

The Pragmatic Study of
Deliberate Misinterpretation in
Verbal Communication

言语交际中刻意曲解策略
的语用学研究

申智奇 著



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北 京

序

申智奇博士的这本专著是在她的博士学位论文基础上写成的。早在 2004 年她就完成博士学位论文答辩，获得学位。虽然事隔多年了，但我作为她的导师，对她当时撰写论文的过程还历历在目。她写的是言语交际策略，是关于人们在交际过程中故意曲解对方话语的问题。

言语交际策略是语用学研究的重要课题之一。但策略可以从不同的方面来描述。一方面可以从认知的角度，研究听话人如何理解对方的说话方式和交谈态度，从而准确地领会对方话语的意图；而另一方面也可以从语言运用的角度，研究说话人在不同语境下为达到交际目的所使用的语言形式和交际手腕。在言语交际实际中会出现一些意外的情况：说话人说某些话语，竟然导致听话人产生误解或歧解，产生一些对听话人来说是他“非意图表达的意义”(unintended meaning)；或者说说话人由于受某种语境制约，对理解了的话语刻意加以曲解(intentional misunderstanding 或 deliberate misinterpretation)，以实现某种愿望或达到某种目的。其实，这些意外情况在言语交际中是很常见的，但是专门从事这方面研究的学者不多，于是我就建议申智奇以此作为她博士学位论文的切入点，搜索并阅读有关文献，研究话语出现的非意图意义或者研究说话人刻意曲解对方话语的问题。

最初，我建议她了解一下非说话人意图表达的所谓“非意图意义”(unintended meaning)。那时我在网络上发现一位活跃在“关联理论网上通讯”(relevance@linguistics.ucl.ac.uk)中的一位来自阿根廷的学者 Speranza，他认为所谓“非意图意义”实际上是属于“不恰当理解”(mis_understanding)中的一种“过度理解”(overinterpretation)。他引用了语言学家 Sampson 在 *Making Sense* (Oxford) 中的一个例子，说不久前大家都知道 gay 就是 happy，或 enjoyable in a witty and carefree way 的意思，可是现在人们大都将它看成是不同于一般人的生活方式——同性恋(homosexual)现象了。于是，为了避免这个词会让听话人产生并非他们意图表达的(unintended meaning)意义，人们就极力不用 gay 表达

快乐,从而使这个词原来表示的意义迅速消亡。

Speranza 的见解使我联想到一些有趣的语言现象:那时,尽管报章号召大家致力于改变家居城市的面貌,要求我们努力做到“一年一小变”、“五年一大变”,但是人们总不好意思理直气壮地喊出这个口号,因为他们都知道口号里有导致过度理解的 unintended meaning。同样,汉语的“上调”也会产生 unintended meaning:当我说某人不在这里了,说他上调(工作)了,就不是说他“上吊”了;再如我们这里一向都尊称服务行业的女性人员为“小姐”的,可是它的 unintended meaning(“发廊妹”、“妓女”)导致从事服务工作的广大女性不喜欢别人叫她们“小姐”,却宁可接受一个其实并不好听、且带有调侃意味的称呼——“靓女”。英语有些幽默对话,也是由于对话中隐藏了 unintended meaning 而让大家听了忍俊不禁的:

- 1) The professor rapped on his desk and shouted: "Gentlemen, order!"

The entire class yelled: "Beer!"

学生课堂不守规矩,教授生气,大声叫 order,要大家**守秩序**;但学生听到 order,故意曲解为(或脑袋里只想到是)**购买**饮料,于是齐声喊出要喝啤酒。

- 2) **Prof.:** You missed my class yesterday, didn't you?

Stud.: Not in the least, sir, not in the least!

学生旷课,老师质问学生是否没来上课(miss one's class);顽皮的学生故意将 miss 曲解为“想念”了。

我们注意到上面两个幽默对话,发觉只研究话语中的 unintended meaning 还是不够的,因为它只说明学生理解的 order(订购)和 miss(想念)都不是例中教授意图表达的意思罢了。这里最值得注意的倒是学生因其刻意曲解而产生的幽默。如果我们把 unintended meaning 的研究角度转到 intentional misunderstanding 方面,就有可能将问题揭示得更深、更广。于是我和申智奇深入研讨之后,决定将她的论文题目定为“言语交际中的刻意曲解策略研究”,将刻意曲解看成是一个特殊的语用现

象，放到语用策略研究范畴中加以探讨。

这是一个前人研究不多课题，为了这个课题，申智奇只能独立思考，并尽可能地扩大她的阅读范围，从相邻的或涉及的相关论题中了解国内外学者的发现和看法。经过艰苦的努力，她在攻博的最后年头顺利完成论文，参加答辩。答辩委员会的五人小组成员来自美国、香港和国内研究话语和语用学的专家，大家一致认可她的研究，并给予较高的评价，申智奇也就顺利地通过了论文答辩，被授予博士学位。

这篇论文的评价到底如何？让我们听听答辩委员会专家的看法：言语交际中的刻意曲解现象确实存在，现在的论文令人信服地将这种现象看成是交际过程中的一种语用策略，这是很有见地的。目前，在国内外现有的文献中尚难找到这方面的专门研究，作者却能通过文献阅读和评述，分析了相关研究的倾向、特点、成绩和不足，比较充分地展示了研究刻意曲解的必要性和意义，提出明确的研究目标。作者将与自己研究相关的各种概念进行了一番梳理，从而概括出研究对象的本质特性，通过深入细致的分析，论文得出令人信服的结论。文章结构合理、条理清晰、论证有力、语言流畅。

那么这篇论文的主要贡献是什么呢？答辩委员会专家的意见是：

1. 将刻意曲解看成是一种积极的语言运用策略，概括出它的特征，区分出它与偶然 (accidental) 误解、离题 (digression)、故意不懂 (deliberate non-understanding)、假装不懂 (faked non-understanding) 以及误会 (misunderstanding) 之间的不同；
2. 借助顺应论、关联论、面子论，提出了描写和解释刻意曲解现象的框架，指出刻意曲解具有认知基础，体现交际意图的语言选择的过程，是对语境和交际言语应对做出的一种顺应；
3. 指出作为语用策略的刻意曲解具有三个前提：相互性 (mutuality)、关联性 (relevance)、触发语 (triggers)；
4. 指出刻意曲解策略的体现方式：故意违反同一律 (law of identity)、故意违反同一律概念 (law of identity in concept)、故意违反同一律判断 (law of identity in judgment)；
5. 指出刻意曲解的语用功能：实现语境顺应和交际意图。

答辩委员会认为，这些结论可以增进人们对刻意曲解现象的理解，引发更多的研究兴趣，同时也为今后的研究提供参考。

当然，论文也有它的不足。主要是例证不够，因而削弱了论点的说服力；未能从实证的角度对论题加以研究，以获取更为有力的论据。当然这也是当前语用学界普遍面临的一个课题。随着近年实验语用学的兴起，出现了一些结合心理学进行的语用实证研究，相信不久将来我们在这方面会看到更多的成果。

申智奇的博士论文经过这次加工、修改，现在作为她的一项专著出版了。我在这里向她祝贺，并且希望她从事的这项研究能够更全面地结合我们的母语——汉语做进一步的探讨，加深和拓宽汉语语用策略的研究面，丰富语用学在这个领域的研究成果。

何自然

2010年12月于广州白云山

前 言

本书从语用学角度对刻意曲解这一交际策略进行了定性研究。在对误解的研究中,刻意曲解和误解常常被混淆起来。实际上,这是两种本质不同的语言现象。误解是指在言语交际中听话人没有准确或全面理解说话人意义的语言现象。Yus (1998) 认为,误解是指 (a) 听话人没能从说话人在语境的可能的解释中选取正确的解释; (b) 听话人没能处理那些最佳语境信息, 这些信息来自社会文化环境, 而非事先的意图。可见误解实际上是一种无意中的信息传递, 它和刻意曲解中听话人有意误解对方话语是完全不同的。刻意曲解不同于误解中无意的信息传递, 它是语言使用者在会话交际中为了达到某种交际目的, 有意利用某种特殊的语境和对方话语中含糊的、不确定的表达方式, 歪曲对方的话语意图, 以便达到某种交际效果。这样的一种语用策略就叫做刻意曲解。

目前, 对刻意曲解的研究主要依附于其他核心内容为主的研究课题。国内学者主要是从逻辑学和修辞学角度研究歧义和曲解时提到, 国外学者则在从语用学角度研究误解时顺便涉及, 并主要把它作为一个交际策略。以往的研究从多个学科出发, 运用多种方法对这种现象进行了探讨, 但是还存在一些问题。首先, 对于刻意曲解的界定混乱, 影响了研究的深入。如把误导、误解、曲解都混为一谈。其次, 对于刻意曲解的论述常常是讨论误解时附带提到的, 没有对它作过专门的研究, 结果对刻意曲解缺乏深入理解, 有许多问题还未能得到解决。

本书在区分了刻意曲解和其他易混淆的语言现象的基础上, 对刻意曲解进行更为完整的、系统的、动态的论述, 探讨了刻意曲解的生成条件、运行机制, 以及语用功能。刻意曲解策略的生成条件也就是其使用的前提条件。当听到第一说话人的话语之后, 第二说话人¹为什么在众多选择中选刻意曲解策略作为回应? 是哪些因素促成这样的选择? 这些因

1 在只有两方参与的会话交际中, 交际双方既是说话人, 同时也是听话人。所以我们把首先开始新一轮的交际方叫做第一说话人; 把作出回应的交际方叫做第二说话人。

素就是刻意曲解的前提条件,其中包括了对信息的共知、交际中对最佳关联的寻求和刻意曲解的触发语等。刻意曲解的运行机制中探讨了第二说话人进行刻意曲解的具体语言手段。作为有意识的语言选择,刻意曲解体现了第二说话人对语言的管理和操控:第二说话人在正确理解了第一说话人话语意图之后,故意通过某些语言手段使得自己的解释与第一说话人话语意义不匹配,如,第二说话人可以通过对同一律的有意违反,和脱离或改变现存语境来刻意曲解第一说话人的意图。刻意曲解,作为交际者常用的一种语用策略,就是交际者根据特定的交际需求所选择的语言策略。第二说话人正是在对语境顺应的基础上,有意识地精心使用曲解这个语用策略实施了特定的语用功能,例如,说话人可以通过刻意曲解策略打破僵局,建立和谐的人际关系,实现对信息的管理,制造特殊的交际效果等。

本书是对刻意曲解的基础和初步研究,希望它可以加深读者对刻意曲解的理解,引发更多的相关研究,同时对人们的言语交际实践也能起到一定的实践借镜作用。

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My gratitude and thankfulness also go to my parents for their love and constant support during the entire period of my study and hard work.

Although the research has benefited greatly from all those acknowledged here, I alone am responsible for all mistakes and omissions of this work.

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Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Human beings have a wide range of linguistic choices to communicate their thoughts. The utterances chosen by the speaker are often less fine-grained than the actual thoughts (i.e. assumptions) that the speaker intends to communicate with these utterances. This implies that a certain percentage of success in human conversational interaction depends on the hearer's supplying of the missing elements in the speaker's utterance. And when the supplied missing elements of the hearer are not identical with the speaker's intended one, misunderstanding may occur. But in some cases, the hearer may deliberately choose the interpretation diverging from the speaker's intended meaning, so as to achieve certain communicative effects. Namely, the hearer deliberately makes his interpretation appear to be the speaker's unintended meaning. Consider the following examples.

(1) (A、B 是同一个学院的研究生。按照惯例当天下午应该有一个讲座。)

A: 你知道下午是谁做讲座吗?

B: 是谁呀?

A: 我不知道, 所以问你呀。

B: 哎哟, 不好意思, 我也不知道。

(2) (a postman-Aat character B's front door)

A: A very Merry Christmas to you!

B: Thank you. And to you.

A: (holding out his hand) Hold on! I said, Merry Christmas!

B: Oh! I see! All right. Just let me get my purse!

A: Jesus! 50...I got a quid from next door!

(F. Yus, 1999a)

These are two examples of the frequently mentioned phenomenon "misunderstanding". In example (1), A wants B to offer the exact information, but B takes A's question as the presequence of a declaration. So B misunderstands A's utterance by default. Another example of this kind is shown in (2), in which the postman says "Merry Christmas" as an indirect means for asking for money, but he is understood literally by B. So B in both examples accidentally misunderstands A's utterance. But example (3) and (4) are different from example (1) and (2).

(3) (处长让警察小崔去一户人家调查一些情况。女警江伶也在场。)

小崔: 处座, 你得给个伴吧?

处长: 就让小江和你做伴吧!

小崔一跳老高(对小江): 嘿, 听见没有, 做什么?

女警江伶悄悄伸手在小崔腿上狠狠掐了一下。

(关宝华《归期》)

(4) A: *Good day.*

B: What's so good about it.

In these examples, the hearer deliberately chooses the interpretation diverging from the speaker's intended one. In example (3), the police chief's meaning of "keep Xiao Jiang company" is just to inves-

tigate a case together. Xiao Cui deliberately misinterprets the police chief's intended meaning as "keep Xiao Jiang company for the whole life (Chinese euphemistic expression of getting married)". It's easy for Xiao Cui to infer from the situational context that the police chief would not make a match when making an assignment, and it is clear that Xiao Cui deliberately misinterprets the police chief's meaning to achieve a humorous effect. In example (4), speaker A says "Good day" just as greetings to speaker B, while B who is in bad mood deliberately misinterprets it literally.

In the present study, we will focus on the second type of phenomenon, that is, the deliberate misinterpretation. We will explore the deliberate use of misunderstanding as a communicative strategy in verbal communication from a pragmatic perspective.

Deliberate misinterpretation is a common phenomenon in daily conversation. Whereas the study of misunderstanding (notably the understanding failure which cannot be controlled by the language users) has received dominant attention before, and these two different phenomena are often mixed up in the studies. How deliberate misinterpretation is adopted in interactional conversations to facilitate the linguistic communication and ultimately serve to reach the intended purposes is still a wonder which is worth of a thorough exploration. And our focus of interest here is to supply a model to analyze the process and dynamic nature of deliberate misinterpretation in terms of the prerequisites, conversational means and functioning mechanism, etc. The study of deliberate misinterpretation may reflect the communicative competence of language users, because it is the result of language users' choice among numerous communicative strategies. A thorough study of its properties and processes may bring out the strategies involved and the effects it may have on communication. We are socialized through language and are socialized to use language in culturally appropriate ways. Everyday speech activities are socializing

activities and are "the basis for the transmission and reproduction of culture" (Schieffelin, 1990). So the knowledge of deliberate misinterpretation, a certain way of language use, may promote our own use of it, enhance our strategic use of language in general and accelerate our process of socialization. This practical interest always motivates pragmatic researches, since pragmatics does not confine itself to merely describing what people do with language, but also concerns itself with how to help them become better users (Mey, 1994). The study of deliberate misinterpretation may be of further theoretical significance. Traditional pragmatic theories, such as speech act theory and Grice's theory of conversational implicature, have been widely accepted, but in our study of deliberate misinterpretation, the explanatory power of those theories cannot adequately explain this phenomenon. For example, the traditional speech act analysis was confined to single, isolated speech acts. Yet, in daily verbal communication, sequences of speech acts occur even more frequently. And deliberate misinterpretation emerges in sequences of speech acts. So traditional speech act theory cannot give a full explanation to deliberate misinterpretation. Thus a new model with more interpretive power is needed to fully explain this phenomenon.

On the basis of various pioneering efforts made on the study, the present study is intended to dig into the depth of this conversational phenomenon from the pragmatic perspective.

A cursory reading of the literature on research into the conversational phenomenon of comprehension problems concerning deliberate misinterpretation, such as misunderstanding, reveals that a number of problems still remain.

Firstly, the notion of deliberate misinterpretation is often mixed up with misunderstanding. A general and clear distinction between these two phenomena is necessary, and special attentions should be paid to the deliberate one.

Secondly, some sporadic studies concerning with deliberate misinterpretation, whether or not this specific term has been used, mainly count it as a negative property of natural language or a result of the wicked purpose of the speaker (Speranza's email²) or the violation of linguistic/communicative norms and ethical norms (Dascal, 1999). These claims are derived from separate efforts from divergent perspectives.

It is neglected that a certain misinterpretation is deliberately chosen by the speaker as a strategy to achieve communicative effects. What awaits explanation is how this strategy works and why this strategy can enhance the chance of success of the communication. In other words, the generative and operative mechanism underlying deliberate misinterpretation is still left untouched.

Thirdly, the piecemeal researches on deliberate misinterpretation are important and significant when individual cases are taken into account, but the daily communication as a whole can never be overlooked, because it embraces all the possible scenarios where misinterpretation with purposes may occur, and hence provides systematic and comprehensive findings.

Fourthly, the classification of the functions of deliberate misinterpretation, though illuminating, is neither inclusive nor discriminative. When the effects of deliberate misinterpretation in verbal interaction are discussed, the standpoint usually inclines toward change between the producer and the interpreter. In particular, no adequate attention has been directed to the functions and effects of the language producer's motivations and the language interpreter's perception.

Therefore, this study will focus on the intention-driven strategic

2 According to Speranza (in his email), misinterpretation may be intentional or unintentional on the part of the addressee. If unintentional, it's because the addressee is "clumsy" or because she is "a lousy interpreter". If intentional, it may be she's just being "nasty". For Speranza, both of these two misinterpretations are "wicked".