




基于语境维度的 英汉情景喜剧幽默对比研究

徐 真◎著

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内 容 提 要

在当代中国社会,幽默被视为创造力、个人魅力及社会和谐的重要元素之一。然而,在中国关于幽默的系统学术研究却相对较少。因此,作者在本书中试图运用“语境维度”这一理论框架研究英汉情景喜剧中幽默的运用。情景喜剧是一种为引发观众的笑声而创造的语言视觉艺术形式,正因如此,情景喜剧为从语言学角度对人际间的互动幽默进行分析提供了丰富的语料。作者试图在本著作中研究植入于中美两国所创情景喜剧中的幽默机制。

本书适合英语专业本科生、研究生、英语教师以及中西文化对比研究者使用参阅。

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To my wonderful parents for their love and encouragement through the years. Without their care and help I could never have finished this book.

And finally, to all those who have helped me along the way, thank you. No man is an island; you made the journey so much easier.

Abstract

There is little doubt that humor is regarded as an important element of creativity, personal charisma and social harmony in Chinese society. However, humor has not been academically and systematically studied to a significant extent in China. Consequently, the author has embarked on this journey to study the application of humor in selected English language and Chinese language situation comedies using an approach based on a newly developed concept and framework of contextual dimensions. Situation comedies are a form of performing arts deliberately created to arouse laughter in the audience. As such, they serve as a rich corpus for the analysis of interpersonal and interactional humor from a linguistic perspective. In this book, the author studies the mechanisms of humor embedded in interpersonal interactions in situation comedies created in the United States and China.

The author believes that context is an important factor which affects how humor is perceived and understood. The extent to which an individual finds something humorous depends upon a large number of variables, including geographical location, culture, maturity, level of education, intelligence and context. In fact, the author believes that geographical location, culture, maturity, level of education, and intelligence can all be categorized into certain dimension of context, which is a new framework developed by the author that allows instances of humorous encounters to be analyzed systematically.

The physical dimension of context consists of all factors which exist in the tangible universe. The temporal dimension of context

describes factors which are affected by the sequence in time of the occurrence of the associated events. The experiential dimension encompasses all factors related to the intangible memory of the mind that is stored over the lifetime of individuals through collective and private experiences. These factors include, but are not limited to, social setting, culture, personality, world view, knowledge, discourse, status, etc.

The innovation of this book is mainly reflected in the following aspects: First, a novel concept of categorizing context in terms of mutually orthogonal dimensions has been developed. Although context is one of the most frequently discussed subject matters in linguistics, it tends to be treated largely at the semantic level. This book attempts to draw a parallel between the linguistic system and the physical universe by dividing context into mutually exclusive dimensions, which greatly simplifies the way in which it may be analyzed. Second, this book fills an academic void in the study of humor in China. Existing research tends to be concerned with the analysis of humor within one language (such as using classical theories to discuss one chosen passage either in Chinese or in English), or within a single area of interest (such as the translation of humor between Chinese and English), rather than systematic explorations of humor and its underpinning elements. In the meanwhile, humor studies in Western academia are relatively more concentrated in the areas of psychology and philosophy. The comparative examination of humor in both the English and Chinese languages in terms of linguistic and cultural aspects described in this book provides a fresh and innovative approach to the study of humor. Third, the use of situation comedies for humor studies is relatively scarce and most of these studies involve single language works only. The novelty of this book is reflected in the comparative examination of the works of two languages, which were produced in approximately the

same era, in terms of how humor is applied and received.

An introduction to this study is presented in Chapter 1. In Chapter 2, a comprehensive literature review is provided to determine the current state of humor research, including the definition of humor, the history of humor in the West and in China, and current humor theories. A novel framework for the analysis of humor using the concept of contextual dimensions has been developed and is presented in great detail in Chapter 3, with a large number of examples provided to illustrate how this framework may be used to analyze instances of humorous encounters. Comprehensive analyses on how humor is projected and received for an English situation comedy and a Chinese language counterpart produced in the early 1990's have been conducted using the framework of contextual dimensions, and they are presented in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 respectively. Chapter 6 outlines a comparative investigation that discusses the similarities and differences between the English language works and the Chinese language works in terms of the application of humor. Finally, a conclusion of this study is presented in Chapter 7. Due to the large volume of the text, analyses of the 24 scripts, with more than 220,000 words, will be listed as statistical forms and included as appendixes.

In this research, both qualitative and quantitative methodologies have been employed. The thorough literature review presented in Chapter 2 represents a qualitative approach to determine the current state of research and body of knowledge in the areas of interest. The discourse analyses presented in Chapters 4 through 6 have been conducted using quantitative research methods such as corpus tagging and statistical analysis.

At the completion of this study, a thorough understanding has been gained on how humor is projected and received through examining the similarities and differences between the English language works and

Chinese language works. The frequency of humor has been found to be just under 50% in both literary works, which bears a remarkable consistency. Overall, the English language situation comedy “Friends” is found to be more palatable to an international audience compared to the Chinese counterpart “I Love My Family”. The greater utilization of the temporal contextual dimension and the lesser utilization of the experiential contextual dimension for “Friends” compared to “I Love My Family” means that the former works depend more on linguistic elements and less on social and cultural knowledge in order to achieve the humorous effects.

These research findings and newly acquired understandings will contribute to the study of socio-and cultural linguistics associated with humor in the English and Chinese languages and aid in the linguistic exchange between the two languages. Ultimately, the author hopes that the research findings will enhance intellectual and cultural exchange between China and the West from the linguistic, literary and social perspectives.

Key words: humor, contextual dimension, situation comedy

摘 要

在当代中国社会,幽默被视作创造力、个人魅力及社会和谐的重要元素之一。然而,在中国关于幽默的系统学术研究却相对较少。因此,作者在本书中试图运用“语境维度”这一理论框架研究英汉情景喜剧中对于幽默的运用。情景喜剧是一种为引发观众的笑声而创造的语言视觉艺术形式。正因如此,情景喜剧为从语言学角度对人际间的互动幽默进行分析提供了丰富的语料。作者试图在本书中研究植入于中美两国所创情景喜剧中的幽默机制。

作者认为,语境是感知幽默和理解幽默的重要因素。个体对幽默的认同程度取决于一系列的变量,包括地理位置、文化、成熟度、教育程度、智力水平和语境。笔者认为,事实上,地理位置、文化、成熟度、教育程度、智力水平都可以归类于语境的某个特定维度,语境的维度即作者创造的用于系统分析幽默现象的新型框架。

语境的物理维度包括宇宙中众生能够直接感知的可触及因素。语境的时序维度则描绘受到相关事件发生的时间顺序所影响的因素。语境的经验维度包含与无形的大脑记忆储存相关的所有因素,这些因素在个人的一生中通过集体以及私人的经验不断累积,包括但又不局限于社会环境、文化、性格、世界观、知识、话语、地位等。

本书的创新点主要体现在以下几个方面:第一,对语境的划分。语境虽然是语言学中的最常讨论的经典概念之一,然而对于语境的划分更多在语义层面,本文试图将语言体系比作物理宇宙,用三维的概念去划分语言语境,把纷繁芜杂的传统语境划分化繁为简,透过现象看本质,由此对语言及语言使用进行更透彻的研究;第二,对于幽默的研究。在中国,目前对于幽默的学术研究比较有限。从语言学学科来说,已有的研究往往集中在某一语言:如运用汉语或英语中的

某个语段、结合经典理论进行论证;或者针对某一领域,诸如幽默的翻译,做出应用方面的研究等。比较罕见的是对于幽默进行较大规模的理论范畴的论述。在西方学界,对于幽默的理论研究历史颇长,更多集中在心理学和哲学范畴,虽说提供了一定的理论背景,但涉及语言学领域的幽默研究历史相对短。目前的趋势是这方面的研究越来越多,然又鲜有涉及中文的研究。因此,对于幽默在语言学范畴的中英文对比研究可以说是较为新颖独特的。第三,研究的对象。情景喜剧因其问世时间不长,经典作品为数尚不多,目前较少被作为语料来研究。然而随着情景喜剧这一语言和视觉结合的艺术类型的不断发展和拓展,必将有更多的研究以其作为语料。目前以情景喜剧语言为语料的研究主要涉及单一语言,少有对比。本文选择的英汉语料分别是中西方公认的经典作品,作者选取其创作时间上最为接近的英汉各24个文本共22多万字的语料,在此基础上进行对比研究亦是一个创新。

本书的主要结构如下。第一章导论,介绍了本书的研究问题、意义以及研究方法,对本书的内容作了概述。在第二章文献综述中,对于幽默研究的现状做了较为全面的总结,包括幽默的定义、幽默在东方和西方产生、发展的历史以及当前的主要幽默研究理论。在第三章的正文部分,作者建立了运用语境维度这一创新概念进行幽默分析的理论体系,对之进行详细剖析,并加以实例阐释此体系对于具体幽默现象的分析方法。在第四章和第五章中,作者以语境维度为框架对20世纪90年代初中美两国两部具有代表性的经典情景喜剧中幽默的制造以及接收机制进行了综合广泛的分析。第六章继而对于前两章的分析作出对比,探讨英汉语言对于幽默运用的异同。第七章对于整篇论文的研究内容、方法、发现和意义作出了总结,提出了论文的局限和不足之处,并展望了未来可能的研究方向。由于篇幅巨大,文本分析被提炼成数据表格形式附录于正文之后。

本书涉及定性以及定量两种研究方法。比如:第二章中的文献综述对于幽默研究现状进行了定性描述;第四章至第六章的文本分析则运用了定量研究方法,如语料标注和数据分析。

作者通过检验英语与汉语作品的相同点和差异处,对于幽默如何产生及如何生效有了较为全面的理解。所选两部作品的幽默频率均接近于50%,显示出了高度一致性。然而总体来说,英语情景喜剧《老友记》中的幽默可能更为不同文化背景的国际观众所接受,其原因之一是,相较于汉语情景喜剧《我爱我家》,其对于语境时序维度的运用频率相对较高,而对于语境经验维度的运用频率相对较低,这进一步意味着,为达到幽默的生效,前者比后者更多依赖于语言因素,而后者则较多依赖于社会知识和文化元素。

本书的研究结果对于英语与汉语语言中相关幽默的社会以及文化语言学研究将有较为广泛的意义,同时也将有助于这两种语言之间的交流。作者希望本研究最终对于提高中西方从语言以及社会角度在精神和文化层面上的交流亦有一定程度的帮助。

关键词: 幽默; 语境维度; 情景喜剧

Contents

Chapter 1	Introduction	1
1.1	Rationale	3
1.2	Research Methods	4
1.3	Outline	5
1.4	Research Findings	7
Chapter 2	Literature Review	9
2.1	Definition of Humor	9
2.2	A Brief History of Humor and Humor Studies in the West	11
2.3	Humor and Humor Studies in Chinese History	17
2.4	Theories of Humor	21
Chapter 3	An Approach to Humor Based on Contextual Dimensions	27
3.1	A Review of Context in Humor	27
3.2	New Development: Contextual Dimensions as the Framework of the Study	29
3.3	Role of Context in Interactive Humor	36
Chapter 4	A Study of Humor in an English Language Situation Comedy— “Friends”	42
4.1	Introduction and Selection Criteria	42
4.2	A Linguistic Analysis of Humor	44

Chapter 5	A Study of Humor in a Chinese Language Situation Comedy—《我爱我家》 (I Love My Family)	107
5.1	Introduction and Selection Criteria	107
5.2	A Linguistic Analysis of Humor	110
Chapter 6	Comparisons and Discussions	152
6.1	Frequency of Humor	152
6.2	Type of Humor (Context)	154
6.3	A Statistical Analysis	158
6.4	Summary and Significance of Findings	160
Chapter 7	Conclusion	163
7.1	Summary of the Findings	165
7.2	Limitations of the Research	168
7.3	Some Thoughts on Future Research	169
Bibliography		170
Appendix A	Analytical Statistics of “Friends” — Episode 3-24	177
Appendix B	Analytical Statistics of “I Love My Family” — Episode 3-24	185

Chapter 1 Introduction

Humor is a social phenomenon shared by all human cultures. It refers to the tendency of particular cognitive experiences to provoke laughter and provide amusement. The English term “humor” is derived from humoral medicine of the ancient Greeks, which taught that the balance of fluids in the human body, known as “humours”, control human health and emotion (Martin, 2007). Humor is projected through visual or aural stimuli. Visual stimuli include humorous acts, amusing imagery, and other information perceived through sight. Aural stimuli refer to verbal language, peculiar sounds and other audio signals which provide aural input to the brain.

Because humor is such an omnipresent aspect of our daily lives, many people think that they already understand it and do not need systematic research to explain it. However, studies on humor have revealed many interesting surprises. Humor has been found to serve a number of social, emotional, and cognitive functions, making it a worthwhile and rewarding subject matter for scientific research (Martin, 2007; Kotthoff, 2005; Eckardt, 1991; 李 小 克, 2007). Indeed, the concept of humor is a complex subject matter, and it continues to attract significant research attention from multidisciplinary perspectives. Recent contributions have come from such diverse areas as anthropology, linguistics, psychology, semiotics and sociology, to name just a few (Attardo, 2007; Martin, 2007; Weisfeld, 1993; Kotthoff, 2005; Crawford, 2002; Berger, 1999; Dubinsky, 2011). Through these studies, researchers attempt to discover how humor is constructed, projected, received and understood in the interaction of

sentient beings.

Humorous encounters most often involve the participation of multiple interactants, where it is projected by certain interactant(s) and received by others. Hence, it is apparent that humor cannot be understood monadically — that is, by studying one person. Rather, it has to be understood dyadically, where people are influencing each other. Hence, the move is from intrapsychic to interpersonal explanations in the understanding of humor as an anthropological phenomenon (Hay, 1999; Chapman, 1995; Gruner, 1999; Morrison, 2012; Lundberg, 2002) . Unless humor stimulates people towards a quantum of growth, it may not be humor at all, however intended it might have been.

Situation comedies, often shortened to sitcoms, belong to a genre of comedy that features characters sharing the same common environment, such as a home or workplace, accompanied with jokes as part of the dialogue (Molon et al., 2005; Sedita, 2005; 李智, 2010) . Such programs originated in radio, but today, sitcoms are found almost exclusively on television as one of its dominant narrative forms. As situation comedies are a form of performing arts deliberately created to arouse laughter in the audience, they serve as a rich corpus for the analysis of interpersonal and interactional humor from a psycholinguistic perspective (Molon et al., 2005; 吕晓志, 2008; 韩骏伟, 2003; 朱润, 2009; 刘玲玲 and 李洪涛, 2006) .

I intend to study the mechanisms of humor embedded in interpersonal interactions in situation comedies created in both the United States and China. This investigation will provide valuable knowledge in terms of how humor is projected and received in the situation comedy works of two completely different language systems.

1.1 Rationale

There is little doubt that humor is regarded as an important element of creativity, personal charisma and social harmony in modern Chinese society (and in all human societies, for that matter) (文天行, 2011; Hay, 1999; Berger, 2010). However, important as it is, humor has rarely been studied academically and systematically in China. On the other hand, significant research on the subject matter exists in Western academia. The author hopes that this study will contribute significantly to the scarce literature on humor currently existing in this country. By studying how humor is practiced and received in the US and Chinese situation comedies, a better understanding of the differences in Western and Eastern humor may be acquired which will ultimately enhance intellectual and cultural exchange between the East and the West from the linguistic, literary and social perspectives.

The extent to which an individual will find something humorous depends upon a large number of variables, including geographical location, culture, maturity, level of education, intelligence and context. Context is an important factor which affects how humor is perceived and understood (Sommers, 2011). In fact, the author believes that geographical location, culture, maturity, level of education, intelligence, can all be categorized into certain dimensions of context.

Context has been previously studied extensively by Western scholars. However, the wide utility of context as an explanatory concept has led to the equally extreme degree of polysemy in the word itself and its vague meaning from a pragmatic perspective. For instance, as Grice (1975) pointed out, in language use, some content cannot directly be transmitted by words, but is implied by what the

speaker utters. He argued that on some occasions, particular contextual features help the listener to reconstruct the speaker's communicative intention. Thus, in case of doubt, the context makes clear to the listener the meanings an utterance was intended to convey. In particular, Grice considered that an agent could rely on both the linguistic and the extralinguistic context in comprehending conversational implicatures.

Context has been described in terms of a taxonomy of categories that contribute to the reconstruction of the speaker's communicative intentions (Bosco et al., 2004) . The authors identified Access, Space, Time, Discourse, Move, and Status as the fundamental categories of context. However, the difficulty of this approach lies in its inability to provide an exhaustive list of categories into which context can be partitioned, for there is always the risk of certain categories remaining undiscovered.

The author proposes to describe context that influences the way in which humor is received in terms of three unique dimensional constituents — physical, temporal and experiential, each of which occupies an independent axis in the cognitive universe. This contextual framework will serve as a useful tool to study how humor is applied and whether it is effectively received.

In this thesis, the author shall demonstrate how humorous encounters can be analyzed and explained using this framework of contextual dimensions. An English language situation comedy and a Chinese language situation comedy will be examined and used as the linguistic material for this analysis.

1.2 Research Methods

There are two general classes of research methods — qualitative