be demonstrated fully in our daily work. How to balance work and life or family challenges the employee as well as the manager. The consideration of the family needs and wants will render more productivity, which is the Dao of the management; the mutual understanding of the maximization of a firm will win the manager’s heart and soul. The harmony between the corporation and the stakeholders is the Dao of the business, all the interactions being the De, the actualizations. Such process is a fuzzy set, from obscurity to clearness, whose manifestation of the variables is an art science.

Communication can be achieved through more styles. Writing is a considerable and formal communication, whose style makes a man. You-attitude is a style of writing that looks at things from the reader’s point of view, emphasizing what the reader wants to know, respecting the reader’s intelligence, and protecting the reader’s ego (Locker 2005: 34). However, the Chinese prefers we-attitude. Such a style can build up the friendly atmosphere, as if all the parties are in the same family. Anyway, impersonal expressions often help you convey criticism tactfully. For example, the utterance “This estimate makes no allowance for inflation” is better than “No allowance for inflation has been made in this estimate”, and much better than “You make no allowance for inflation in your estimate”. This illogical design ignores the reasoning of grammar, highlighting the communication effect with little rudeness (Locker 2005: 36). Distinct cultures cultivate distinctive expressions and actualization. Variety of expressions stands for different reasoning, countlessly and namelessly revealing the complexity. The flexibility to the situation also attributes to the cultural property. Successful business communication involves admission to cultures and subcultures of any sorts, mutual respect for the differences and distinctions of high context cultures or low context cultures. Varieties of beliefs such as gods, heaven, Christ, and so on bring forth no discrimination in communication. Taking actions or no actions results from mutual benefit, activity or passivity is just viewpoints on the world, concerning about the relevant understandings of their communities. Globalization and localization render glocalization, a global village crying for smiling to all, open to all. International corporation gives rise to transnational corporation, melting pot resolving all disagreement with the Daoist constraint of desire digging.

Admittedly, communication is goal-directed. Perhaps even more important for intercultural interaction and rapport management is mutual understanding of each other’s goals and the
congruence of them (Spencer-Oatey and Franklin 2013: 113). This involves clearly understanding of the other party’s intention and expectations, satisfying answer bringing rapport. Otherwise, frustration, disappointment, or irritation may occur. Dillard and his colleagues (Dillard 1990; Dillard, Segrin, and Harden 1989) have provided a useful consideration of these multiple goals by differentiating between primary goals and secondary goals. The former refers to what a person is trying to accomplish the interaction, the latter typically concerned with relational issues (Miller 2007: 116). In business negotiation, it is reasonable to adhere to the primary goal, advisable to be silent or vague or retreat to the secondary goals for the time being, the fuzzy logic of the Daoism taking the lead. Sacrifice to the subcompartments avoids others’ embarrassment and face-threatening, winning their hearts and minds. In a series of studies (Berger 1997), Berger and his colleagues found support for this proposition as well as for the notion that changes in abstract aspects of plans were more cognitively demanding than lower-level changes (Miller 2007: 118). This explicates that changes in the abstract aspect require handling the vague or ambiguous plans, making a direct and clear goal is preferred in some circumstances.

Countless views on the Dao or the way of business reveal the uncertainty of the approaches to such a communication, the flexibility leading us to pay particular attention to the vague language or images in business information. In 1988, Marian Williams published an article reporting on the relationship between the language used by native speakers of English in business meetings and the language taught by business English textbooks at that time for use in meetings. She found that almost no correspondence between the meetings and the textbooks and that the speakers’ use of language was far more complex than the way in which it was represented for the student (Bargiela-Chiappini, Nickerson, and Planken 2014: 12). Also, Bülow-Moller speaks of the suspension of fixed expectations and judgement, the tolerance of ambiguity and the willingness to engage in building new discursive frames (Bargiela-Chiappini et al. 2014: 31). No universal rule or law for all the things leads us to be open to any discrepancy or inconsistency in the real life, where business negotiation requires us to embrace more quarrels or fights. Such unhappiness is caused by the misunderstanding of the Dao of the other party. The understanding of the Dao comes from the being-without-form, we admit no universal law; recognize of the Dao rises from the being-within-form, we hug all sorts of views, as there exist different cultures. Such subtlety lies in our hearts, whose depth and profoundness are the entrance to success in business communication. This is what Chapter One of Dao De Jing is going on; this is the lead of the Daoism, open to all differences. The minutes are variables in the set of Wu, being-without-form, the origin of Heaven and Earth and You, being-within-form, the mother of myriad things. To encourage firms to be more ethical should not be considered as an illusion. Businesses can be instruments of peace. Corporations should be promoted to avoid corruption, be environmentally responsible, empowering employees with voice, violating no rights, enhancing gender equity.

Cultures are diverse and dynamic. There shall be a mode of “a weak government and a strong community”, which is compelling in China. Still now, some of the Chinese officials at all levels persist in the power-oriented management. In their minds, authority is power, monitoring being habit, which is rooted even in some institutions. The value of “taking no action bringing actions” in the Daoism is nonsense to them. Such hard-headed political realists die hard in China. As Dao De Jing goes, the government or any agent should not be strong-minded or persistently self-centered, “takes the mind of the people as his mind”, taking no arbitrary, unreasonable, or blind actions (Wang 1998: 15-16). This is one of the
fundamentals of the Daoism by the connotation of “taking no action”, which is a somewhat vagueness of harvesting a long-term gain at the expense of short-term losses.

Because of its emphasis on the relationship between the Daoism and business communication, cross-cultural pragmatics has much to offer cross-cultural studies, including intercultural interaction, in philosophy. A business cannot go without crying for profit and the profit-seeking tends to drive us to be selfish. Anyway, such selfishness will make us having no reliable friends. Mutual help undergoes among human beings, between man and nature. The Dao is of heaven-man oneness or nature-man oneness, which is the anchor of the Daoism. It anchors the spontaneity, the underlying law of everything, not just the law of nature.

CONCLUSIONS

Culture now occurs in a global economic context and intercultural processes. One of the actors is the Daosim, whose nimbleness and global reach triggers more scholars burying themselves into Dao De Jing. Professors of business communication are involved in the tide. However, the Dao of conducting business is open to define.

The interpretation of the interconnections between the Daoism and Vagueness is intriguing and theoretically sophisticated, which requires elaboration and further testing. Clarity, sometimes, generates face-threatening, hence vagueness being invited.

Logic can be a bridge between a text and its meaning. The Daoism can help understand nodes of interlinks between corporate profit and community benefit in responsible events enriching peace.

Of business interaction, one can benefit from the ABC—accuracy, brevity, and clarity, as well as the VOA—vagueness, obscurity, and ambiguity. The logics of the Dao in business communication are in your eyes, your mouth, your hands, and your heart and soul in particular.

References

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