

# Lin Daiyu’s Ironic Speech in Hawkes’ English Version of *A Dream of Red Mansions*----A Speech Act Theory Approach

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## Abstract:

Based on the speech act theory as well as the four ironic illocutionary speech acts advocated by Haverkate, the paper tries to analyze four ironic speeches initiated by Lin Daiyu, a female dominating figure in the book *A Dream of Red Mansions*, one of China’s Four Masterpieces. The four speeches are selected randomly from the former twenty chapters of Hawkes’ version of the novel. In doing so, the paper endeavors to figure out the linguistic mechanism under the distinctive style of Lin Daiyu’s ironic speeches, thus to enriching the linguistic study of Lin Daiyu’s characteristics.

**Keywords** —Irony, speech act theory, Lin Daiyu

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## I. INTRODUCTION

As one of China’s four classics that particularly represent Chinese culture, *A Dream of Red Mansions* has been translated into more than 20 languages. Not only does it have an unshakable status in Chinese literature, but also it enjoys high popularity in world literature and is loved by many foreign readers thanks to its rich traditional Chinese culture, complex plots as well as the characters with varied characteristics. Scholars at home and abroad have taken varied researches on *A Dream of Red Mansions* which include the comparative analysis on the translations of it, the studies on the complicated cultural symbols in the book as well as the studies of the translation of certain Chinese words and phrases in the novel, etc. (Zhou, 2013; 103). When it comes to the studies that linguistically concern the language uttered by the characters and the characteristics of them, it is observed that Wang Xifeng, one of the twelve key female characters, and her language have always been the focus of such studies. Lin Daiyu, as

another major and distinctive character besides Jia Baoyu, is also renowned for her sarcastic and sharp language (Zheng, 2012; 87). However, the studies concerning Lin Daiyu’s speeches were mainly carried out from purely literary perspective to dig out the reason for her unfortunate fate, but few studies tried to analyse Daiyu’s language from a linguistic perspective. Nearly no attention was paid to her ironic and sarcastic language which is particularly notable in the book and can reflect her personality clearly and directly. Hence, the paper will analyze the ironic speeches initiated by Lin Daiyu from the purely linguistic perspective with the theory of four ironic illocutionary speech acts in order to enrich the linguistic study on *A Dream of Red Mansions*.

Actually, there are numerous translated versions of *A Dream of Red Mansions* whose representatives include Hawkes’ version and Yang Xianyi and Dai Naidie’s version, etc. The corpus based on what the analysis is carried out is taken from Hawkes’ version rather than Yang and Dai’s version for the following reasons. Firstly, by looking at Hawkes’

translation, we can observe how a foreigner understands the traditional Chinese cultural symbols and what strategies that he chooses to transform the culture into another language. It is beneficial to find out the gap existing in the varied cultures. Secondly, according to the theory of Peter Newmark, translation can be roughly divided into two categories: communicative translation and semantic translation. Communicative translation pays more attention to whether the information can be successfully transmitted to readers, while semantic translation adheres more to the semantic content of the original text (Xu, 2014; 254). When it comes to the two famous versions of *A Dream of Red Mansions*, we can see more communicative translation in Hawkes' version and relatively more semantic translation in Yang's version. Hence, Hawkes' version can reveal how an English-speaking reader understands *A Dream of Red Mansions*, and on the basis of this, how to transform Chinese culture into English faithfully and efficiently.

The paper first introduces the purpose and significance of the research, and then sets up the theoretical framework of the research from the perspective of irony and speech act theory. Finally, a pragmatic analysis of the dialogues in the novel is carried out from the micro-irony perspective. The four dialogues were respectively selected from Chapter Eight, Chapter Nine, and Chapter Twenty. By analyzing these speeches from the ironic speech act theory perspective, the paper aims to find out how the ironies are realized linguistically and what personalities of Lin Daiyu can be revealed from her speeches as well as what strategies were used by Hawkes to convey the original content appropriately.

## II. THEORETICAL BASIS

Thanks to the rapid development of pragmatics, a large number of theories in pragmatics such as speech act theory, have been successfully applied to literary criticism, as a result of which, literary pragmatics, a new marginal subject came into being (Zhu, 2002: 60). To analyze the speech acts between characters in literary works, speech act theory can serve as a useful tool to help readers

understand the personalities, the inner thoughts of the characters, the relationship between the characters as well as the plot of the literary work. Furthermore, irony, a rhetorical device and also a writing technique, is widely used in almost all types of literature.

Irony has been understood in terms of speech act theory for a long time. In his academic writing *A Speech Act Analysis of Irony*, Haverkate holds that "irony is conscious expression of insincerity" (Haverkate, 1990: 104). Insincerity is the intrinsic and inherent property of ironic utterance (Fu, 2004: 29). In speech act theory, if the intention and the attitude are accord with speakers' inner thoughts, then we can say that it is a sincere speech act. If the speaker's utterance is not consistent with his mental activities, then the speech act is insincere. In ironic utterances, speakers imply intentions opposite to the literal meanings of their words. Besides, Grice has linked irony with the Cooperative Principle. Grice points out that the speaker should be cooperative and follow four principles: (a) the maxim of quantity; (b) the maxim of quality; (c) the maxim of relation; (d) the maxim of manner. However, in daily conversations, people will violate some of these principles and tell lies. A cooperative hearer can get the hint given by the speaker and figure out the speaker's real intention and what he or she wants to say indeed. Grice assumes that irony is recognized when the hearer becomes aware of the apparent violation of some of these pragmatic principles, as the result of which, the hearer identifies the speaker's opposite of the literal meaning and figures out his intended meaning (Zhou, 2014; 62). And then an ironic speech act can be said to be accomplished.

Besides, it is worthwhile to know that a distinction can be made between macro irony and micro irony. The former concerns the communication between the writer and the readers while the latter is linked with the communication between the characters in the novel. With respect to micro irony, Haverkate (1990) conducted a pioneering study on verbal irony based on Searle's classification of illocutionary acts based on speech act theory. In his book *Expression and Meaning*, Searle (1979) redefined Austin's Speech Act Theory

by further classifying the illocutionary act into five categories: (a) representatives--- saying or describing what the speaker believes to be true; (b) directives--- intending to get or order the hearer to do something; (c) commissives--- committing or promising the speaker himself to some future actions; (d) expressives--- expressing or conveying feelings or attitudes toward an existing state; (e) declarations--- bring about immediate changes by saying something. Naturally, Haverkate proposed four ironic speech acts, namely, assertive irony, directive irony, commissive irony and expressive irony. Besides, the sincerity condition does not exist in declarations, thus no irony can be generated in this category. (Zhu, 2002: 99).

### III. THE ANALYSIS ON THE IRONIC SPEECHES IN THE NOVEL

#### A. Text One

[1] *The Just at that moment the servants outside announced "Miss Lin" and almost simultaneously Dai-yu came flouncing into the room.*

[2] *Catching sight of Bao-yu she let out a wail of mock dismay.*

[3] *"Oh dear! I have chosen a bad time to come!"*

[4] *The others rose and invited her to be seated.*

[5] *"Why did you say that?" Bao-chai asked her.*

[6] *"If I had known he was coming, I shouldn't have come myself"*

[7] *"What exactly do you mean by that?"*

[8] *"What do I mean by that?" said Dai-yu.*

[9] *"I mean that if I only come when he does, then when I don't come, you won't have any visitors. Whereas if we space ourselves out so that he comes one day and I come the next, it will never get either too lonely or too noisy for you. I shouldn't have thought that needed much explaining."*

Sentence [3], sentence [5] and sentence [9] uttered by Dai Yu all belong to the assertive ironies. According to Searle's classification of the illocutionary act, assertives refer to the speaker's making a promise to the truth of an expressed proposition. The speaker intends to make the hearer

accept the propositional content, and believe it is true. To realize the illocutionary act of assertives, the addresser may use compliments to convey blaming or use scolding for praise. If the addresser himself does not believe the truth of propositional content, then ironic effects will be produced. The addresser hopes and believes that the addressee can comprehend his proposition from the opposite by analyzing the context and semantic structure of the sentence (Zhou, 2014; 91).

This dialogue happened in Chapter Eight when Lin Daiyu visited Xue Baochai and found that Jia Baoyu was also there, which directly evoked dissatisfaction in Daiyu's heart. Adoring Baoyu strongly, Daiyu was somewhat jealous of Baoyu's intimate associations with other girls, especially Baochai. Hence, Daiyu's true intention at the moment was to convey her discontent over Baoyu's frequent visiting Baochai. However, as a distinguished lady, she did not express her intention directly to be polite, which made her speeches sarcastic and ironic. Firstly, for the sentences [3], [6] and [9], Daiyu violated the sincerity principle for that she did not want Baoyu and Baochai to be in close connection at all. It is impossible for Daiyu to encourage Baoyu to visit Baochai frequently and alone without letting her know this. And these three sentences naturally also violated the quality maxim. Besides, for the sentence [9], Daiyu also violated the manner maxim. According to the manner maxim, speakers should express themselves briefly. However, Daiyu here made a long explanation of why she thought Baoyu and herself cannot visit Baochai at the same time, which is actually not necessary and seems to hide her dissatisfaction. At this moment, Baoyu and Baochai's perlocutionary act of Daiyu's illocutionary act "I am complaining that you are always together" was their embarrassment and having no idea how to react. But Daiyu did not show them her sympathy.

Thus, Daiyu's utterances violating CP as well as the sincerity principle turn out to be assertive ironic speech acts which actually threaten others' negative faces. In doing so, Daiyu's ability to use language flexibly, her arrogance and her care for Baoyu are vividly displayed.

In translating the sentence initiated by “黛玉笑道” which can be literally translated as “Daiyu laughed”, Hawkes omitted Daiyu’s laugh but added a rhetorical question “*What do I mean by that ?*”. From the writer’s perspective, such translation is inappropriate for that Daiyu’s sarcasm was based on her politeness and arrogance and she would not express her feelings, whether good or not, so blankly. Besides, her laugh can strengthen the irony here and should not be omitted.

#### **B. Text Two**

*Dai-yu, who sat cracking melon-seeds between her teeth throughout this homily, smiled ironically. Just at that moment her maid Snowgoose came hurrying in with a little hand-warmer for her.*

[10] “*Who told you to bring this?*” Dai-yu asked her.

[11] “*Very kind of them, I am sure.*”

[12] “*But I was not actually freezing to death here.*”

[13] “*Nightingale told me to bring it, Miss. She was afraid you might be cold.*”

[14] “*I am glad you are so ready to obey her. Generally when I tell you to do anything it goes in one ear and out the other; yet anything she tells you to do is followed out more promptly than an Imperial Edict!*”

This dialogue happened very closely after the former one when Baoyu, Daiyu and Baochai were kept by Aunt Xue for drinking, and one maid of Daiyu, Xueyan (Snowgoose in the text), was called by Zijuan (Nightingale in the text), another maid of Dai Yu’s, to send a little-warmer for her. In this dialogue, sentences [11] and [12] are assertive ironies while sentence [14] is an expressive irony.

There were only Baoyu, Daiyu and Baochai in the last context. However, besides them, Aunt Xue was also in this context. Another difference is that, in the former dialogue, the irony victims were obviously Baoyu and Baochai. However, in this dialogue, Daiyu’s speech which was actually still targeted at Baoyu and Baochai seemed to aim at Xueyan on the surface.

Sentences [11] and [12] are assertive ironies. Here, Daiyu violated the sincerity principle as well as the maxim of quality. Daiyu was born in poor

health, so she could definitely not stand the cold in the room. Besides, she didn’t want to appreciate her two maids’ kindness as what she said at all. The illocutionary act of Daiyu here was still to vent her anger. Thus, the illocutionary act of speeches [11] and [12] threatened the face of everyone in the context including Xueyan, Baoyu, Baochai and Aunt Xue, so they turn out to be ironic.

Speech [14] is an expressive irony. The illocutionary force of expressive speech act refers to the speaker’s state of mind to the objective world. The speaker expresses his attitude or feeling towards the hearer such as congratulations, gratitude, welcome and apology. And the hearer has to infer the speaker’s irony from the context. The main purpose of an expressive irony is to give the hearer’s behavior an understatement (Yi; Zhao, 2007: 85). On the surface, it expresses Daiyu’s dissatisfaction with Xue Yan who usually listened to another maid instead of her own words. But her true intention was to speak these words to Baoyu because Daiyu thought that Baoyu always listened to Baochai, not her, which dissatisfied her. Thus, Daiyu’s locutionary act was polite while her illocutionary act was sarcastic. It is worth noting that Aunt Xue was also present at this time, and of course, she could read between the lines of Daiyu. Aunt Xue is one of Daiyu’s elders. Under such circumstances, Daiyu still used ironic language, which highlighted her blunt and unsophisticated character.

As for the translation, Hawkes added “*smiled ironically*” in translating “*只抿着嘴笑*” which can be literally translated as “Daiyu only smiles”, showing directly Daiyu’s inner activity. Actually, readers can probably have no difficulty to infer that Daiyu’s smile is ironic based on the later speeches and the context, so there is probably no need to add the author’s own understanding to the original meaning.

#### **C. Text Three**

[15] “*Wait till I get back and have had my supper, cousin,*” said Bao-yu, “*and I will give you a hand with that rouge.*”

[16] *He chatted with her for quite a bit longer before finally tearing himself away.*

[17] *As he was going she suddenly called after him so that he stopped:*

[18] *“Aren't you going to say good-bye to your cousin Bao-chai?”*

[19] *Bao-yu smiled but said nothing and went straight off to school with Qin Zhong.*

This dialogue happened in Chapter Nine when Baoyu was about to leave for school with QingZhong and he came to say goodbye to Daiyu before leaving.

The sentence [18] here is a typical directive irony. The goal of directives is to make the addressee do what the addresser has told him to. Its propositional content is asking the hearer to do things. In directive irony, the proposition made by the speaker will be performed by the hearer, and the speaker's utterances will take effects through the hearer's act. However, once the speaker utters a sentence and requires or commands the hearer to follow him, if the hearer reasons that the propositional content is irrational and it is impossible for the speaker to ask him to do so, he would attempt to judge the speaker's real intention from the opposite. In such a case, the utterance will appear ironic (Zhou, 2014; 123).

Before leaving for school, Baoyu particularly came to bid farewell to Daiyu. In fact, Daiyu was very happy about that. But instead of expressing her joy and satisfaction, she uttered a question sentence to suggest that Baoyu should also say goodbye to Baochai. On the surface, a grammatical metaphor was used by Daiyu to advise Baoyu to say goodbye to Baochai. But, in fact, Daiyu violated the sincerity principle as well as the maxim of quality, because she did not really want Baoyu also to say goodbye to Baochai just like what Baoyu did to herself at all. Her real intention was actually to make fun of Baoyu's intimate relationship with Baochai, with which she had been unsatisfied for a long time. Through this directive irony, we can see Daiyu's inner joy for Baoyu's behaviour, her sarcastic skills and her brooding over the relationship between Baoyu and Baochai.

As for the translation part, in translating “好妹妹” which can be literally translated as “my dear cousin”, Hawkes chooses to use the word “cousin” only. From a Chinese reader's perspective, in A

*Dream of Red Mansions*, Baoyu doesn't have a closer relationship with anyone else in Da GuanYuan than that with Daiyu, so Baoyu rarely calls other girls “好妹妹”(my dear cousin), except Daiyu. In other words, this intimate title is used for Daiyu most of the time especially when Baoyu needs to allay Daiyu's anger and make her happy. Hence, in translating such a kinship term, Hawkes should add this major information on it.

#### **D. Text Four**

[20] *“How you do pick on one” said Xiang-yun. Always finding fault. Even if you are the perfect you're the lf, I don't thee why you have to go making fun of everyone elthe. But I can show you thome one you won't dare to find fault with. I shall certainly think you a wonder if you do.”*

[21] *“Who's that?” said Dai-yu*

[22] *“If you can find any shortcomings in Cousin Bao-chai” , said Xiang-yun, “you must be very good indeed.”*

[23] *“Oh her,” said Dai-yu coldly. “I wondered whom you could mean. I should never dare to find fault with her.”*

This conversation happened after Daiyu made fun of Shi Xiangyun's inarticulateness. Xiangyun, one of the twelve major female characters, had difficulty articulating the sound “ai” and “er” correctly in Chinese, which aroused Daiyu's mockery. Hence, Xiangyun accused Daiyu of her always making fun of others.

Speech [23] is an assertive irony. In this dialogue, Shi Xiangyun clearly expressed her preference for Xue Baochai and compared Baochai with Daiyu, which was totally unacceptable for Daiyu. But there was actually nothing wrong with Shi Xiangyun's words, for that Daiyu knew that Baochai was truly more popular than herself among those girls and even among servants. Therefore, Daiyu could do nothing but hid her dissatisfaction and ridicule in her own words. On the surface, what this speech [23] conveyed was that Daiyu did not dare to compare herself with Baochai. But, in fact, Daiyu's real illocutionary act was to express her disdain to be compared with anyone else as well as her dissatisfaction when she heard others saying that she was not as good as Baochai. Hence, irony

appeared as the result of the inconsistency between her illocutionary act and illocutionary act.

As for the translation, for the sake of readers' better understanding of Xiangyun's confusion between the two sounds "ai" and "er" which are typical in Chinese, Hawkes chooses to transform this confusion into that between "s" and "th" which is more familiar with English speaking readers. It is a thoughtful and necessary skill in translating *A Dream of Red Mansions* because there are many cultural images with unique Chinese characteristics in the novel, which requires the translator to convey it to foreign readers appropriately based on a thorough understanding of the original text.

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

According to the analysis of Daiyu's ironic speeches in the former twenty chapters of the novel, it can be found that assertive ironies are mostly used, followed by expressive ironies and directive ironies, while commissive ironies are the least used. On the one hand, such a distribution is consistent with Daiyu's characters and her status in Jia Mansion. Lin Daiyu is an arrogant lady with high self-esteem, which means that she would only make fun of or mock others in a decent way. So she prefers using declarative sentences to achieve irony and that is why assertive ironies are most frequently used by her. On the other hand, directive and expressive ironies are also used by Daiyu when she is talking to Baoyu or her maids for that, in Jia Mansion, she can only vent her anger or dissatisfaction to them apparently. Besides, As Haverkate proposed, the four ironic speech acts are not evenly distributed and assertive irony turns out to be the mostly used. The basic conclusion of the paper is consistent with Haverkate's idea. But for the reason that the paper only focuses on the former twenty chapters but not the whole book, so further studies need to be taken to prove the distribution of these four ironic speech acts.

The above analysis of Daiyu's ironic speech acts at least reveals the following characteristics of Daiyu. Firstly, Lin Daiyu has a deep affection for Jia Baoyu. Daiyu is a noble and arrogant girl, so she doesn't bother to compare herself with other girls in Jia's house. However, when it comes to Xue

baochai, Daiyu cannot turn a blind eye. More than half of the ironic speech acts are related to Xue Baochai. Secondly, actually, Daiyu is very favored in Jia's residence. So she is not afraid to show her true ideas and sharp personalities in front of her elders. Thirdly, as a young lady from an ancient family, Daiyu would only lose her temper in front of Baoyu. On other occasions, she would choose to express her views thoroughly in the most polite way, dignified but not losing her sharpness and this is why many speeches of Daiyu turn out to be ironic.

As for the translation of these ironic speeches, we can see that Hawkes adds his own understandings at least from these four dialogues. For example, he would omit certain important verb which was originally in the text and add another sentence or add certain adjectives or adverbs to expose the characters' inner thought. Furthermore, when translating typical Chinese cultural phenomena, like Xiangyun's confusion between the sounds "ei" and "ai", Hawkes can flexibly transform them into the cultural symbols that English-speaking readers are familiar with. But some of his translating strategies can be said to disobey the original intention of the writer. For example, in translating the kinship term "好妹妹"(my dear cousin) which is only used by Baoyu to Daiyu, Hawkes overlooks the strong emotion on such a title. Hence, there is still a long way to go before we can thoroughly present the world with the philosophy and value of Chinese language and Chinese literature and more work need to be done on the research of *A Dream of Red Mansions*, especially on the characters with varied styles of language.

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