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A Pragmatic Study of the Conversations
of Major Characters in *The Portrait of a Lady*

《贵妇画像》中主要人物对话的语用分析

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Abstract

Discourse analysis is an interdisciplinary field of study and has been applied widely to investigations in such fields as philosophy, linguistics, psychology and literary criticism. Since the 1980s, theories of pragmatics such as the Speech Act Theory developed by Austin and Searle, the Cooperative Principle by Grice, the Politeness Principle by Leech, Brown and Levinson, and procedures for conversation analysis by Sinclair and Coulthard have been widely applied to analysis of texts of various genres, including literary texts.

According to Pratt (1977) there is no contradiction between “literary language” and “ordinary language”. Discourse analysis may prove to be an effective approach to study language in literature, capable of revealing the theme or the characterization in fiction.

Based on such assumption, the thesis attempts to analyze the conversations in *The Portrait of a Lady* by drawing insights from the research findings in discourse analysis. *The Portrait of a Lady* is generally regarded as the best of the early works by Henry James, the American novelist. By creating lively conversations among characters, Henry James demonstrated the contrast of character between the naïve Americans and the sophisticated Europeans, reflecting the innocence of the new world in conflict with the corruption and wisdom of the old. Major conversations between Isabel Archer, the heroine, and the intimate group of the men surrounding her, namely Lord Warburton, Caspar Goodwood and Osmond Gilbert are chosen for detailed analysis in the present paper.

In analyzing the conversations, the Speech Act theory is used to reveal how characters with different identities and personalities perform their directives indirectly and politely. The Cooperative Principle is used to find out how and why the characters violate the maxims of the Cooperative Principle in their conversations,

and how the conversational implicatures are generated in the discourse. The Politeness Principle is used to examine how different characters have adopted the politeness strategies to their advantages in communication.

The analysis of the conversations has helped to reveal the sharp contrast in personality between the characters from the two continents and to demonstrate the international theme of this novel, thus providing a new perspective to understand Henry James.

Key words: Discourse Analysis; the Speech Act Theory; the Cooperative Principle; the Politeness Principle

摘要

话语分析是一项跨学科的研究，它被广泛应用到哲学，语言学，心理学和文学评论等领域中。在上个世纪八十年代，诸如奥斯汀和塞尔的言语行为理论，格莱斯的合作原则，利奇，布朗和莱文森的礼貌原则以及会话分析等语用学理论被用于分析包括文学文本在内的各种文体。

蒲拉特(Pratt)1977 年的研究表明文学语言与普通语言之间没有冲突，话语分析就成为研究文学语言的有效方法，能够更好地揭示文学作品中的主题和人物性格。

本文将使用话语分析的理论对《贵妇画像》中的对话进行分析。《贵妇画像》是美国小说家亨利詹姆斯早期作品中的精品。在这部小说中，亨利詹姆斯通过对不同人物对话的精确刻画，展示了纯洁直爽的美国人与腐朽虚伪的欧洲人之间巨大的性格差异，从而体现了他的国际主题，也就是新世界的纯洁与旧世界的腐朽虚伪之间的冲突。女主人公伊莎贝尔 (Isabel) 和她身边的亲密男士之间的对话成为本文分析的重点。这些男士分别是沃伯顿 (Lord Warburton), 卡斯博 (Caspar Goodwood) 和奥斯蒙德 (Osmond Gilbert)。

在详细的话语分析中，本文将采用言语行为理论来分析不同性格和身份的人物如何间接礼貌地实施他们的指示性言语行为，用合作原则来分析为什么人物在同女主人公的对话中违背合作原则？会话含义又是怎样产生的？礼貌原则被用来分析不同人物在交流中如何采取有利于他们自己的礼貌策略。

对人物话语的分析有助于揭示来自两个世界的不同人物之间的性格差异和这部小说的世界主题，从而提供一个了解亨利詹姆斯的新视角。

关键词：话语分析；言语行为理论；合作原则；礼貌原则

Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter 1 The Analytic Framework of the Paper	4
1.1 Speech Act Theory	6
1.1.1 Austin's Speech Act Theory.....	6
1.1.2 Searle's Development of Speech Act Theory.....	8
1.2 The Cooperative Principle and the Notion of Implicatures ...12	
1.2.1 The Cooperative Principle and Four Maxims.....	13
1.2.2 Violation of the Maxims and the Conversational Implicatures.....	13
1.3 The Politeness Principle and the Concept of Face	17
1.3.1 Leech's Politeness Principle.....	18
1.3.2 Brown and Levinson's Face Theory.....	19
1.3.3 The Parameters of Politeness.....	23
Chapter 2 Henry James and <i>The Portrait of a Lady</i>	26
2.1 Henry James, the Novelist	26
2.2 The Plot of <i>The Portrait of a Lady</i>	27
2.3 A Constellation of Main Characters	28
2.4 Conversations as a Means of Characterization	31
Chapter 3 A Pragmatic Analysis of the Conversations in <i>The</i>	

<i>Portrait of a Lady</i>	34
3.1 From the Perspective of Speech Act Theory	34
3.1.1 The Conversation between Isabel and Lord Warburton.....	35
3.1.2 The Conversation between Isabel and Caspar.....	37
3.1.3 The Conversation between Isabel and Osmond.....	39
3.2 From the Perspective of the Cooperative Principle	41
3.2.1 The Conversation between Isabel and Lord Warburton.....	41
3.2.2 The Conversation between Isabel and Caspar.....	45
3.2.3 The Conversation between Isabel and Osmond.....	47
3.3 From the Perspective of the Politeness Principle	49
3.3.1 The Conversation between Isabel and Lord Warburton.....	50
3.3.2 The Conversation between Isabel and Caspar.....	54
3.3.3 The Conversation between Isabel and Osmond.....	57
Conclusions	59
Bibliography	62
Appendix	64
Acknowledgements	81

目 录

引言.....	1
第一章 理论框架.....	4
1.1 言语行为理论.....	6
1.1.1 奥斯汀的言语行为理论.....	6
1.1.2 赛尔对言语行为理论的发展.....	8
1.2 合作原则和会话含义.....	12
1.2.1 合作原则及其准则.....	13
1.2.2 合作原则准则的违反和会话含义.....	13
1.3 礼貌原则和面子概念.....	17
1.3.1 利奇的礼貌原则.....	18
1.3.2 布朗和莱文森的面子理论.....	19
1.3.3 礼貌参数.....	23
第二章 亨利詹姆斯和《贵妇画像》.....	26
2.1 小说家亨利詹姆斯.....	26
2.2 《贵妇画像》的故事情节.....	27
2.3 主要人物的图示.....	28
2.4 人物刻画的一种方式：对话.....	31
第三章 《贵妇画像》中对话的语用分析.....	34

3.1 以言语行为理论为视角的分析	34
3.1.1 伊莎贝尔和沃伯顿之间的对话.....	35
3.1.2 伊莎贝尔和卡斯博之间的对话.....	37
3.1.3 伊莎贝尔和奥斯蒙德之间的对话.....	39
3.2 以合作原则为视角的分析	41
3.2.1 伊莎贝尔和沃伯顿之间的对话.....	41
3.2.2 伊莎贝尔和卡斯博之间的对话.....	45
3.2.3 伊莎贝尔和奥斯蒙德之间的对话.....	47
3.3 以礼貌原则为视角的分析	49
3.3.1 伊莎贝尔和沃伯顿之间的对话.....	50
3.3.2 伊莎贝尔和卡斯博之间的对话.....	54
3.3.3 伊莎贝尔和奥斯蒙德之间的对话.....	57
结论	59
参考文献	62
附录	64
致谢	81

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Introduction

Over the past twenty years, theories of pragmatics such as the Speech Act Theory developed by Austin and Searle, the Cooperative Principle by Grice, and the Politeness Principle by Leech, Levinson and Brown, and procedures for conversation analysis by Sinclair and Coulthard have been employed by scholars home and abroad to analyze texts of various genres. The feasibility of applying these theories to the analysis of literary texts has been investigated by scholars abroad. It has been found that there is no contradiction between literary language and ordinary language in the analysis of literary works.

There has emerged a new trend of combining linguistics with the study of literature. Discourse research in literary works has been conducted by such linguists as J. Sinclair, G. Yule, and M. A. K. Halliday, etc. In analyzing conversations in literary texts, they have paid attention not only to the analysis of conversations but also to the process of interaction of the interlocutors, usually with a purpose of revealing the theme or the personality of the characters.

This paper attempts to probe into a piece of literary work, *The Portrait of a Lady*, by using theories of the Speech Act Theory, the Cooperative Principle and the Politeness Principle in a comprehensive manner, with each throwing some light on the understanding of the theme and the characters of the literary text under research. The Speech Act theory is used to reveal how characters with different identities and personalities perform their directives indirectly and politely. The Cooperative Principle is used to find out how and why the characters violate the maxims of the Cooperative Principle in their conversations, and how the conversational implicatures are generated in the discourse. The Politeness Principle is used to examine how different characters have adopted the politeness strategies to their advantages in communication. Through an in-depth analysis of the selected

conversations, it is hoped that the sharp contrast of character between the naïve Americans and the sophisticated Europeans will be revealed and the novelist international theme demonstrated.

The Portrait of a Lady is generally regarded as the best of the early works by Henry James, the American novelist. By creating lively conversations among characters in the novel, the novelist gives an eloquent expression of the sharp difference of the character between the Americans and the Europeans as well as the international theme. This paper will focus on the conversations between Isabel Archer, the heroine, and the three men that surround her, namely, Lord Warburton, Caspar Goodwood and Osmond Gilbert, who represent three kinds of people with different identities and characters. The conversations in Chapter 12, Chapter 14, Chapter 16 and Chapter 41, in which the three men are involved in serious conflicts with the heroine, are chosen as data for detailed study.

The thesis consists of three chapters exclusive of the introduction and the conclusion. Chapter One presents the analytic framework of the present paper. A review on previous researches conducted by major linguists in the field of discourse analysis is followed by a synthesized analytic framework, in which the Speech Act Theory by Austin and Searle, the Cooperative Principle by Grice and the Politeness Principle by Leech, Brown and Levinson are used as sources of theoretical support.

Chapter Two gives a brief introduction to Henry James, the novelist, and his work *The Portrait of a Lady*. It is noted that conversations, which make up a considerable portion in this novel, work as an important means of characterization. The present paper will therefore focus on the analysis of conversations between the protagonist and the intimate group around her, including Lord Warburton, Caspar Goodwood and Osmond Gilbert.

Chapter Three is devoted to a detailed analysis of the conversations thus selected. The conversations are analyzed in the light of theories of pragmatics mentioned in Chapter One. The sharp contrast of the character between the

Americans and Europeans is shown with diagrams and charts.

In the conclusion, results of the present research are summarized and the limitations of this paper are admitted.

This paper can be significant for future studies in that it provides a new prospective for understanding fiction. It may further testify and enrich the application of theories of discourse analysis to literary works, especially novels.

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Chapter 1 The Analytic Framework of the Paper

Since the early 1980s, discourse research in literary works has been conducted by scholars, noticeably J. Sinclair and M. Coulthard in Europe, G. Yule and S. Thompson in America, and M. A. K. Halliday and R. Hasan in Australia. Conversations among characters in literary texts are the focus of analysis in discourse stylistics, which attaches importance not only to the analysis of conversations but also to the process of interaction of the interlocutors, usually with a purpose of revealing the theme or the personality of the characters. With the development of such theories as Conversation Analysis put forward by J. Sinclair and M. Coulthard, the Speech Act Theory by Austin and Searle, and the Cooperative Principle by Grice, there has emerged a new trend of combining linguistics with the study of literature. Scholars abroad have investigated the feasibility of applying these theories to discourse analysis. They have found that there is no contradiction between literary language and ordinary language in the analysis of literary works. (Zhu Xiaozhou, 2002: 60-63) They pointed out that linguistic theories for ordinary language analysis can also be employed in literary criticism.

In *Toward a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse*, Pratt (1977) suggests and demonstrates that it is both possible and necessary to develop a unified theory of discourse which allows us to talk about literature in the same terms as we use to talk about other things with language. She states that literature itself is a speech context, and as with any utterance, the way people produce and understand literary works depends enormously on unspoken, culturally shared knowledge of the rules, conventions and expectations when language is used in that context. She also states that there is no valid reason to assume that language stops being itself when it enters a literary work, and what speech-act theorists have taught us about the way words perform outside literature can and should be applied to the particular performance

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