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A Discourse Study of the Iceberg Principle in *A Farewell to Arms*

MA Daoshan[a],*; ZHANG Shuo[b]

[a]Professor. School of Foreign Languages, Tianjin Polytechnic University, China.
Research area: Syntax and comparative linguistics between English and Chinese.
[b]School of Foreign Languages, Tianjin Polytechnic University, China.
*Corresponding author.

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Abstract
The iceberg principle (also know as the "Principle of Omission") is a term used to describe the writing style of the American writer—Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961), who compares his principle on writing to an iceberg. The principle is well presented in *A Farewell to Arms,* where much of the content has been omitted, leaving the readers to explore it through their logical thinking and imagination.

Key words: Iceberg principle*; A Farewell to Arms;* Omission; Implication

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INTRODUCTION
As one of the greatest novelists in American literary history, Ernest Hemingway's war experience helped him accomplish many great works in human history, and *A Farewell to Arms* is his second most influential novel in which, as in his other great works, his succinct writing style makes him one of the greatest masters of modern literature (Grebstein, 1973, p.5).

The iceberg principle, also known as the "Principle of Omission", is used to describe the pithy writing style of American writer Ernest Hemingway. According to him, the words and images in literary works are what seems to be the one-eighth above water, while the emotions and thoughts behind the lines compose the seven-eighth underwater. He says, "The dignity of movement of an iceberg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water."

According to Hemingway's explanation, a brief outline of the "iceberg principle" can be made: the so-called iceberg principle, is creating a distinct image with the laconic and compendious writing, the feeling and the thought of the writer himself are included in the image to the largest extent. Thus, the emotion is plentiful, though hidden but not exposed; the thought is profound, though deeply concealed but not obscure. On account of this, the sensibility and perceptibility of literature are combined skillfully, leaving the readers to explore the emotion and thoughts in the work through the feeling of these distinct images.

A Farewell to Arms is a semi-autobiographical novel written by Ernest Hemingway concerning events during the Italian campaigns in the First World War. The title is taken from a poem by 16th-century English dramatist George Peele. The book, which was first published in 1929, is a first-person account of American Frederic Henry, serving as a Lieutenant ("Tenente") in the ambulance corps of the Italian Army.

A Farewell to Arms works on two literary levels. First, it is a story concerning the drama and passion of a doomed romance between Henry and Catherine Barkley, a British nurse. Second, it also skillfully contrasts the meaning of personal tragedy against the impersonal destruction wrought by the First World War. Hemingway deftly captures the cynicism of soldiers, the futility of war, and the displacement of populations. Although it was Hemingway's bleakest novel, its publication cemented his stature as a modern American writer.

The iceberg principle is also called the Principle of Omission, and so omission maybe the most important writing skill to reach the standard of iceberg principle.

Hemingway's "telegraphic dialogue" and laconic narrative style are the best presentation of omission.

1. DISCOURSE IMPLICATION OF THE TELEGRAPHIC DIALOGUE

In the novel, Hemingway writes in the use of telegraphic dialogue. That is to say he creates a kind of "telegraphic" language style which is rather laconic. When he tells the story, expresses feelings, and illustrates the theme through the natural, vivid, succint dialogue, Hemingway describes them subjectively instead of the traditional long monologue. It also embodies the Hemingway's "tip" writing style. In fact, telegraphic style is a kind of implicit iceberg principle. Therefore, you can not understand the profound meaning if you read it for the first time. The novel must be read repeatedly, and then you may get the profound meaning.

(a) "Priest every night five against one" (Hemingway, 2004, p.14).

The captain has made an extremely condensed statement. The metaphor is played out long over the course of their conversation, leaving no doubt that the captain is both suggesting that the priest five fingers are battling his penis, but also suggests that the priest is a fraud and makes love with five girls at the same night. When we think of the priest as a receiver of confessions, it takes on a deeper significance. The captain suggests that the priest's hand and the priest's penis are engaged in the battle of confession of sexual desire. During the war time, people are at loss; even the priest has lost his belief (Brian, 2002, p.24).

(b) "Let's drop the war."

"There's no place to drop it."

"Let's drop it anyway."

(Hemingway, 2004, p.24)

This early exchange says much about why Catherine and Frederic get along so well. They are on the same wavelength. On the surface, it's playful banter, but it expresses their respective and shared feelings about the war. Both of them hate the war and they seek to something that could distract their attraction on war, which gives possibility to a romance. There is a debate going on, and a give and take of information as they test the waters.

(c) "So you make progress with Mr. Barkley?"

"We are friends."

"You have the pleasant air of a dog in heat."

I did not understand the word.

"Of a what"

He explained.

(Hemingway, 2004, p.25)

In the reality of Frederic's memory, conversations are being conducted in a variety of languages, what we get in English is often "translated" from another language. Maybe Hemingway was thinking in Italian when he wrote some of the novel.

(d) "I stay too long and talk too much."

"No. Don't go."

(Hemingway, 2004, p.66)

Part of why the priest wants to leave is because, at points in the conversation, the confessor-confessee relationship was reversed and the priest was confessing to Frederic. He feels guilty and doesn't want it to go on. Priests have to confess to other priests. In those moments of reversal, Frederic is priestly.

(e) "But people do. They love each other and they misunderstand on purpose and they fight and then suddenly they aren't the same one" (Hemingway, 2004, p.125).

This makes us wonder who Catherine has been fighting with in her life. She knows an awful lot about the pitfalls of bad communication. Moments like this make us wonder if she's older than Frederic. Her age is as ambiguous as his. She was engaged for eight years, but she qualifies it, saying she "grew up" with her fiancé. But growing up could mean a number of things, including losing virginities together. Thus, is Catherine as pure as what Henry thought of her to be? Maybe she is a little "crazy".

(f) "No danger of —," using the vulgar word. "No place for —" (Hemingway, 2004, p.174)

We love how Frederic describes Aymo's use of the "F" word, and there is no doubt what he means. When Frederic uses it himself a few lines later, it's even funnier. We wonder if the editors or Hemingway chose not to put the actual word in. If it's Hemingway, then we can assume that Frederic uses the word, but won't use it when narrating this story for some reason.

(g) "We are war brothers. Kiss me good-bye" (Hemingway, 2004, p.62).

The love between Rinaldi and Frederic is complicated. The erotic overtone of the scenes between the two men is not to be denied. One 1990s critic says, "Rinaldi and Frederic are not gay and they know it." Maybe that's true, but can we at least admit they are flirting?

The historian Paul Fussell illustrates that some soldiers at front-line in the Great War felt "passions" for comrades as "antidotes against loneliness and terror" and experienced "homoerotic," "a sublimated (i.e., 'chaste') form of temporary homosexuality" (Cohen, 1995, p.42):

> Hemingway experienced military life during the First World War and described the conflict between male intimacy and institutional homophobia in the army in *A Farewell to Arms*. 'Farewell' depicts how the military on the one hand produces physical and emotional intimacy between soldiers and on the other hand requires the homophobic exclusion of homosexuality and the compulsive performance of heterosexuality (Massaya, 2012, p. 5).

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1985) asserts that patriarchal culture constitutes a homo-social network through "male traffic in women": "the use of women as exchangeable, perhaps symbolic property for the primary purpose of cementing the bonds of men with men". Drawing upon Sedgwick's Principle, Peter F. Cohen (1995) shows a homo-social relationship between Frederic and Rinaldi through the exchange of Catherine between them. Cohen evidences Frederic's intimate feeling toward Rinaldi by analyzing his gaze upon Rinaldi. After coming back to the front from a leave for a trip around Italy, Frederic, stripped to the waist, watches Rinaldi on the bed: " While I rubbed myself with a towel I looked around the room and out the window and at Rinaldi lying with his eyes closed on the bed. He was good looking… we were great friends." The sexual images of the nakedness and the bed characterize Frederic's gaze as erotic.

(h) "You're such a silly boy." She kissed me. (Hemingway, 2004, p. 93)

Frederic gets called a boy a lot. Since we don't know his age, we don't know if this is a literal reference to his age. Hemingway was only 18 when he worked as an Italian ambulance driver, but we only get few hints about Frederic's age, some of them contradictory.

(i) "There, darling. Now you're all clean inside and out. Tell me. How many people have you ever loved?"

"Nobody."

"Not even me?"

"Yes, you."

"How many others really?"

"None."

"How many have you—how do you say it?—stayed with?"

"None."

"You're lying to me."

"Yes."

"It's all right. Keep right on lying to me. That's what I want you to do. Were they pretty?"

(Hemingway, 2004, p.95)

Soon after Henry arrives at the American hospital in Milan, his relationship with Catherine Barkley becomes passionate. Initially a means of alleviating the pain of war and private grief, their affair continues to serve the very practical purpose of masking the difficulties in their lives. As this passage from Chapter 16 illustrates, their game of love distracts them from unpleasant circumstances—here, a procedure wherein Catherine "cleans out" Henry's insides to prepare him for his operation. Indeed, Hemingway washes over the details of the procedure by having Catherine say, "There, darling. Now you're all clean inside and out." At this point, however, the couple's game, though acknowledged by Catherine as a lie, is becoming more complicated. The reader is unsure of the depth of feeling that inspires Henry's declaration of love and his honesty about sleeping with other women. This dialogue establishes the importance of illusion in Catherine and Henry's budding relationship.

2. NARRATIVE STYLE

A Farewell to Arms features Hemingway's economical use of dialogue and physical description to expose the inner lives of his characters, which is later to be praised by the Nobel Prize Committee for its forceful and style-making mastery of the art of modern narration. Henry Frederic, the narrator and protagonist in *A Farewell to Arms*, is not only a function of the style but also its source, regardless of the suspicion of his trustworthiness. The bare and straightforward narrative for the setting, together with the stream of consciousness constitutes Henry's narration and displays its style. The charm of Hemingway's narration lies in his expertise in controlling both the skills of dialogue and stream-of-consciousness under the iceberg principle on the canvas of the laconic narrative.

Although Frederic is ostensible telling his own story, the narrative contains two simultaneous voices: Frederic's and Hemingway's. Together, they give us the simultaneity of a sliding discourse—a simultaneity that allows Hemingway to superimpose two time schemes: one corresponding to the events as they first occurred, the other corresponding to hindsight.

2.1 Stream-of-Consciousness in Discourse

Writing from Frederic Henry's point of view, Hemingway sometimes uses a modified stream-of-consciousness technique, a method for spilling out on paper the inner thoughts of a character. Usually Henry's thoughts are choppy, staccato, but when he becomes drunk the language does too, as in the passage in Chapter 3:

> I had gone to no such place but to the smoke of cafes and nights when the room whirled and you needed to look at the wall to make it stop, nights in bed, drunk, when you knew that that was all there was, and the strange excitement of waking and not knowing who it was with you, and the world all unreal in the dark and so exciting that you must resume again unknowing and not caring in the night, sure that this was all and all and all and not caring (Hemingway, 2004, p.13).

The rhythm, the repetition, has us rolling with Henry. Thus, Hemingway's prose is in fact an instrument finely tuned to reflect his characters and their world. As we read *A Farewell to Arms*, we must try to understand the thoughts and feelings Hemingway seeks to inspire in us by the way he uses language.

> I sat outside in the hall. Everything was gone inside of me. I did not think. I could not think. I knew she was going to die and I prayed that she would not. Don't let her die. Oh, God, please don't let her die. I'll do anything for you if you won't let her die. Please, please, please, dear God, don't let her die. Dear God, don't let her die. I'll do anything you say if you don't let her die. You took the baby but don't let her die. That was all right but don't let her die. Please, please, dear God, don't let her die. (Hemingway, 2004, p.291).

The above excerpt is the psychological activity of Henry during Catherine's operation. Without any adjectives, we can still feel the anxiety of Henry, because our feeling has rolled with Henry's stream of consciousness.

2.2 Narrator's Point of View

We all know that *A Farewell to Arms* ends tragically, with the death of Frederic and Catherine's son. One good way to see the deeper meaning of the tragedy is to look at the way the novel is structured. It's told in the first person, in the past tense, like a memory. So, at the beginning of the novel, the narrator already knows how it will end.

While we read, we can pretend that we've met Frederic in some café or bar and he's telling us the story over multiple pasta courses and fine wines. And, because it's a memory, he gets some things wrong, and he might embellish some things (like the dialogue) to entertain readers. It's also probable that the trauma of many of the events, and the number of beers in Frederic when he experiences them, have colored his memories. Unless Frederic has changed a great deal, he's probably drinking while he's telling the story. In short, in some ways, at some times, Frederic can be considered an unreliable narrator.

If Frederic is telling us this story while drinking, then he's pretty smashed by the time he gets to the end, which might have something to do with why the following passages are so weird.

> The doctor held him by his heels and slapped him.
> "Is he all right?"
> "He's magnificent. He'll weigh 5 kilos [eleven pounds]."
> I had no feeling for him. He did not seem to have anything to do with me. I felt no feeling of fatherhood.
> "Aren't you proud of your son?" the nurse asked.
> (Hemingway, 2004, p.183)

Now, a little while later, we come to this scene.

> "What's the matter with the baby?" I asked.
> "Didn't you know?"
> "No."
> "He wasn't alive."
> "He was dead?"
> "They couldn't start him breathing. The chord was caught around his neck or something"
> (Hemingway, 2004, p. 216).

The fact that the baby is dead when Frederic first sees him at least partially explains why Frederic "felt no feeling of fatherhood," and we can infer that the doctor is smacking the kid around to try to revive him, but it doesn't in any way explain why they are acting like everything is just fine. You just don't go around calling dead babies or even near dead babies "magnificent." And even if the doctor and nurse are stalling in order to try to somehow bring the baby to life, unless they are complete sadists, they wouldn't act like that.

In a case like this, we have to suspect that the narrator isn't remembering things as they happened. Or is it possible he wanted the baby to be alive so badly that he misheard what they were telling him? And thus misremembered it? Frederic sometimes lies to people in the novel, but he seems to always tell us the truth. Or does he? How you answer that question relates to how you interpret the novel. Regardless, some kind of communication breakdown occurred. This aspect of the ending emphasizes that the book is very much about the nature of memory, and about the nature of communication.

2.3 Zero Ending

One of the unique features of Hemingway's "iceberg principle" is that he usually adopts an open ending, which is different from other writers' carefully designed, well-made ones. A Hemingway style ending seems always ends when it is still halfway, which makes the reader feel that the story is to be continued and the writer does finish it deliberately. He omits the heroes' destiny and let the reader imagine it by themselves. Hemingway leaves readers in suspense and cleverly avoids committing himself to any conclusion. This deliberate avoidance from making judgment and explanation renders the story even more intriguing.

> Outside the room, in the hall, I spoke to the doctor, "Is there anything I can do to-night?"
> "No. There is nothing to do. Can I take you to your hotel?"
> "No, thank you. I am going to stay here a while."
> "I know there is nothing to say. I cannot tell you—"
> "No," I said. "There's nothing to say."
> "Good night," he said, "I cannot take you to your hotel?"
> "No, thank you."
> "It was the only thing to do," he said. "The operation proved—"
> "I do not want to talk about it," I said.
> "I would like to take you to your hotel?"
> "No, thank you."
> He went down the hall. I went to the door of the room.
> "You can't come in now," one of the nurses said.
> "Yes, I can," I said.
> "You can't come in yet."
> "You get out," I said. "The other one too."
> But after I had got them out and shut the door and turned off the light it wasn't any good. It was like saying good-by to a statue.
> After a while I went out and left the hospital and walked back to the hotel in the rain.
> (Hemingway, 2004, p.293)

The ending is very weird. The doctor asked Henry three times to take him home. Obviously, the doctor wanted to talk with Henry about the operation. But Henry interrupted him and tried to avoid the answer, which he might have known. Is there a skeleton in the closet? It seems to be a natural ending that Henry would go through a miserable life since he walked in the "rain".

CONCLUSION

A Farewell to Arms, one of the best war novels, is also illustrated as a good example of the application of iceberg principle.

To follow iceberg principle, several writing skills are employed by Hemingway in *A Farewell to Arms*. To combine simplicity and connotation, omission is an indispensable device. What everybody knows and the part that the author would like the readers to figure out should be omitted. Besides, direct presentation and description is also a useful technique to achieve the goal. Symbols, adopted to combine the natural objects with the characters'

future and fortune, are used to achieve the combination frequently. Moreover, prevalence of satire throughout the novel is another useful device, which adds ironic tone toward the destructive world and war. In addition, special lexicology and sentence pattern are possible means to follow the iceberg principle.

In general, the stories in Hemingway's novels are comparatively depicted tersely but the meaning beneath needs the reader's careful exploration. It is through "iceberg principle" that Hemingway leaves unlimited room for the readers' response, and that fills his work with enormous attraction.

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