Humorous Effects in the Crosstalk *Learning Manchu* by Non-observance of Cooperative Principle

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This paper analyzes the humorous effects generated through the non-observance of Grice's Cooperative Principle (CP) in the Chinese crosstalk *Learning Manchu*. Focusing on violations of the Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner maxims, it examines how deliberate pragmatic deviations create comedy. The study also incorporates the unique crosstalk mechanism of "Baofu" (packaging and delivering jokes) and emphasizes the essential role of audience cooperation in humor reception. It argues that humor in crosstalk arises not only from performers' non-cooperation but also from active audience engagement within a shared cultural context.

Keywords: non-observance of Cooperative Principle, humorous effect, crosstalk, audience cooperation

Introduction

Crosstalk is a time-honored traditional art form in China. It features the humorous effects on both contents and language. To analyze its humorous effects under Cooperative Principle (CP), this paper will focus on the language part. In term of number of the performers, crosstalk can be divided into three categories: comic monologue (performed by only one actor or actress), comic dialogue (performed by two persons) and multi-player talk show (performed by three or more than three persons). Nowadays, comic dialogue is the most popular among the mass, and the programs of which outnumber those of the other two types. And the form of dialogue perfectly meets the basic requirement of the research on CP, which focuses on conversational implicature. Furthermore, in light of the popularity of comic dialogue, and the comparatively simpler and briefer conversations than those of multi-player talk, this paper will mainly focus on the linguistic characteristics and humorous effects in comic dialogue.

Increasingly has the connection of humor and CP come into scholars' sight, people tend to introduce this combination into the analysis of humorous contexts such as films and ads. On the basis of CP, this paper aims to analyze the humorous effects in cross-talk, a typical Chinese humorous art form of language, and take the traditional program *Learning Manchu* as an example, which involves ambiguity and conflicts caused by utterances against CP.

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Cooperative Principle and the Non-observance Against It

The Cooperative Principle (CP) refers to the regularity in conversation. Grice has noted that for the sake of face, politeness or other factors, people may say things by implicatures instead of talking about them directly. For example, when A is eating something that B, who feels embarrassed to ask for the food directly, also wants to have a taste, B may say, "Is it delicious?" If A understands B's real intention to express the requirement, A will offer the food to B. However, this kind of process requires successful cooperation between the speakers. That is to say, CP means that both two sides should recognize the common purposes and mutual directions of their conversation.

Maxims of Cooperative Principle

Grice has introduced four categories of maxims of CP: Quantity maxim, Quality maxim, Relation maxim, and Manner maxim. Quantity maxim aims to make the speaker's contribution adequately informative and at the same time to avoid unrequired information. Quality maxim emphasizes the authenticity of the conversation, without false utterances or those lacking adequate evidence. Relation maxim means the speaker's contribution should be relevant to the purpose or direction of the conversation. And Manner maxim requires perspicuity, avoiding obscurity, ambiguity, prolixity and disorder. The four maxims guarantee a smooth, successful conversation with genuine intentions under CP. But violating CP does not mean unsuccessful communication. Sometimes people tend to intentionally choose the opposite direction against CP in order to achieve humorous effects with implicatures that are superficially irrelevant to the conversation.

Non-observance of Cooperative Principle

To further develop this pragmatic theory, Thomas (1995) has put forward five kinds of non-observance against CP—flouting, violating, infringing, opting-out, and suspending. Flouting means that the speaker deliberately deviates from CP, which, however, does not aim to mislead or cheat the hearer but to guide the hearer to realize the conversational implicature. On the contrary, violating will cause misunderstanding by a hidden manner of non-observance that the hearer cannot find out immediately. Infringing is an unintentional way resulting from the inappropriate state of the speaker, such as language barrier, cognitive limitations and speech impediments. Opting-out will occur in a formal situation, usually because of the unwillingness to cooperate in light of laws, races and other factors. The last is suspending, a non-observance influenced by the restriction of culture which the speaker is situated in (Liu & Zhang, 2008). Based on Thomas' supplement, the first three kinds are involved in crosstalk, respectively applied in different situations. And the following parts of the paper will analyze them in detail.

Humorous Principle, Cooperative Principle and Crosstalk

It is noticeable that He Wenzhong (2003) has tried to depart humorous principle from cooperative principle to be an individual pragmatic theory, suggesting that they should be considered under separate contexts: CP is expected to be discussed under sincere communication while humorous principle ought to be applied in insincere conversations. Moreover, humorous principle cannot be simply regarded as the deviation of cooperative principle, but the independent principle that goes the opposite way in interpersonal communication. However, his humorous principle excludes unintentional humor that he has considered valueless in pragmatics, for it is still

based on sincere communication, in which the speakers unconsciously infringe the maxims of CP. But in crosstalk, both intentional humor and unintentional humor can be considered as a joke, which will be under discussion in this paper. As a famous crosstalk master, Hou Baolin (1980) has put forward that crosstalk is a folk art form different from daily conversations. That means there is distinct between the language processed by art and that in daily communication (Gao, 2001). Chen Jinzhong (2008) has also pointed out that the humorous language in crosstalk requires a dynamic cooperation between the performers and audience. Therefore, there is an interesting coexistence of cooperation and non-cooperation in a comic dialogue program. The latter refers to the deviation from CP between the two performers so that the jokes can be set up. Meanwhile, the particularity of crosstalk lies in its "third-party" interlocuter, the audience, who are expected to cooperate with and echo with the performers so that they can understand the jokes immediately, which will lead the program to the final success. Then the cooperation and non-cooperation become an interactive system in crosstalk.

In crosstalk, there is a fundamental and essential concept called "Baofu" (in Chinese written as "包袱", whose literal meaning is "package"), a metaphor of joke. To be specific, a "Baofu" is a package full of jokes in crosstalk (Mei, 2011). When the performers want to make the audience laugh, they are expected to prepare for it step by step: "Wrapping Baofu" (to pave the way for the joke by shifting audience attention away from the truth so that the punchline can be temporarily hidden; in Chinese written as "系包袱", whose literal meaning is packaging), "Unknotting Baofu" (to deliberately show the inkling of the joke without completely uncovering it; in Chinese written as "解包袱", whose literal meaning is trying to unknot the package), and the last and the most important step "Opening Baofu" (to completely disclose the truth and the joke to amuse the audience; in Chinese written as "抖包袱", whose literal meaning is pouring out the stuff in the package).

The three steps above are all important in crosstalk. However, most of the articles analyzing humorous language in crosstalk under CP only focus on the last step and point out how the deviation from CP generates humorous effects. In fact, it is also vital to explore the process of "Wrapping Baofu" and "Unknotting Baofu", which are the manifestation of the role of audience in crosstalk. The following parts of this paper will also take the process of audience understanding into consideration so that the other two steps can be discussed as well, so as to uncover the more detailed pragmatic system of crosstalk.

Humorous Effects in *Learning Manchu*

Non-observance of Quantity Maxim

Quantity Maxim requires the speaker to express properly in quantity, with enough information and without excessive words. In the cross-talk, the performers may create humorous utterance by speaking unnecessary words. Usually the unnecessary part is a language trap formed during the process of "Wrapping Baofu" and "Unknotting Baofu". And when the hearer completely falls into the trap, the speaker will "open Baofu" by making the hearer embarrassed.

Example (1)

A: 您是中国人吧？ (You are Chinese, aren't you?)

B: 这没错。(Right.)

A: 那您会说中国话吗？ (Can you speak Chinese?)

> B：废话，中国人不会说中国话？(Nonsense! How could a Chinese person not speak Chinese?)
>
> A：这么说您会说中国话？(So you can speak Chinese, right?)
>
> B：当然了。(Of course.)
>
> A：那您会说中国话，我问您内蒙古人是中国人，外国人？(Then since you can speak Chinese, let me ask you: are people from Inner Mongolia Chinese or foreigners?)
>
> B：中国人呐！(Chinese of course!)
>
> A：那你说说蒙古话。(Then speak Mongolian for me.)
>
> A：不会。(I can't.)

In this conversation, the three steps are obvious. When A asks "You are Chinese, aren't you?" and "Can you speak Chinese?", the performer is paving the way for the trap to fool B, which can be considered as the first step "Wrapping Baofu". A's repeated questions of "Can you speak Chinese?" seem to be unnecessary, for it is a common sense that Chinese people can speak Chinese language, violating the second component maxim of Quantity maxim—avoiding unrequired contribution. And such repetition is so strange that the audience will doubt the aim of it. And the doubt will become the recognition of the process of "Unknotting Baofu". Then the audience may feel amused when they realize it and can predict the joke. Moreover, the "Chinese language" that A refers to does not mean the lingua franca mandarin, but all the variations of Chinese, or at least Manchu. This violates the first component maxim of Quantity maxim that requires adequate information. With the intentional violation, the speaker is shaped into a seemingly stupid but actually shrewd image, creating humorous effects for the audience.

Non-observance of Quality Maxim

Sometimes the crosstalk performers may say something contrary to the reality to make the conversations more ridiculous so as to make the audience laugh, which violates one of the requirements of quality maxim that do not say what you believe to be false.

Example (2)

> (Background: A is going to teaching B to speak Manchu.)
>
> A：咱俩单列两旗。(Let's create another two Banners.)
>
> B：怎么单列？(How to create?)
>
> A：八旗里没有黑旗和花旗。(There is no Black Banner and Multicolor Banner among all the eight banners.)
>
> B：那是。(Yes.)
>
> A：咱俩来这两旗。(So we can create these two banners.)
>
> B：行。(Ok.)

In this conversation, A suggests that to learn Manchu, they should create two new "Banners" (a Banner is a group for social and military administration in Manchu culture), and B agrees in earnest. In fact, they can never create the new banners officially and learning Manchu does not need to do so. A's advice implies that the following learning and teaching may not be serious. By violating the quality maxim, the performers succeed in making the conversations funny by pretended seriousness. And it is also noticeable that this conversation

contains no intentionally blatant humor such as exaggeration and funny bickering. It can be considered as the process of "Wrapping Baofu" to pave the way for the ultimate part of "Opening Baofu", in which A will fool B by teaching B to say some ridiculous sentences in Manchu. And the pretended seriousness in this conversation generates the effects of unintentional humor which is designed to amuse the audience instead of showing the performers' reactions to humor.

Secondly, crosstalk performers will also utilize metaphor or deviation from the common meaning in public cognition to mislead the hearer to receive wrong information, so that the unexpected result can generate humor effect.

Example (3)

> (Background: To create a context for teaching and learning Manch, A and B are designing the characteristics of their roles.)
> B：您在哪上班？ (Where do you work?)
> A：我在煤铺上班，煤铺"官饷"每月四十八斤…… (I work in a coal shop, and every month the "salary" is forty-eight jin…)("Jin" is a unit of weight used in China. 1 jin=0.5 kilogram.)
> B：银子？ (Silver?)
> A：煤球。(Coal briquette.)

A uses "salary" to define what the coal shop pays for A's work. However, in common sense, it is silver that usually serves as "salary" in their context. A deliberately expresses the unusual meaning of the words that everyone is familiar to without any explanation, in order to cause humor effect with an unexpected answer.

Non-observance of Relation Maxim

To utter something seemingly irrelevant is a common method in cross-talk to create a sense of humor. The speaker may suddenly break through the context so as to leave the hearer in an embarrassed situation. It often coexists with other methods such as exaggeration.

Example (4)

> A：你连蒙古语、满语都不会。(You even can't speak Mongolian or Manchu.)
> B：是我学艺不精。(I'm not proficient. It's my fault.)
> A：学艺不精就完啦？(Just say you are not proficient?)
> B：那我也不能死去呀？(Then should I die?)

In this conversation, A intends to guide B to spontaneously express the desire of learning Manchu by saying "Just say you are not proficient?" However, B does not reply something concerning language, but exaggeratedly asks "Then should I die?" This reply seems to bear no relation to the topic of Manchu, but it actually contains certain implicatures. B neither completely understands A's words nor seriously answers A's question. A does not have the intention to instigate B to die, which B definitely knows. And B does not seriously interpret A's words as a guide to death. Then B chooses irony, which violates relation maxim, to create a humorous effect when dealing with A's question.

Non-observance of Manner Maxim

Manner maxim requires the speaker to talk in a perspicuous way so that the hearer can receive information clearly. In cross-talk, the performers tend to utilize the phonetic features of the language they use, creating ambiguity from pronunciation to meaning, so that funny misunderstanding will emerge, resulting in humorous effects.

Example (5)

(Background: A is teaching B to speak Manchu.)

A: 爱白才！(Ai Bai Cai!) (The pronunciation is similar with "Where are you going?" in Manchu)

B: 买白菜呀! (Buy cabbages!)

A: 买白菜干什么？"爱白才"是问您上哪去？(Why buy cabbages? "Ai Bai Cai" means "Where are you going?")

In this context, A just teaches B the pronunciation apart from the meaning, which leads to ambiguity in both pronunciation and meaning, so what B can only do is to roughly imitate the sounds. Influenced by the first language, B's imitation fails to reach accuracy and even approach to a new sentence in the first language with similar pronunciation but totally different meaning. In this example, the pronunciation of "爱白菜" (means "Where are you going?" in Manchu) is similar to "买白菜" (means "Buy cabbages" in mandarin). The asymmetry of sound and meaning can make the audience laugh.

As a crosstalk program with the theme of learning a new language, *Learning Manchu* contains various conversations with non-observance of manner maxim as Example 5, shaping speaker A (the Manchu teacher) in to a cunning and naughty character and speaker B (the Manchu learner) into a funny and foolish image. The skillful use of the trick and the vivid images of the performers produce humorous effects and amuse the audience successfully.

Conclusion

Although the humorous utterances in cross-talk violates CP, the conversation is deemed as a success. That is because the speakers and the audience have the same or similar cultural backgrounds or at least knowledge of the culture performed in the program, so that everyone involved can understand and appreciate.

In a nutshell, it is essential in cross-talk humor mechanism to utilize and improve non-observance of cooperative principle, as well as the cooperation between the audience and the performers. Without any of these, a crosstalk performance cannot succeed. Through the pragmatic analysis of cross-talk, this paper aims to uncover that the analysis of audience information process is also non-negligible, and the processes of "Wrapping Baofu" and "Unknotting Baofu" worth discussing as well, although the process of "Opening Baofu" is the main part of the climax of the joke. This paper just takes *Learning Manchu* as an example to try to take audience cooperation into consideration of the humor mechanism of crosstalk. Further researches on pragmatic analysis of audience cooperation are still expected, in order to provide more reference for the innovation and progress of crosstalk.

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