



The Analysis of Pragmatic Ambivalence in *A Dream of Red Mansions*

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Abstract

Pragmatic ambivalence refers to the indeterminacy of utterance meaning in the dynamic process of language use. According to Thomas (1991, 1995) and Yu Dongming (1997), pragmatic ambivalence is the language phenomenon in which the speaker conveys two or more illocutionary acts or illocutionary forces to the hearer by using indeterminate, ambivalent or indirect utterances in a certain speech act. It is a communicative strategy consciously employed by the speaker to achieve specific communicative effects.

Taking conversations in the novel *A Dream of Red Mansions* as the research data, relevance theory as the theoretical foundation, the thesis defines the pragmatic ambivalence, analyzes the features and functions of pragmatic ambivalence, and discusses the features and functions of pragmatic ambivalence in the novel.

Key words: Pragmatic ambivalence; Conversations; Communicative intention

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INTRODUCTION

Pragmatic ambivalence, as a communicative strategy, emerges in large numbers in our verbal communication as well as literary works, because conversations in literary works are from life, and greatly resembling

communication in our daily life although they are deliberately created by the author.

The research takes the conversations in the novel *A Dream of Red Mansions* as its research data. *A Dream of Red Mansions* is regarded as the pinnacle of the Chinese classical novel. It is not only a great Chinese novel but also a gem of world literature, because it vividly reflects the culture, history and feudal aristocratic life of China. It can be called as the encyclopedia of life, because it almost contains every single aspect of life at that time. The language in the novel is vivid and appealing, which is mainly reflected in the conversations in the novel. It is through the conversations that the author shaped the characters, developed the plot and founded the artistic mansion of the novel. Thus, it is of great value for us to study its conversations between characters and its language feature. The thesis discusses and analyses pragmatic ambivalence in the conversations in the novel *A Dream of Red Mansions* under a relevant theory framework in the hope of better understanding pragmatic ambivalence, appreciating literary works and guiding verbal communication.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on pragmatic vagueness, which is also termed as “ambivalence”, starts from Leech (1977) and Brown and Levinson (1987). Thomas (1995) also observes “Ambivalence occurs when the speaker does not make clear precisely which of a range of related illocutionary values is intended” (Thomas, 1995, p.195). In other words, pragmatic ambivalence refers to the language phenomenon in which the speaker does not directly point out his intention but implies it by utilizing vague or ambivalent utterances. Pragmatic ambivalence can leave both the speaker and the hearer enough room to negotiate meaning in interaction. In order to be polite or to save one’s face, the speaker usually employs pragmatic ambivalence strategy to achieve his communicative goals.

A proposition is vague where there are possible states of things concerning which it is intrinsically uncertain whether, had they been contemplated by the speaker, he would have regarded them as excluded or allowed by the proposition. By intrinsically uncertain we mean certain in consequence of any ignorance of the interpreter, but because the speaker's habits of language were indeterminate; so that one day he would regard the proposition as excluding, another as admitting, those states of things. Yet this must be understood to have reference to what might be deduced from a perfect knowledge of his state of mind; for it is precisely because these questions never did, or did not frequently, present themselves that his habit remained indeterminate (Peirce, 1902, p.748).

American cybernetics expert Zadeh (1972) is another important figure who greatly influences the research on vagueness. He put forward the fuzzy set theory in 1965, which is initially applied in the studies of mathematics and later expanded into many disciplines including linguistics. He believes that most categories in the reality are boundary-blurred, some slightly, some markedly fuzzy, and owes the vagueness of language to the pervasiveness of vague ideas in our mind. It is his study that greatly pushes forward the research on language vagueness.

Kempson, as a linguist, classified four types of vagueness in his book *Semantic Theory* in 1977: a) Referential vagueness, where the meaning of the lexical item is principally clear, but it may be hard to decide whether or not it can be appropriately applied to the entity, for example it is hard to tell "mountain" apart "hill", "forest" apart "wood", or "house" apart "cottage"; b) Indeterminacy of meaning, for example, John's book is the book John owns, borrows, writes, or etc.? And, a good student is a student good at study, school behaviors, social activities, or something else? c) Lack of specification in the meaning of an item, where the meaning is clear but the referent is unspecified, for instance, my neighbor unspecified for sex, race, age, and etc.; d) Disjunction in the specification of the meaning of an item, where the meaning involves a disjunction or either-or statement of different interpretation possibilities (Kempson, 1977, pp.123-126).

As for the domestic scholars who study on vagueness, Zhao Yuanren is one of the earliest scholars in China who notices the issue of language vagueness. He distinguished ambiguity, vagueness and generality in 1959, and defined vagueness as follows: "a symbol is vague in so far as its borderland cases of applicability loom large in comparison with its clear cases" (qtd. in Zhu Yue, 2006, p.105). This definition is in accordance with western scholar's view of blur boundary of vague notions.

Wu Tiejing is generally regarded as the first person who introduces into China western research findings on vagueness, especially the fuzzy set theory of Zedah.

He is also the first Chinese scholar who systematically studies semantic vagueness by comparing multiple languages. In this book, he introduces and discusses the sources, features, and applications of vagueness. He also analyzes the geographical, political, economical, and social factors that influence language vagueness, probes into the interchangeability between precision and vagueness, compares language vagueness in different languages, and applies language vagueness into the study of lexicology, lexicography, etymology, rhetoric and etc. In a word, it is a ground-breaking work of fuzzy linguistics research and plays a pioneering role in China's fuzzy linguistics research.

He Ziran published the paper "Hedges and Verbal Communications" in 1985 in *Foreign Languages*, which introduces the foreign research on the classification of hedges and elaborates on approximations and shields. He proposes that approximates belong to the semantic category, while shields the pragmatic category.

Zhang Qiao is another Chinese scholar whose research on linguistic vagueness has raised concern in the international academic world. Her publication of *Fuzzy Semantics* in 1998 comprehensively introduces and comments on the research situation of fuzzy linguistics in the west, and studies on the lexical fuzziness and sentential fuzziness.

Vagueness is an inherent feature of human language. People employ vague language unconsciously because vagueness in verbal communication is almost "part of our taken-for-granted world" (Channell, 1994, p.4). It is neither all "good" nor all "bad". What matters is to employ vagueness appropriately. Under some circumstances, we should try to pursue the precision and clarity of language, for example in scientific report; in some, we apply vague language to achieve our specific communicative goals, for instance on diplomatic occasions, in others, we are even unaware of our usage of vague language, because language itself is vague and lacks precise representation.

The linguistic vagueness discussed above belongs to the semantic category, because it mainly deals with the static meaning of language. As we all know, it is definitely insufficient to only talk about static semantic meaning of language, because meaning, to a larger extent, is generated in dynamic interactions between interlocutors, just as Thomas pointed out: "Meaning is not something which is inherent in the words alone, nor is it produced by the speaker alone, nor by the hearer alone. Making meaning is a dynamic process, involving the negotiation of meaning between speaker and hearer, the context of utterance (physical, social and linguistic) and the meaning potential of an utterance" (Thomas, 1995, p.22). Therefore, when we study language vagueness, it is inevitable to consider dynamic pragmatic factors which are involved in the generation of language vagueness. Pragmatic vagueness or ambivalence emerges as the time requires.

2. THE FEATURES OF PRAGMATIC AMBIVALENCE IN A DREAM IN RED MANSIONS

2.1 People With Inferior Status Being the Unintended Hearer

For pragmatic multivalence, the speaker usually conveys different illocutionary forces to different hearers by one certain speech. That is to say, the speaker communicates the literal meaning to the unintended hearer and the implied meaning to the intended hearer. The speaker of pragmatic multivalence always points at one but abuses another. To the hearer with superior status, the speaker making apparent accusations will seem very impolite and unacceptable in social norms. Thus, people with inferior status than the intended hearer always serve as the superficial hearer, when the speaker wants to criticize people with superior status. For example:

(1) (Baochai was angry with Baoyu, because he compared her to Lady Yang, the concubine of Emperor Tang. Her sarcastic retort was interrupted by one of the young maids, Dianer.)

二人正说着，可巧小丫头靛儿因不见了扇子，和宝钗笑道：“必是宝姑娘藏了我的。好姑娘，赏我罢”宝钗指他道：“你要仔细！我和你顽过，你再疑我。和你素日嬉皮笑脸的那些姑娘们，你该问她们去。”说的个靛儿跑了。（第三十回）

This is a typical example of pragmatic multivalence, in which people with inferior status were taken as the unintended hearer and people with superior status the intended hearer. In this speech act, Baochai conveyed different illocutionary forces to Dianer and Baoyu. To Dianer, Baochai meant the literal meaning that she never played such tricks with her and she should ask the other young ladies who are always joking with her. To Baoyu, she implicitly criticized him for his inappropriate speech. She meant that she never joked with him on such topics. How could he play such a trick with her? He should play tricks with those girls who are always joking with him. Actually, she was not one of the girls. He chose a wrong object, which made her very embarrassed and irritated. However, she could not directly criticize Baoyu in this way, because Baoyu, as the young heir of the Jia Clan, was with a higher status. Direct criticism would not be appropriate in social norms. In such a condition, Dianer, a maid with lower status, became the victim of Baoyu. Direct criticism of her would be accepted as normal and acceptable.

(2) (Baoyu received a fearing flogging from his father, which set his mother Lady Wang to a storm of weeping. The Lady Dowager also came to reproach Jia Zheng with a breaking heart.)

贾母又叫王夫人道：“你也不必哭了。如今宝玉年纪小，你疼他，他将来长大成人，为官作宰的，也未必想着你是他母亲了。你如今倒不要疼他，只怕将来

还少生一口气呢。”贾政听说，忙叩头哭道：“母亲如此说，贾政无立足之地。”（第三十三回）

It is also an example of pragmatic multivalence, in which Lady Wang, the daughter-in-law of the old lady and the wife of Jia Zheng, was taken as the unintended hearer; and Jia Zheng, the paterfamilias of the family, was the true intended hearer. The Lady Dowager conveyed different illocutionary forces to Lady Wang and Jia Zheng by the same utterances. Of Lady Wang, she told her not to be too fond of Baoyu now in case of his disobedience to her when he grows up and becomes a high official in the future. To Jia Zheng, she expressed her anger because his disobedience to her now as he grows up and becomes a high official. It may not be suitable to criticize Jia Zheng directly in public, because he is the head of the family with very high social status. However, Lady Wang, as the daughter-in-law of the old lady, would be a much more suitable person to bear the complaint of the old lady.

Thus we can see that people always do not directly criticize those with higher social status. They would rather use pragmatic multivalence to seemingly abuse someone with lower status and implicitly criticize the true intended hearer.

2.2 Female Language: Ambivalent and Meaningful

A Dream of Red Mansions is a novel on women awaking in the feudal society. It depicts hundreds of women characters with vivid admirable characteristics. No matter they are misses or maids, they are all beautiful, intelligent, brilliant and full of humanity. Different with the social norm that believes women are inferior to men, the author respects women, sympathizes with them, and sings the praise of their fighting spirit. In such a novel, the women language the author designs for them is also full of beauty, ambivalent and meaningful. Women in the novel, whether they are privileged misses or poor serving-girls, talented or illiterate, are all good at employing ambivalent utterances to express their feelings and thoughts.

Undoubtedly, Daiyu is one of the best representatives. Her ambivalent utterances can be taken as examples without any difficulty. Her utterance of “before we have seen The Drunken Monk you are playing The General Feigns Madness” when seeing Baoyu enjoying Baochai’s explanation of the play The Drunken Monk, and her superficially accusing Xueyan of “doing whatever she asks, but letting whatever I say go in one ear and out the other, and jumping to obey her instructions faster than if they were an Imperial edit” when seeing Baoyu taking Baochai’s advice, well depicts her jealousy and her care for Baoyu. Her skillful public pleading of “I’m too young to know the right way to talk; but you, dear as an elder sister to me, can teach me. If you won’t forgive me, who else can I turn to” is a hint for Baochai to forgive her reading improper books. All these vividly reflect her intelligence.

Baochai, as one of the most outstanding among the girls in the Grand View Garden, also employs pragmatic ambivalence freely. Her retort of “it’s too bad I have no brother or cousin able to be another Yang Guozhong” when Baoyu comparing her to Lady Yang, and her satire of “you too are the ones well versed in ancient and modern literature, so of course you know all about ‘abject apologies’ — that’s something quite beyond me” when seeing Daiyu’s enjoyment of her discomfiture at Baoyu’s remark, all show that her image of a perfect feudal lady is inviolable.

Daiyu and Baochai are well known for their erudition. However, illiterate as Xifeng, and even maids like Pinger, Xiren, and Yuanyang, they are all masters of pragmatic ambivalence.

(3) (Seeing Daiyu’s enjoyment of her discomfiture at Baoyu’s remark, Baochai satirized the two.)

凤姐于这些上虽不通达，但见他三人形景，便知其意，便也笑着问人道：“你们大暑天，谁还吃生姜呢？”众人不解其意，便说道：“没有吃生姜。”凤姐故意用手摸着腮，诧异道：“既没人吃生姜，怎么这么辣辣的。”宝玉黛玉二人听见这话，越发不好过了。宝钗再要说话，见宝玉十分羞愧，形景改变，也就不好再说，只得一笑收住。（第三十回）

When all the others did not understand what happened, Xifeng guessed what was afoot from their expressions, and asked: “Who’s been eating ginger in such hot weather?” Her astonishment is a pragmatic multivalence, conveying different illocutionary acts to different hearers. To the other people on the spot, it is just a simple question on eating ginger; but to Baoyu, Baochai and Daiyu, it is a cunning statement to resolve embarrassed the situation and dispel the atmospheres for them.

(4) (Jia She wanted Yuanyang to be his concubine. Yuanyang was unwilling. She hid herself to the garden and met Pinger and Xiren on her way.)

平儿笑道：“你只和老太太说，就说已经给了琏二爷了，大老爷就不好要了。”……袭人笑道：“他们两个都不愿意，我就和老太太说，叫老太太说把你已经许了宝玉了，大老爷也就死了心了。”鸳鸯又是气，又是臊，又是急，因骂道：“……”（第四十六回）

Pinger’s suggestion of “telling the old lady you’ve already given yourself to Master Lian” and Xiren’s advice of “getting the old lady to tell Lord She you’re already promised to Baoyu” are all good examples of pragmatic bivalence/plurivalence, conveying different illocutionary forces to Yuanyang. Their words seemed to be their suggestions of ways for Yuanyang to fob Lord She off. Actually, they were taking the opportunity to propose impossible ways to make fun of Yuanyang.

No matter they are misses such as Daiyu and Baochai, or illiterate as Xifeng, humble as maids, they are all masters of language. Their utterances are ambivalent and meaningful. They excel at employing ambivalent

utterances to meaningfully express their feelings and thoughts.

2.3 People With Knowledge and Cultural Cultivation Inclined to Employ Pragmatic Ambivalence

Throughout the whole novel, Baochai and Daiyu are the two characters whose words are crackled with wits and wisdom the most and who are good at innuendo and expressing intentions ambivalently the most. Compared with other characters, examples of their expressions of pragmatic ambivalence are numerous to mention. They are the superb of the Grand View Garden, with extensive and broad knowledge and cultural cultivation. They always quote scriptures to express meanings ambivalently and arrive at their intentions indirectly. By contrast, Xifeng and maids like Qinwen who received little education, though sharp in their words, may not employ pragmatic ambivalence so frequently. Thus, we can say that those learned people and those with deep cultural edification may more often and inclined to express meanings ambivalently. For example:

(5) (Baoyu originally did not like the opera *The Drunken Monk* Baochai selected. Baochai explained the verses in the opera to Baoyu, which made Baoyu appreciate it very much, loud in his praise of the verses as well as of her erudition.)

宝玉听了，喜的拍膝画圈，称赏不已，又赞宝钗无书不知。林黛玉道：“安静看戏吧，还没唱《山门》，你倒《妆疯》了。”（第二十二回）

Here, Daiyu made use of the names of two classic operas: *The Drunken Monk* and *The General Feigns Madness* to indirectly satire Baoyu. She compared Baoyu, who pounded his lap to the rhythm of the verse and nodded appreciatively, loud in his praise of Baochai’s words and her erudition, as the general who feigned madness, to express her dissatisfaction at his enjoyment of Baochai’s words and his praise of Baochai.

(6) (Baoyu compared Baochai as Lady Yang, the concubine of Emperor Tang and Helen of Troy in Tang Dynasty. Daiyu enjoyed his remarks. And then, Baoyu asked Baochai what opera she was seeing.)

宝钗因见林黛玉面上有得意之态，一定是听了宝玉方才奚落之言，遂了他的心愿，忽又见问他这话，便笑道：“我看的是李逵骂了宋江，后来又赔不是。”宝玉便笑道：“姐姐博古通今，色色都知道，怎么连这一出戏的名字也不知道，就说了这么一串子。这叫《负荆请罪》。”宝钗笑道：“原来这叫作《负荆请罪》！你们博古通今，才知道‘负荆请罪’，我不知道什么是‘负荆请罪’！”（第三十回）

In this example, Baochai pretended that she did not know the opera of “Abject Apologies” and what is “Abject Apologies” to express indirectly that you two, who knew well of “Abject Apologies”, should feel guilty and apologize to me for your wrong doings.

(7) (Baoyu was going to off to school. He hurried to Daiyu's room and said goodbye to her.)

宝玉忽想起未辞黛玉，因又忙至黛玉房中来作辞。彼时黛玉才在窗下对镜理妆，听宝玉说上学去，因笑道：“好，这一去，可定是‘蟾宫折桂’了。我不能送你了。”（第九回）

“Plucking fragrant osmanthus in the palace of the moon” is a metaphor indicating succeeding in the imperial exams. Daiyu employed the metaphor to mock Baoyu, who hated the imperial exams in actions but had to go to school in behavior. Thus, the utterance of “you are going to pluck fragrant osmanthus in the palace of the moon” is a pragmatic bivalence. Apparently, Daiyu expressed her wishes to Baoyu and wished her to achieve a success in the imperial exams. However, actually she knew well his hatred towards the exams. Her utterance is just a mock of him.

From the above three examples, the language capacity of Baochai and Daiyu can be seen. They are well educated, knowledgeable and with deep cultural cultivation. They are good at ambivalently expressing their meanings and inclined to do so, because direct expressions may hurt both the faces of the communicator and the audience.

3. THE FUNCTIONS OF PRAGMATIC AMBIVALENCE IN DRM

Pragmatic ambivalence in the novel *A Dream of Red Mansions* has many functions. In addition to its function as depicting the character personalities and developing the plot, it also has varied pragmatic functions, namely, strengthening the communicative purpose, weakening the communicative purpose, negotiating the communicative purpose, being polite and being humorous.

3.1 Strengthening the Communicative Purpose

The communicator sometimes applies pragmatic ambivalence to reach a stronger communicative effect than what would be achieved by utterances directly expressing their intentions. For example:

(8) (Baoyu compared Baochai to Lady Yang. Daiyu was delighted to hear him make fun of her. Dissatisfied with their behavior, Baochai took the chance of talking about the name of an opera to retort.)

宝玉便笑道：“姐姐通今博古，色色都知道，怎么连这一出戏的名字也不知道，就说了这么一串子。这叫《负荆请罪》。”宝钗笑道：“原来这叫作《负荆请罪》！你们通今博古，才知道‘负荆请罪’，我不知道什么是‘负荆请罪’！”（第三十回）

Abject Apologies is the name of an opera about Li Kui abusing Song Jiang and then apologizing. Baochai pretended that she did not know the name of the opera, and attracted Baoyu to call it Abject Apologies. Then, she retorted: “Abject Apologies, is it? You two are the ones well versed in ancient and modern literature, so of course you know all about “abject apologies” — that’s something

quite beyond me.” Her several times repeat of “abject apologies”, her “praise” of Baoyu and Baochai knowing all about “abject apologies”, and her self-effacing of knowing nothing about ‘abject apologies’, all directs to one purpose: Her dissatisfaction with their improper abusing and not apologizing to her. Her ambivalent utterance achieves a stronger effect and makes both Baoyu and Daiyu immediately blushed.

3.2 Weakening the Communicative Purpose

Sometimes, due to some reason, it may be improper for the communicator to directly express his intention, and suitable for him to be euphemistic and indirect when expressing his intention. Then, he may apply pragmatic ambivalence as a hint to weakly express his communicative purpose. For example:

(9) (Daiyu teased Baochai in front of Tanchun, who mischievously asked Baochai to pinch her lips for what she said. Baochai playfully pushed her down on the Kang to pinch her cheeks.)

黛玉笑着忙央告：“好姐姐，饶了我罢！颦儿年纪小，只知说，不知道轻重，作姐姐的教导我。姐姐不饶我，还求谁去？”……宝钗原是和他顽，忽听他又拉扯前番说他互看杂书的话，便不好再和他厮闹，放起他来。（第四十二回）

Daiyu's public pleading of “forgive me, dear cousin, I'm too young to know the right way to talk; but you, dear as an elder sister to me, can teach me. If you don't forgive me, who else can I turn to?” is a pragmatic multivalence, conveying different illocutionary forces to Baochai and the other hearers on the spot. To the others, her words are only a pleading to Baochai on the current situation, because they only inferred the meaning from the current context and did not know what lay behind this exchange. However, to Baochi, it is not only a simple pleading on the current topic. Her pleading refers to her earlier lecture on reading improper books after Baochai caught her reading improper books and tried her for it. Daiyu took it as a hint and skillfully begged for Baochai's forgiveness. It is a secret between the two and should not be public to the others, let alone be emphasized in front of the others. Thus, her utterance is artfully weakening the communicative purpose of begging for forgiveness on reading improper books.

3.3 Negotiating the Communicative Purpose

When the topic the interlocutors deal with is very sensitive or special, the communicator may use very ambivalent utterances to depict it. In such a case, the ambivalent utterances have to be interpreted on the discourse level, and the interlocutors need to negotiate the communicative purpose in order to make the communicative intention well understood by the audience. For example:

(10) (Baoyu made an avowal to Daiyu.)

宝玉瞅了半天，方说道：“你放心”三个字，林黛玉听了，怔了半天，方说道：“我有什么不放心的？我不明白

这话。你倒说说怎么放心不放心”宝玉叹了一口气，问道：“……”林黛玉道：“果然我不明白放心不放心的话。”宝玉点头叹道：“……”林黛玉听了这话，如轰雷掣电，细细思之，竟比自己肺腑中掏出来的还觉恳切，竟有万句言语，满心要说，只是半个字也不能吐，却怔怔的望着他。（第三十二回）

In the feudal society, confession of love is not as simple and direct as today. It is very euphemistic and indirect. If it is expressed orally by the speaker, it may not be appropriately understood at the very beginning, because the hearer may not have any spiritual preparation for such a confession and would not accustom to such bold speech. Therefore, when Baoyu made an avowal to Daiyu, he told her: “You mustn’t worry!” It could never be understood by Daiyu as a confession of love for her at the beginning. She probably considered it as a suggestion for her not to be worried about something or someone. Through negotiation and repeated explanation, Daiyu finally obtained the communicative intention of Baoyu. He wanted her to stop feeling worried about his feelings for her. He informed her of his unchanged love for her all the time. Such a bold confession could not be understood easily at the beginning. The true communicative purpose is negotiated after repeated explanations. And, pragmatic ambivalence can achieve such a communicative effect.

3.4 Achieving Politeness

In order to be polite or to save the face of the interlocutors, the communicator may also employ pragmatic ambivalence. For example:

(11) (Mrs. Zhou was asked by Aunt Xue to take the gauze flowers to the girls. She gave them to the three young ladies and Xifeng on her way, and then finally found Daiyu and gave her the flowers.)

黛玉只就宝玉手中看了一眼，便问道：“还是单送我一个的，还是别的姑娘们都有呢”周瑞家的道：“各位都有了，这两支是姑娘的了。”黛玉冷笑道：“我就知道，别人不挑剩下的不给我。”周瑞家的听了，一声儿不言语。宝玉便问道：“周姐姐，你作什么到那边去了。”（第七回）

Mrs. Zhou and Aunt Xue did not mean to give Daiyu the last two sprays of gauze flowers. It only happened by coincidence. Daiyu’s bitter irony of “I might have known I wouldn’t get mine till the others had taken their pick” would offend both Mrs. Zhou and Aunt Xue. It set Mrs. Zhou to immediate embarrassment. She could say nothing. Seeing such a situation, Baoyu’s interruption of “what were you doing over there, Sister Zhou” actually is not simply asking Mrs. Zhou for information. It mainly plays a role of dispelling the embarrassment between Mrs. Zhou and Daiyu and achieving politeness.

The above example is on the function of pragmatic ambivalence to achieve politeness when there is embarrassment already. In some other situations, the speaker may use pragmatic ambivalence in ahead of the appearance of embarrassment. For example:

(12) (Jia Lian, the son of Lord She, wanted to marry Second Sister, the poor sister of Madam You, as a concubine.)

贾琏听了，忙要起身，又听贾蓉和他老娘说道：“那一次我和老太太说的，我父亲要给二姨说的姨夫，就和我这叔叔的面貌身量差不多儿。老太太说好不好”。（第六十四回）

Jia Rong’s utterance of “the one my father has in mind for Second Aunt, has much the same features and build as this uncle of mine” is a pragmatic bivalence, conveying two different illocutionary forces to the old Mrs. You, the mother of Second Sister. One is to propose to Second Aunt for the one with much the same features and builds as Jia Lian. The other is to propose to her for Jia Lian. He did not directly point out who wanted to marry Second Sister, but implicitly referred to the proposer as the one with much the same features and build as his uncle, Jia Lian. All this is to save the face of Jia Lian if the proposing was refused by the old Mrs. You. This is an example of achieving politeness in ahead of the appearance of embarrassment.

Pragmatic ambivalence can help save the face of both the speaker and the hearer and achieve politeness in communication, when the topic is sensitive to be mentioned directly and when the topic may easily hurt the faces of the interlocutors.

3.5 Achieving Humor

Achieving humor is also an important function pragmatic ambivalence can play in communication, because the indirect expressions of meaning sometimes can achieve a very humorous communicative effect. For example:

(13) (The Lady Dowager asked Xichun to paint the Grand View Garden. Liwan allowed her a month leave. But she thought that was too short.)

黛玉道：“论理一年也不多。这园子盖才盖了一年，如今要画自然得二年工夫呢。又要研墨，又要蘸笔，又要铺纸，又要着颜色，又要——”刚说到这里，众人知道他是取笑惜春，便都笑问说：“还要怎样”黛玉也自己掌不住笑道：“又要照着这样儿慢慢的画，可不得二年的工夫”（第四十二回）

Xichun wanted to ask for a year’s leave for painting the Grand View Garden. Daiyu replied: “Actually a year isn’t too long. Since this garden took a year to build, painting it will naturally require two, what with grinding the ink, spreading out the paper, dipping the brushes in the colors and then... Then slowly paint the whole thing in detail.” Her utterances are pragmatic bivalence, conveying two different illocutionary forces to the hearers on the spot. One is to literally express that a year’s leave is not too long for painting the garden. The other is to make fun of Xichun for her speed of painting. We can say that her utterance is a statement on painting, but moreover a cunning teasing of Xichun. It is full of a sense of humor.

CONCLUSION

On the basis for pragmatic ambivalence communication, it illustrates that we share a set of facts on the utterances of pragmatic ambivalence. Therefore when we communicate it, the mutually manifested cognitive environment provides a basis for us to successfully generate and understand pragmatic ambivalence in the process of our communication.

By the research, we can better understand pragmatic ambivalence, including its generation and interpretation. By understanding pragmatic ambivalence, we also harvest in a better literature appreciation including its character depicting and plot development. And, in our daily communication, we can consciously cultivate our habit of utilizing pragmatic ambivalence strategy so as to reach our specific communicative effects. Moreover, in first or second language teaching, it is also beneficial to teach language learners how to recognize, generate and interpret pragmatic ambivalence, because in the process of language usage, pragmatic ambivalence can play a role that cannot be done by precise language, and

sometimes we can never avoid pragmatic ambivalence due to the intrinsic indeterminate features of language system.

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