摘 要

由于不同文化所提供的语用预设常会造成理解上的失误，近 20 年来，国内外很多语用学家在这个领域作了大量的研究。但纵观这些学者对跨文化语用学的研究，对跨文化语用失误分析的理论基础还只限于 Grice 的合作原则, Leech 的礼貌原则以及 Brown 和 Levinson 的面子理论。本文拟用关联理论这一新的认知科学对跨文化语用失误的本质及其原因进行分析，一方面旨在证明关联理论对跨文化语用失误现象有极强的诠释力，另一方面为促进交际法教学提供新的依据。

首先，本文认为，关联理论能合理诠释跨文化语用失误，其主要表现在两个方面即关联的程度性和关联的全面性。首先，从话语间的最大关联到完全不关联，关联的程度与会话蕴涵是密不可分的。话语理解的过程就是寻找关联的过程。由于跨文化交际是发生在不同文化背景下人们之间的语言交流，语境效果差，关联程度小，听话人往往要付出比和他的同族人交流时更大的努力才能寻求出话语之间的联系，因此语用失误常常发生。其次，关联理论的交际观没有完全抛弃传统的代码模式，相反，认定编码与解码是推理的基础。对话语的理解就是一种认知活动，为实现相互之间的互明，保证交际的成功，交际双方在交际或理解语言时，只需找出话语之间的关联。由此可见，相比于 Grice 的“合作原则”，关联理论的全面性使得关联理论对于跨文化交际过程的描述更为直观、自然。

其次，本文在关联理论的基础上，对语用失误的本质及其原因作了具体的论述。根据关联理论的"经济原则"（principle of economy），交际的目的不仅是成功地传递信息，交际者还希望以最少的投入来获得最佳的实际效果，这显然与话语的关联性有关。这种关联性作为语境效果和付出努力之间的一种关系，是导致跨文化语用失误现象的本质原因。对于跨文化语用失误的具体原因，本文从五个方面进行了分析：对交际对象用意的不解；对听话者能力的认识不清：交际双方未能共享隐含前提；潜在关联未能成功确立以及会话双方认知环境的不同。

最后，本文在阐述了关联理论对跨文化语用失误现象的合理诠释后，提出了其局限性和不完备性。笔者认为，交际毕竟是面对面的交际，不能忽略人类交际中的社会文化特征，所以合作和礼貌是不可或缺的因素。关联理论仍需要进一步的发展和完善。

关键词：跨文化交际；语用失误；关联解析；

Abstract

As cultural presuppositions can be major stumbling blocks on the road to understanding, during the last 20 years or so, pragmaticians have carried out contrastive research into many different pragmatic features in a very wide range of languages. However, the previous studies were mainly based on Grice's Cooperative Principle, Leech's Theories of Politeness and Brown and Levinson's ' Face ' model. This thesis, analyzes the nature and the cause of cross-cultural pragmatic failure from the perspective of Relevance Theory, aiming to provide scientific basis for the research with the aim of contributing to communicative language teaching, but also to demonstrate the interpretative force of Relevance Theory on cross-cultural pragmatic failure.

First of all, this thesis believes that Relevance Theory can give a reasonable analysis of both failure and success in cross-cultural communication. The author holds that Relevance Theory can account for cross-cultural pragmatic failure because Relevance is a matter of degree and is universal in language. First, what makes the communicator's utterances relevant or less relevant or irrelevant is the interpreting process available to the hearer in that context. Every utterance comes with a guarantee of its own particular relevance. As the relevance of what is said to a hearer from an alien culture usually costs more effort than it would to

one from the same language community, the principle of relevance plays a more important role in measuring the degree of success or failure in cross-cultural communication. Second, RT does not ignore the traditional 'Code-Model' encoding-decoding process. Instead, it regards it as the basis of inferential communication. Utterance interpretation is a kind of cognitive activity. To realize mutual manifestness and ensure the success in communication, what one needs to do is to find the relevance between utterances. So compared with Grice's Cooperative Principle, RT is more intuitive and natural in comprehending cross-cultural communication for the universality of relevance.

Secondly, the thesis has elaborated on the nature and the cause of cross-cultural pragmatic failure, the author argues that, according to the Principle of Economy, the goal of communication is not merely to convey information, but to convey it economically. Moreover, the communicator hopes to be optimally relevant with the situation to minimize the expenditure of processing effort. So this relevance, as a matter of degree in terms of contextual effects and processing efforts in utterance interpretation, is the driving force behind pragmatic failure. Resorting to cognitive principles and to the Principle of Relevance, the author views the direct factors which result in failure in cross-cultural communication as: failures to recognize intended assumptions; a dim consciousness of the hearer's abilities of utterance interpretation; failures to share the same

implicated premise; inability to determine potential relevance and mismatch of cognitive environments for communicators.

Lastly, the thesis, after affirming the strong points of Relevance Theory, has pointed out some shortcomings and limitations of Relevance Theory. The author suggests that cooperation and politeness, which are unexpectedly ignored in Relevance Theory, should be considered in cross-cultural communication because communication is often a face-to-face talk. So, the author thinks RT still has much room for improvement.

Key words: cross-cultural communication, pragmatic failure, relevance-theoretic analysis

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Introduction

The major impetus for this research began to take shape when one of my close friends took his linguistic course in Sheffield in England. At the end of each lesson, their British teacher frequently told them they might like to do a certain exercise by the next lesson.

He meant it as an order, but by keeping to the fairly common British convention of avoiding explicit directives, he confused his students. Nearly all of the Chinese students interpreted it as an optional possibility, and were surprised and embarrassed when they discovered the next day that they were supposed to have done the work. This incident made me realize a fact that not all utterances can be successfully understood even if we are teachers of English with near native speakers' competence in English. I began to think of a reasonable answer to the question: What is it that makes a linguistic unit meaningful and understandable to a native speaker, whereas other apparently correct linguistic units can not only be misunderstood, but can even be insulting to the addressee and embarrassing to the speaker? Readings on this topic led me to hypothesize that context, with all its implications and embedded features (see Sperber and Wilson, 1995), plays a key role in both verbal communication and utterance interpretation. In other words, communicators depend on other factors outside language such as physical characteristics of objects and socio-cultural conventions, in addition to 'frozen' language formulae and grammaticality,

Pragmatics, as "the science of the relation of signs to their interpreters" (Morris 1938: 30), it's concerned not with language as a system or product, but rather with the interrelationship between language form, messages and language users. During the last 20 years or so, pragmaticians have carried out contrastive research into many different pragmatic features in a very wide range of languages. This area of research is known as 'cross-cultural pragmatics', it has explored questions such as the following:

(1) What cultural differences (if any) are there in the effect of context on the performance of speech acts?

(2) What cultural differences (if any) are there in the impact of sociopragmatic principles on people's performance of speech acts?

(3)What language differences (if any) are there in the influence of pragmalinguistic conventions on the performance of speech acts? Researchers both at home and abroad who are interested in this area have been probing into various kinds of pragmatic principles in accounting for pragmatic failure put forward by Jenny Thomas (1983). By far the most influential pragmatic principle was developed in the mid-1960s by the Oxford philosopher Paul Grice (1967, 1989). He argued that people are disposed to presume that communicative behavior is guided by a set of principles and norms, which he called the 'co-operative principle' and maxims of conversation. In 1983, Leech put forward the 'politeness principle', which is regarded as a necessary supplement to Grice's co-operative principle, arguing that people often break the co-operative Principle for 'politeness' reasons, He attempts to categorize in more details some of the underlying intent behind these forms by articulating a set of rules or politeness maxims: (1) Tact maxim: minimize cost and maximize benefit to other; (2) Generosity maxim: minimize benefit and maximize cost to self; (3) Approbation maxim: minimize dispraise and maximize praise of other; (4) Modesty maxim: minimize praise and maximize dispraise of self; (5)Agreement maxim: minimize disagreement and maximize agreement between self and other; (6) Sympathy maxim: minimize antipathy and maximize sympathy between self and other. Another influential model that tries to explain the impact of social factors on people's use of language is Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987) 'face' model of politeness. Brown and Levinson define 'face' as "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself "and they draw a distinction between positive face and negative face. Positive face reflects every person's need that his or her self-image is appreciated and approved of. And negative face reflects every person's basic claim to territories, personal preserves, rights to non-distraction—that is, to freedom of action and freedom form imposition. (1987: 61).

In China pragmatic studies of cross-cultural communication started only in the 1980s. Some scholars published books and articles to discuss pragmatic competence, pragmatic failure and pragmatic principles, such as He Ziran (1988), Hu Wenzhong (1988, 1992, 1993), Huang Cidong (1984). However, such pragmatic studies have largely concentrated their attention on listing Chinese learners' common errors of interaction in English or instances of misunderstanding in the name of pragmatic failure. Still not too much emphasis is laid on the theoretical analyses to account for the success and failure of cross-cultural communication. Besides, the previous study has just made some explanations by using the general Cooperative Principle and theories of Politeness.

Grice's Co-operative Principle and Leech's Politeness Principle have made a great contribution to the successful establishment of pragmatics as an independent branch of linguistics. Yet they have a number of limitations. For example, one of the main problems with the Co-operative Principle is that there is often an overlap between the four maxims. It can be difficult to say which one is operating and it would be more precise to say that two or more are operating at once.

In the recent years, the challenge of describing and explaining the reasoning processes involved in communication has been taken up by cognitive approaches to pragmatics, that is Sperber and Wilson's Relevance Theory, which maintains that the reasoning processes involved in communication are constrained by a single principle of relevance. All maxims can be reduced to the maxim of relation, since relevance is a natural feature of all exchanges in which speakers have the aim of achieving successful communication.

This thesis is an attempt to analyze the nature of cross-cultural pragmatic failure with the aim of contributing to communicative language teaching. It draws on Sperber and Wilson's Relevance Theory as a general pragmatic framework in order to account for the failure in cross-cultural communication. My main view is that in cross-cultural communication, pragmatic failure resulting from a mismatch in the cognitive environments is more serious than from being a product of language errors (see Sperber and Wilson's, 1995: 172-3). Although language errors can lead to miscommunication, we'll mainly discuss pragmatic failure in this paper, for the native speakers often forgive phonological, syntactic, and lexical errors made by L2 speakers, yet they are less likely to forgive pragmatic errors. According to Thomas, native speakers typically interpret pragmatic errors negatively as arrogance, impatience, rudeness, and so forth.

In this thesis, we hypothesize that misunderstanding in cross-cultural communication results from mismatch in the socio-cognitive environments of the members of two language communities. Examples of utterance interpretation are analyzed in Chapter Four. The findings in this paper show that although the incidents of mismatch in the cognitive environments are few in number, they utterly block the way to successful communication in most cases, so the cultivation of cultural awareness to decrease pragmatic failure is important in cross-cultural communication. As a result, the manipulation of context and the teaching of culture play a key role in minimizing the degree and frequency of communicative breakdown.

This thesis consists of four chapters.

In Chapter one, some basic notions of Relevance Theory and the principle of relevance will be introduced. This chapter will also point out that Relevance Theory, for all its limitations, will make a great contribution to the development of modern pragmatics by making a comparison between RT principle of relevance and Grice's co-operative principle.

Chapter Two will demonstrate the interpretative force of Relevance Theory on cross-cultural pragmatic failure by analyzing the relationship between RT and cross-cultural communication. In addition, the nature and areas of pragmatic failure will be explained in this chapter on the basis of RT.

In chapter three, the direct factors which result in pragmatic failure will be examined and examples of utterance interpretation will be analyzed.

Chapter four will contain the discussion of practical applications and point out that the manipulation of context and cultural awareness raising play a key role in minimizing the degree and frequency of communicative breakdown.

Besides the four chapters, this thesis has an introduction at the beginning and a conclusion at the end. In the introduction, the background and the main purpose of the current study are introduced. In the conclusion, major findings of the study will be summed up; the theoretical root of the research will be restated; the practical significance of cross-cultural pragmatics will be reemphasized for the pupose of improving students' communicative competence, and suggestions will be made for further studies.

Chapter One Relevance Theory

As a communicative theory of cognitive pragmatics, relevance theory (RT) is dedicated to the study of the ostensive-inferential communication and meant to establish a general principle of interpreting the inner mechanism of human communication. Since its first formal presentation with the publication of the book *Relevance: Communication &Cognition*(Sperber&Wilson 1986), RT has evoked intense repercussions in world-wide circles of linguistics, and of pragmatics in particular, for it has provided a brand-new perspective and approach to studying communicative and pragmatic problems and demonstrated a large potentiality of interpreting language phenomena.

RT has attracted consistent interest and attention of western pragmatists since it was advanced. The fundamental points of its theoretical framework have been all-sidedly introduced, interpreted, reviewed and modified or complemented. The developments in the researches of the theory since 1986 can be partly traced from the second edition of *Relevanc: Communicalion & Cognition* (Sperber&Wilson 1995), which "makes a discusion of the more serious criticisms of the theory and envisages possible revisions or extensions"(Publisher's words for the 2nd edition of Relevance).

According to Sperber and Wilson, the reasoning processes involved in communication are constrained by a single principle: the principle of relevance. A single principle of relevance is sufficient to explain the process of utterance understanding. As we all know, the communicative principle is the need for people to communicate, communication is said to be unavoidable. In particular, as language users, our intention is to communicate some meaning to somebody, since what is communicated is supposedly of importance to both the speaker and the hearer, communicating something meaningful may be supposed to be relevant to the partners in communication. In this sense, the principle of relevance is a variant of the communicative principle.

In this chapter, we will introduce some basic cognitive notions of relevance and the principle of relevance, which lay the foundation for the relevance-theoretic approach to pragmatics. According to the understanding of this theory of communication, we present a brief account of its major relevant points below.

1.1 Basic Cognitive Notions of Relevance Theory

The cognitive notions of Relevance Theory can be analyzed as the follows:

1.1.1 Mutual Manifestation of Cognitive Environements

Suppose that you have an appointment with me in my office, and I am on the phone when you arrive. There are all sorts of things that you could notice as you wait --- the smell of coffee, the clock on the wall, the murmur of voices in the next room, the pile of English books on my desk, an open desk diary with your name scrawled on the page and so on. On the basis of this evidence there are all sorts of assumptions that you could form--- that I've just had a cup of coffee, that there are people in the next room, that I understand English, that I was expecting to see you and so on.

Following Sperber and Wilson, the set of assumptions you could form is the cognitive environment.

Since the communicative partners do not share completely identical cognitive environment, then what makes them able to successfully convey and understand each other's communicative intentions? In order to answer this question and make Relevance Theory more applicable to communication utterance, Sperber and Wilson put forward the notion of 'mutual manifestness', which is used to refer to the facts that are manifest to both sides of communication or the communicators' mutually manifest expressions on the common topic.

It is obvious that Sperber and Wilson reject the mutual knowledge hypothesis defined by Schiffer (1972), but maintain mutual manifestness. As we know, People can mutually communicate information due to the material world they share with each other as well as the common law of reasoning, but this does not suggest that people living in the same objective world should share the same kinds and amount of knowledge about the world. This is because on the one hand the direct environments people respectively enjoy are not the same; on the other hand, their cognitive abilities are different, too. Therefore, although people share the identical material world, their cognitive environments or their respective understanding of the objective world vary, more or less, from one to another. As a result of these differences among people, mutual knowledge is not a reality but "an ideal people strive for because they want to avoid misunderstanding whenever possible." (Clark & Marshall 1981: 27)

Thus it can be seen that mutual manifestness in Relevance is inseparable from the communicator's cognitive environment. Both manifestness and cognitive environment are defined in connection with each other in Relevance:

> A fact is manifest to an individual at a given time if and only if he is capable at that time of representing it mentally and accepting its representation as true or probably true. A cognitive environment of an individual is a set of facts that are manifest to him (Sperber & Wilson, 1995: 39)

It seems that the success of communication relies largely on whether the communication participants' cognitive environments can be manifest and mutually manifest to each other. So in Relevance Theory, mutual manifestness of the cognitive environments is regarded as the basis of successful communication. However, the communicative partners are different in their degrees of manifestness, sometimes they might even arrive at a different understanding on the same topic. For example:

(l) *A. He: will you have some coffee?*

B. The Coffee would keep me awake.

In normal circumstance, the speaker of (1A) would implicate (2):

(2) She won't have any coffee,

But (2) is not deducible from the content of (lB) alone: (3) is not a contradiction:

(3) Coffee would keep her awake, and she will have some coffee.

Another example:

A: You're not eating

B. It's too hot.

B's response also has two possible senses, because 'hot' could mean 'warm' and 'spicy' as well.

From the examples above, we see there is nothing to stop hearers from having their own assumptions, for some utterances might raise doubts, and even more meanings may be embedded in them. "However, in a given speech event, for a given hearer, there will be only one relevant interpretation" (Sperber, 1994), otherwise, utterance can be ambivalent. But what leads to the two or even more diffrent assumptions for the same utterance? It must be the assessment of the contextual applications and their effects rather than different interpretations of the explicit content of the utterance. But, how does the audience derive these implications? Let's take a look at the process of the communication.

1.1.2 Ostensive-Inferential Communication

> Ostensive-inferential communication: the communicator produces a stimulus which makes it mutuallv manifest to communicator and audience that the communicator intends, by means of this stimulus, to make manifest or more manifest to the audience a set of assumptions. (Sperber & Wilson 1995: 63)

As this definition stands, ostensive-inferential communication involves the use of an ostensive stimulus, which is designed to attract an audience's attention. When a communicator produces a stimulus; he intends to make informative intention. But if he communicates intentionally by ostension with the aim of fulfilling an informative intention, communicative intention is then intended. For instance, when Anna said that the bank had not opened its door, she intended to pass this information to Bill and have him know the fact that the bank had not opened its door. This intention was Anna's informative intention. At the same time Anna intended to make it manifest to Bill that she has such an informative intention so that Bill would abandon his plan to go to the bank. This is Anna's communicative intention. The real purpose of the communicator's ostensive behavior is to stimulate the audience's reaction to his informative intention. Therefore we can see:

Informative intention: to make manifest or more manifest to the audience a set of assumptions.

Communicative intention: to make it mutually manifest to audience and communicator that the communicator has this informative intention.

(Sperber & Wilson 1995: 58, 61)

Communication is an ostensive-inferential process which can be described in terms of an informative intention and a communicative intention. Judging by the point of view of the communicator, we hold that communication is an ostentive process in which the informative intention can be clearly expressed, but from the point of view of the hearer, communication is an inferential process, in which the hearer would fulfill the communicative intention on the basis of speaker's ostensive behavior and in combination with his contextual assumptions. Therefore, ostention and reference are just the two aspects in communication. They are actually the same process. From the angle of the speaker, communication is an ostensive process whereas from the angle of the hearer, communication is an inferential process.

As understanding can be achieved when the communicative intention is fulfilled, ostensive-inferential communication offers some possibilities of successful communication. However whether the informative intention itself is fulfilled depends on how much the audience trusts the communicator. There is a gap between understanding and believing. For understanding to be achieved, the informative intention must be recognized. If the informative intention cannot be clearly recognized by the hearer, pragmatic failure might occur.

1.1.3 Non-Demonstrative Inference

In the last section, we briefly introduced a model of ostensive-inferential communication which involves informative intention and communicative intention. In this section, we shall explain how it works by analyzing how information is inferentially processed.

According to Sperber and Wilson, the process of inferential comprehension is non-demonstrative:

> The addressee can neither decode nor deduce the communicative intention, the best he can do is to construct an assumption on the basis of the evidence provided by the communicator's ostensive behavior. For such an assumption, there may be confirmation but no proof. (Sperber & Wilson 1995: 65)

Humans are rather good at non-demonstrative reasoning by using deductive rules. At the start of each deductive process, the memory of the deductive device contains an initial set of assumptions: that is, a set of premises. An inferenial process starts from a set of premises and results in a set of conclusions. That is virtually one of the main differences between inferential process and decoding process. Sperber and Wilson have not given up decoding process completely, they argue that inferential process simultaneously functions as a decoding process, but it also has a set of premises, explicit and implicit as well.

Let's take a look at the sub-tasks in the overall comprehension process:

(1) Constructing an appropriate hypothesis about explicit assumption via decoding, disambiguation, and other pragmatic enrichment processes (in relevance-theoretic terms, an explicitly communicated assumption is called an explicature).

(2) Constructing an appropriate hypothesis about the intended contextual assumptions (in relevance-theoretic terms, implicated Premises)

(3) Constructing an appropriate hypothesis about the intended contextual implications (in relevance-theoretic terms, implicated Conclusions).

These sub-tasks should not be thought of as sequentially ordered. The hearer does not first decode the logical form of the sentence uttered, then construct an explicature and select an appropriate context, and then derive a range of implicated conclusion. Comprehension is an on-line process, and hypotheses about explicatures, implicated premises and implicated conclusions are developed in parallel against a background of expectations which may be revised or elaborated as the utterance unfolds. In particular, the hearer may bring to the comprehension process not only a general presumption of relevance, but more specific expectations about how the utterance will be relevant to him (what cognitive effects it is likely to achieve), and these may contribute, via backwards inference, to the identification of explicatures and implicated inference process embedded within the overall process of constructing a hypothesis about the speaker's meaning.

Compared with Grice's 'conversational implicatures', RT argues that explicature is as important as implicature. An explicature is a combination of linguistically encoded and contextually inferred conceptual features. The smaller the relative contribution of the contextual features, the more explicit the explicature will be, and inversely. A communicated assumption is either an explicature or an implicature, but an explicature is explicit to a greater or lesser degree. Any assumption communicated implicitly is called implicature. As mentioned above, there are two kinds of implicatures in non-demonstrative reference: implicated premises and implicated conclusions. In cross-cultural communication, people might have different cognitive environments. The implicated premises are not necessarily the same even from the same utterance. So the implicated conclusions differ too. We think this indeterminacy of the implicated premises is also one of the main reasons for the cross-cultural pragmatic failure.

1.2 Principle of Relevance

In the process of communication, the communicators always speak around a certain criterion as is expected by the audience. According to Relevance Theory, the criterion of utterance production and interpretation is human cognitive hypothesis: human cognitive activities always abide by a principle that is referred to as 'relevance' by Sperber & Wilson (1986, 1995), that is to say, people's cognition is relevance-orientated. Therefore, in the studies of language communication, attention should be given to relevance and the principle of relevance that guides people's communication and cognition.

Relevance:

An assumption is relevant in a context if and only if it has some contextual effects in that context. (Sperber & Wilson 1995: 122)

What sort of things may be relevant? In relevance-theoretic terms, any external stimulus or internal representation, which provides an input to cognitive process may be relevant to an individual at some time. According to Relevance Theory, utterances raise expectations of relevance not because speakers are expected to obey Cooperative Principle and maxims of some other specifically communicative conventions, but because the search for relevance is a basic feature of human cognition, which communicators may exploit. In this section, we shall introduce two principles of relevance: Cognitive Principle and Communicative Principle, which lay the foundation for the relevance-theoretic approach to pragmatics.

Cognitive Principle of Relevance:

Human cognition tends to be geared to the maximization of relevance. (Sperber & Wilson 2002: 255)

Sperber & Wilson believe that only when an assumption results in some contextual effect in a specific context, can we say it is relevant in that context. It can be seen that contextual effect is a critical notion in principle of relevance. Briefly speaking, contextual effect is contextual implication. It is the result of the interaction between newly presented information and contextual assumptions (old information), along with which new context is constructed. It is clear that deriving contextual effects takes time and effort, and the more time and effort expended, the less relevant the information will seem to be. Thus, relevance may be assessed in terms of contextual effect and processing effort. People always automatically process each new item of information in a context in which it yields a maximal contextual effect for a minimum cost in processing.

Communicative Principle of Relevance:

Every ostensive stimulus conveys a presumption of its own optimal relevance.(Sperber & Wilson 2002: 257)

Preassumption of Optimal Relevance:

(a) The set of assumptions in which the communicator intends to make manifest to the addressee is relevant enough to make it worth the addressee's while to process the ostensive stimulus.

(b) The ostensive stimulus is the most relevant one communicator could have used to communicate (Sperber & Wilson 1995 : 158)

As mentioned above, RT's communication is a kind of ostensive -inferential communication. Ostension and inference are two sides of one coin: communication is just a process in which the speaker gives ostension while the audience draws inference. According to the communicative principle of relevance, the speaker's ostensive stimulus can ensure its own optimal relevance while the hearer's inference is a deduction of the speaker's communicative intention combined with the context, on the basis of the hypothesis that the speaker's ostensive stimulus has optimal relevance, alternatively speaking, inference is a process in which the hearer reproduces the relevance of the speaker's utterance in the context. Once convinced what the speaker has conveyed is a piece of information with optimal relevance, the hearer will choose the contextual assumption of optimal relevance for the interpretation of the speaker's communicative intention

Although the communicative principle of relevance demonstrates that a hearer is entitled to go ahead and interpret every utterance in the expectation that it is optimally relevant, this doesn't mean that optimal relevance can be always achieved by the hearer. In fact, according to Sperber and Wilson, the success of communication is measured by the principle of relevance, for relevance is a matter of degree, which makes the communicator's utterances relevant or less relevant or irrelevant in terms of the interpretative process available to the hearer in the context.

1.3 RelevanceTheory in Pragmatics

Relevance Theory, as a new cognitive approach, brings to us a new perspective of analysis on communication. In order to account for the pragmatic failure in cross-cultural communication, we need to make clear the following points:

1.3.1 Contribution of Relevance Theory in Pragmatics

Briefly speaking, the contribution of Relevance Theory in Pragmatics lies in two models:

1.3.1.1 The Code-Model

Pragmatics questions the validity of the code-model of communication that was developed within the discipline of semiotics. In the code-model, communication is seen as an encoding-decoding process. According to this view, communication is successful to the extent that the sender and the receiver pair signals and messages in the same way, the communicator encodes her intended message into a signal, which is decoded by the audience using an identical copy of the code.

The code-model has the merit of describing one way in which communication can be achieved (for example, between machines, or bees), but it is wholly inadequate as an analysis of how people actually communicate. Modern approaches to pragmatics recognize that human communicative behavior relies heavily on people's capacity to engage in reasoning about each other's intentions.

1.3.1.2 The Inferential Model

One of Grice's central claims is that an essential feature of most human communication, both verbal and non-verbal, is the expression and recognition of intention. In developing this claim, Grice laid the foundations for an inferential model of communication, an alternative to the classical code model. According to the inferential model, a communicator provides evidence of her intention to convey a certain meaning, which is inferred by the audience on the basis of the evidence provided. So the goal of inferential pragmatics is to explain how the hearer infers the speaker's meaning on the basis of the evidence provided.

Another of Grice's central claims is that utterances automatically create expectations, which guide the hearer towards the speaker's meaning. Grice described these expectations in terms of a Co-operative Principle which speakers are expected to observe. "Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged" (Grice, 1989: 26)

Deriving an interpretation that satisfies the Co-operative Principle is effected through four maxims, which the communicator is presumed to abide by:

(l) Maxims of Quantity

Make your contribution as informative as required.

Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

(2) Maxim of Quality

Do not say what you believe to be false.

Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

(3) Maxim of Relation

Be relevant.

(4) Maxim of Manner

Avoid obscurity of expression.

Avoid ambiguity.

Be brief.

Be orderly.

Grice's fundamental point was not that people always observe these maxims, but rather that they are unstated assumptions that underlie communication. So, if a speaker clearly flouts one or more of the maxims (for example, by giving a very brief answer when a more informative one is expected), the speaker may be prompting the listener to look for a meaning that is different from the meaning that is expressed verbally, in other words, to work out the "conversational implicature".

Grice's approach provides a reasonable account of implicated meaning, however it is quite clear that it has a number of limitations, for example, although the idea of conversational implicature has had enormous appeal and been used in an informal way to account for a wide range of pragmatic phenomena, little progress has been made in specifying the exact nature of the inference process by which conversational implicatures are worked out. Also, Grice's theory does not incorporate the impact of social or interpersonal factors, nor does it explain the fact that context plays an extremely important role in determining the thought expressed by an utterance.

1.3.1.3 Ostensive-Inferential Communication

Relevance Theory defines communication as an ostensive-inferential behavior. The speaker's ostension and the hearer's inference are the two sides of the same communicative process. Ostension is aimed at changing the cognitive environment of the hearer and the speaker intends to convey not only informative intention, but also communicative intention, that is, to make manifest an intention to make something manifest. The hearer's inference, different from logical inference, is non-demonstrative and guided by the hearer's deductive apparatus.

RT's definition of communication has absorbed the strong points of both the code model and Grice's inferential model and demonstrates evident progressive significance. From semiologists' code model to Grice's inferential model, though each can perform certain kind of function of interpreting communication, nevertheless, both are lacking in comprehensive considerations. According to relevance theory, a scientific model of communication should be a combination of decoding and inference, because decoding initiates the process of utterance interpretation and precedes the process of inference, without decoding, inference has nothing to be based on. On the other side, it is the inferential process that brings about more penetrating understanding of the speaker's intentions. Utterance interpretation can be orientated to the speaker's real intention only when it initiates from decoding and develops in the direction of inference. RT's communicative model thus integrates the processes of encoding-decoding and ostension-inference and provides a comprehensive approach to language communication.

Sperber and Wilson's Relevance Theory could be regarded as a further specification of the Grice's Co-operative Principle. They both claim the goal of pragmatics is to explain how the hearer understands the speaker's intention and they both emphasize the importance of inference in successful communication. Sperber and Wilson admit that "Grice's analysis provides the point of departure for a new model of communication, the inferential model, and this is how we use it in Relevance" (1987: 698, 699). But unlike Grice's (1967) Co-operative Principle, Relevance Theory is not a rule-based or maxim-based system; in this framework, relevance is fundamental to communication not because speakers should observea maxim of relevance, but because relevance is fundamental to cognition. By contrast, we can see that the principle of relevance is much more explicit than Grice's Co-operative Principle and maxims, it not only makes co-operative and the maxims of quality, quantity and manner redundant, but also carries less of a functional burden.

1.3.2 Its Limitations

RT is said to be able to account for all the phenomena assigned to the other maxims for their explanation. Some linguists believe if the notion of relevance becomes all-encompassing, it will lose its explanatory force. (Gazdar 1979: 54)

Another serious problem lies in the fact that RT, despite its pronounced commitment to communication, says very little about real communicative interaction as it happens in our society. Like most of traditional linguistics and linguistic philosophers, Relevance Theory does not include, let alone focus on, the social dimensions of language. As Talbot remarks:

People are depicted as individuals who confront unique problems in communicationn. In the real world , however people are social beings who are working within pre-existing conventions...

> In Sperber and Wilson's model, differences between people are depicted solely as differences between individuals' cognitive environments. These differences are assumed to stem from variations in physical environment and cognitive ability between people. Considerations of culture and society are notably absent in the characterization of individuals' cognitive environments. (Talbot 1994: 35)

Therefore, it is essential to admit that RT has some of its shortcomings despite its many useful insigts. In contrast to the cognitive framework of relevance theory, work within social pragmatics has sometimes led to the introduction of additional communicative norms. For example, Leech's 'politeness principle' (1983), Brown and Levinson's (1987) 'face' model of politeness; both of them can be regarded as the necessary supplements to Sperber and Wilson's Relevance Theory.

Chapter Two Pragmatics Across Cultures

In chapter two, we showed that a theoretical frame for the study of the cognitive principles relevant for utterance intepretation was essential for the assessment of the role of pragmatics. Thus in this chapter, weshall present an overall picture of pragmatics and attempt to explain the relationship between relevance theory and cross-cultural communication. This will naturally lead to the study of pragmatic failure: its nature, definition and a possible scale indicating its stages and degrees will be suggested. This will also lead to a further specification of the areas of pragmatic failure

2.1 Definition of Pragmatics

The word "pragmatics" was first put forward by Charles Morris (1938: 30) as "the science of the relation of signs to their interpreters". In other words, pragmatics is concerned not with language as a system or product, but rather with the interrelationship between language forms, communicated message and language users. It is generally accepted that pragmatics explores questions such as the following:

(1) How do people communicate more than what the words or phrases of their utterances might mean by themselves, and how do people make these interpretations?

(2) Why do people choose to say or interpret something in one way rather than another?

(3) How do people's perceptions of contextual factors (for exaxnple,

who the interlocutors are, what their relationship is, and what circumstances they are communicating in) influence the process of producing and interpreting language?

As a comparatively new branch of study in the area of linguistics, pragmatics has grown into a well-established discipline over the past 30 years. Howeve there is still no consensus as to the domain of pragmatics so far. A very general definition is that it is the study of how speakers of a language use sentences to affect successful communication.

> Sperber and Wilson gave a definition of pragmatics as follows: pragmatics is the study of general cognitive principles and abilities involved in utterance interpretation, and of their cognitive effects. (Sperber & Wilson 1987: 5)

This definition does not in fact differ a great deal from the definition by Levinson:

> Pragmatics is the study of the relations between language and context that are basic to an account of language understanding. (Levinson, 1983:21).

From the definitions, we can find out that the important and basic concepts "meaning" and "context" are involved in both of them. In this thesis, we adopt Sperber and Wilson' s definition of pragmatics to account for the success or failure of cross-cultural communication, and attempt to show that it goes beyond the level of information provided by the linguistic evidence: it employs utterances as tokens for the discovery of the speaker's informative and communicative intention.

2.2 Cross-cultural Pragmatics

As mentioned above, pragmatics is the study of general cognitive principles and abilities involved in utterance interpretation, and of their cognitive effects(Sperber and Wilson 1987:5). Now what does cross-cultural pragmatics mainly concern about?

As we know, there can be pragmatic differences between languages, just as there can be phonological or syntactic differences. Some of these differences can be relatively 'grammatical', for example, in phrases like 'In the light of this' or 'having said that', which refer to what has been said previously, a singular deitic (this, that) is used in English, whereas a plural is used in Greek. Other differences are more socially based, for example, in China, if you thank a close friend after he or she has done you a favor, this would be inappropriate because it would be 'distance' behavior; in England, on the other hand, failure to thank would be inappropriate because it implies taking the friend for granted. During the last 20 years or so, pragmaticians have carried out contrastive research into many different pragmatic features in a very wide range of languages. This area of research is known as'cross-cultural pragmatics'. It's the study of differences in expectations based on cultural schema (Yule, 1996: 87). Today, the majority of studies have focused on speech acts across cultures and they have mainlv explored the following questions:

(1) What cultural differences (if any) are there in the effect of context on the performance of speech acts? (For example, if two strangers slightly bump into each other, do British and Chinese people evaluate this similarity in terms of degree of seriousness, and thus have similar conceptions as to whether a verbal apology is required?)

(2) What language differences (if any) are there in the influence of pragmalinguistic conventions on the performance of speech acts? (For example, when expressing disagreement, is it common to soften the impact by using an 'I agree with you but ...' structure, or by asking for further information?)

(3) What cultural differences (if any) are there in the impact of sociopragmatic principles on people's performance of speech acts? (For example, when responding to a compliment, is it more important to express verbal modesty in Chinese than in English?)

What has been mentioned above seems consistent with the Sub-division of pragmatics proposed by Leech and his colleague Jermy Thomas, They (1983) proposed to subdivide pragmatics into a pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic component. The Pragmalinguistic perspective focuses on the linguistic strategies that are used to convey a given pragmatic meaning, whereas the sociopragmatic perspective focuses on the socially based assessments, beliefs and interactional principles that underlie people's choice of strategies. For example, suppose you are a dinner guest and want to reach the salt which is placed at the other side of the table. Here, making clear of what the relationship between the participants is (for example, close or distant, equal or unequal) and the social acceptability of reaching for food in such a context belongs to a sociopragmatic competence. How to express yourself by using a direct request ("Pass me the salt, will you ?") , a conventionally indirect request ("Can you pass me the salt please? ") or a non-conventionally indirect request ("I like my food quite salty") belongs to a pragmalinguistic competence.

2.2.1 Range of Research on Cross-cultural Pragmatics

In most cases, the range of aspects of cross-cultural communication can be discussed and exemplified within eight different levels: when to talk; what to say; pacing and pausing; listenership; intonation and prosody; formulaicity; indirectness; cohesion and coherence.

(1) When to talk: to start on the most general level, the question of when to talk is culturally relative. Moreover, cultures differ with respect to what is perceived as silence and when it is deemed appropriate.

(2) What to say: once a speaker decides to talk, what is it appropriate to say? Can one ask questions, and what can one ask about? Some people report that Australian Aborigines never ask the question "Why?", Suzanne Scollon finds that Alaskan Athabaskans rarely ask questions. For these and other speakers, questions are regarded as too powerful to use, because they demand a response.

(3) Pacing and pausing: the next level of cross-cultural difference is that of the conversational control mechanisms of pacing and pausing. How fast does one speak, and how long does one wait following another speaker's utterance, before concluding the other has no more to say? Differences in expectations about these matters can bring a conversation to an end.

(4) Listenership: another level of processing in conversation that is automatic is showing listenership. One-way is through gaze. People found that white participants in counseling interviews maintained eye gaze when listening and frequently broke their gaze when speaking. Blacks in the study did the opposite. They maintained steady eye contact when speaking and frequently broke their gaze when listening.

(5) Intonation: Tiny differences in intonation and prosody can throw an interaction completely off without the speakers knowing what caused the problem. Intonation is made up of degrees and shifts in pitch, loudness, and rhythm, which make up every utterance. There are cultural differences in how these little signals are used, both to do conversational business as usual, and also to express special meanings or emotions. When intonational business-as-usual is mistaken for emotional expression, the result is miscommunication. Therefore, if a pause is in the wrong place, an intonation is misunderstood, and a whole conversation must get awry.

(6) Formulaity: The next level of cross-cultural difference is the question of what is conventional and what is novel in a language. I once had a friend who was from Greece. When I talked with him, I had the impression that he was a poetic soul, actually all of the Greek are uttering conventional truisms that sound novel and poetic to me just because I am not familiar with the convention.

(7) Indirectness: Communication in any culture is a matter of indirectness. Only a part of meaning resides in the words spoken, the largest part is communicated by hints, assumptions, and audience filling-in from context and prior experience. How to be indirect is culturally relative.

(8) Cohesion and Coherence: Cohesion is defined as surface level ties showing relationships among elements in discourse, and coherence is regarded as organizing structure making the words and sentences into a unified discourse that has cultural significance. Habits of cohesion and coherence are very resistant to change. One who learns the explicit

vocabulary and grammar of a new language is likely to stuff it into the implicit paralinguistic and discourse casings of the native communicative system,

What has been mentioned above illustrates Hall's (1959) assertion that culture is communication, To the extent that no two people have exactly the same communicative background, and to that extent, all communication is cross-cultural.

2.2.2 Relevance and Cross-cultural Communication

In 1957, Robert Lado published *Linguistics across Cultures*, in which the concept of cross-cultural communication was first put forward. China started its cross-cultural pragmatic studies since 1980s. However, such pragmatic studies have largely concentrated their attention on listing Chinese learners' common errors of interaction in English or instances of misunderstanding with native speakers in the name of pragmatic failure. Still not too much emphasis is laid on the theoretical analyses to account for the success and failure of cross-cultural communication. The previous studies have just made some explanations by using the general Cooperative Principle and Theories of Politeness. In this thesis, we try to draw on Sperber and Wilson's Relevance Theory as a general pragmatic principle to account for the pragmatic failure in communication between Chinese and English speakers.

According to Relevance Theory, the process of successful communication, generally speaking, is in the following direction: a speaker has a thought, she issues an utterance to express that thought, but the utterance is only an interpretation of that thought. Thus, the utterance exists only as a schema which needs enriching and disambiguating. This act of enrichment and disambiguation is preformed by the hearer who assigns a propositional form to the linguistic schema.

Simultaneously, the hearer is looking for a context which would make that propositional form relevant. The hearer infers the speaker's intended meaning, i. e. he draws contextual implication by way of a process of deduction. In other words, the hearer draws non-trivial implications from two sets of premises: the first is that of the assigned propositional form of the utterance, the second is that of the assumed context. Consequently, relevant interpretation of an utterance yields contextual effects of utterances that should be worth the hearer's while at a minimal cost of processing effort. Furthermore, the speaker's success in saying what is accessible to the hearer depends on her assessment of the hearer's ability to process that utterance in a profitable way that yields adequate contextual effects. Nevertheless, the success of her expectation depends largely on a set of assumptions being mutually manifest to both speaker and hearer in a given speech event. Obviously, such assumptions derive from the communicator's cognitive environment.

Now we have known the process of successful communication. According to Sperber and Wilson, communication is usually intentionally conducted among rational humans, and is never context-free. Such communication and its interpretation are dependent on the communicator's choice of context and the hearer's mapping the communicator's utterances onto that context. Therefore, "a mismatch between the context envisaged by the speaker and the one actually used by the hearer may result in a misunderstanding" (Sperber & Wilson 1995:

16)

However, as we have mentioned in the last chapter, cognitive environments are not the same for people from different societies, they are not even completely the same for people from the same community. The hearer's ability to recover the communicator's thought and deduce her informative intention will result in pragmatic failure, as will be shown in the following chapter. However, Sperber and Wilson's theory is not concerned with cross-cultural communication, but with communication in general in the same language / culture. Thus, we need to ask whether Relevance Theory can be relied upon for a study of cross-cultural pragmatic failure. Wilson (1994: 35) believes that "Relevance Theory is intended to match human performance in comprehension. So, it should give us as much insight into pragmatic failure as into pragmatic success. It should be able to explain why some misunderstandings occur as well as why successful communication takes place," Such a theory is perhaps more capable of accounting for pragmatic failure than success, mainly when cross-cultural communication is concerned. The reasons must be made clear:

(1)Relevance, according to the principle of relevance, is a matter of degree in terms of contextual effects and processing efforts in utterance interpretation:

Extent condition 1: an assumption is relevant in a context to the extent that its contextual effects in this context are large.

Extent condition 2: an assumption is relevant in a context to the extent that the effort required to process it is small.

(Sperber & Wilson 1995: 125)

Thus, the degree of relevance is governed by contextual effects and processing effort. The greater the contextual effect of an assumption is, the less processing effort is demanded, the greater its degree of relevance will be; the smaller the contextual effect of an assumption is, the greater the processing effort is, the smaller the degree of its relevance will be. Now it can be seen that relevance is an elastic notion. In normal communicative activities, absolutely irrelevant speech can be rarely seen, the problem is how great its degree of relevance is. As the relevance of what is said to a hearer from a distant culture usually costs more effort than it would do to one from the same language community, this makes the principle of relevance even more important in measuring the degree of success or failure in cross-cultural communication.

(2) Unlike 'code-model' and Grice's 'inferential model', the most significant feature of relevance in a cross-cultural study of pragmatics lies in its universality. As far as the encoding-decoding process of the 'code-model' communication is concerned, its success could only be achieved when the given signal is identical to the received one in the course of decoding. It goes without saying that the code model is by no means adequate to ensure the achievement of successful communication, nor can it justify, on its own, cross-cultural pragmatic failure. Grice's principle and maxims are a set of norms which communicators are generally required to keep, or just violate them to achieve particular effects. By contrast, the principle of relevance applies without exception. Communicators do not follow the principle of relevance, and actually

they could not violate it even if they wanted to.

(3) Cultural values as expressed by Chinese and English speakers make it very difficult to derive the same inference from supposedly equivalent semantic representations or propositional forms. This means that pragmatic knowledge in cross-cultural communication is even more important than it is within the same language. Inference becomes more important than explicature, due to the fact that in cross-cultural communication the semantic representation of an utterance is rarely the same as its propositional form. Such assumptions naturally lead to a comparative study of what pragmatists have traditionally called pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics when they divided language use into two subdivisions. This division is still tenable even in a relevance-based account for pragmatic failure.

2.3 Pragmatic Failure

In the last chapter, we explained how the pragmatic failure would occur in the process of communication by way of Relevance Theory. As Sperber and Wilson (1995:45) observe, "communication is a less-than-perfect heuristic" therefore, "failures in communications are to be expected". However, it is necessary to define pragmatic failure here, and develop a scale of pragmatic failure in cross-cultural communication in order to be able to designate the area of communicative breakdown and its degree. In this chapter, we try to use Relevance Theory as a general framework to analyze the cause, nature and the areas of pragmatic failure.

2.3.1 Pragmatic Transfer

It is widely acknowledged that people's use of a second language can be influenced by the characteristics of their first language, but defining pragmatic transfer is not easy because of researchers' disagreement about how to define the scope of pragmatics. According to Wolfson:

> The use of rules of speaking from one's own native speech community when interacting with members of the host community or simply when speaking or writing in a second language is known as pragmatic transfer. (Wolfson 1989: 141)

In her terminology pragmatic transfer is the transfer of pragmatic knowledge in situations of cross-cultural communication. It is believed to be the main cause of pragmatic failure. Now the question is: what is the driving force behind pragmatic transfer?

As we see, the goal of communication is not merely to convey information, but to convey it economically according to the principle of relevance; relevance is especially the tendency to minimize the expenditure of processing effort. So this relevance is the driving force behind pragmatic transfer. We can clearly see it by analyzing the process of interpretation.

In the process of interpretation, context selection is driven by the search for relevance. The communicative Principle of Relevance explains how successful context selection is possible: the addressee starts off with an initial context, then adjusts it by discarding those contextual assumptions which seem irrelevant and by replacing them with others which seem relevant. In many cases of miscommunication involving negative pragmatic transfer, the speaker makes incorrect assumptions about the context in which the hearer is likely to interpret the utterance. The difficulties relating to context selection may lead to miscommunication when the following two conditions obtain: (a) the speaker's and the hearer's background knowledge from which the context for utterance and interpretation is selected differ significantly, and (b) the speaker and the hearer are unaware of these differences.

For most of the time, we believe, positive transfer leads to successful communicative outcomes, while negative transfer may lead to miscommunication. However, this is not necessarily the case. For example, if native speakers realize that a non-native speaker's pragmatic knowledge is imperfect, they may make allowances (e.g they might assume something like: the non-native speaker is not being rude, he simply does not know that this type of answer is not appropriate in our culture). For the positive pragmatic transfer, for instance, if the L2 learner responds to compliments in the culturally appropriate way, while their L2 pragmatic competence is evidently flawed in many other respects, their appropriate communicative behavior may be unexpected and so may be perceived as puzzling and mildly amusing. In such a case, positive transfer does not always guarantee communicative success.

2.3.2 Nature of Pragmatic Failure

A language is a set of semantically-interpreted well-formed formulas. A formula is semantically interpreted by being put into semantic correspondence with other objects: for example, with the formulas of another language, with states of the user of the language, or with possible states of the world. A language in this sense... is a grammar-governed representational system(Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 172-3).

According to this definition of language, it would be logical to assume that pragmatic failure could result from:

(1) ill-formed formulas of language

(2) lack of semantic correspondence of one language with those of another in cross-cultural communication;

(3) lack of correspondence of a language's semantic formulas with states of the user; such states could seemingly involve the user's belief and his or her general socio-cognitive environment;

(4) lack of correspondence of a language's semantic formulas with possible states of the world in cross-cultural communication.

In short, the four points above can be reduced to two major areas of possible communicative breakdown: The first has to do with linguistic representation on the part of either the speaker (S) or the hearer (H) in terms of linguistic misinterpretation respectively; The second would be embodied in a mismatch between S's and H's worlds (e. g. their cultural background). This seems to be in agreement with Sperber and Wilson's definition of communication being a mixture of the coded and the ostensive-inferential.

As suggested above, pragmatic failure can be regarded as a stage in verbal interaction, where H misunderstands the implication of what is said, or H cannot access the effect of what S intended to communicate in terms of content or attitude. In simple words, pragmatic failure is the "inability to understand what is meant by what is said," (Thomas, 1983: 91). Consequently, this mismatch in the cognitive environment or linguistic usage can be a major source of pragmatic failure.

It can be seen that breakdown of communication has degrees, which make the communicator's utterances less relevant or irrelevant in terms of the interpretive process available to the hearer in that context. Even grammatical mistakes can occasionally impede the hearer's recovery of the propositional content of an utterance. The interpersonal relations and the degrees of interest in the topic discussed have greater impact on the degrees of contextual effects and on the degrees of the hearer's readiness to allot different degrees of his processing efforts: an obvious example of mismatch between large processing efforts and small contextual effects can frequently be reflected in the tolerance of and concession in communicating with a foreigner. Irrelevant implications can also include degrees of irrelevance ranging, for instance, on a separate scale of sociopragmatic failure, from the 'rude', going through the 'impolite', to the 'insulting', the degrees of irrelevance are different.

2.3.3 Areas of Pragmatic Failure

We have already seen from Relevance Theory that the breakdown of communication mainly has two sources: one is from a lack of linguistic correspondence; the other is from a mismatch in the cognitive environments of the communicator and addressee. And this idea doesn't seem to be quite different from the traditional division of areas of pragmatic failure suggested by other linguists such as Leech and Thomas.

According to the traditional belief, pragmatic failure is divided into two main types as we have known: pragmalinguistic failure and sociopragmatic failure.

Pragmalinguistic failure is basically a linguistic problem, caused by differences in the linguistic encoding of pragmatic force, it occurs when the pragmatic force mapped by the speaker onto a given utterance is systematically different form the force most frequently assigned to it by native speakers of the target language, or when speech act strategies are inappropriately transferred from L1 to L2. Sociopragmatic failure stems from cross–culturally different perceptions of what constitutes appropriate linguistic behavior. For example, identifying oneself on the telephone by saying ‘I am Li Hong’ instead of ‘This is Li Hong’ is an example of a pragmalinguistic failure in which the language used to accomplish this particular speech act is inappropriate. A dinner guest who inquires ‘How much did your house cost?’ has committed a sociopragmatic failure by asking a question inappropriate to the US social context.

Comparing the two types of pragmatic failure, Thomas (1983: 104) points out pragmalinguistic failure is fairly easy to overcome, as it is simply a question of highly conventionalized usage which can be taught quite straightforwardly as ‘part of the grammar’, it’s language-specific, sociopragmatic failure is much more difficult to deal with, since it involves the student's system of beliefs as much as his / her knowledge of the language, it's culture-specific. I think this view also does not differ a great deal from the Sperber and Wilson's view of pragmatics, which emphasizes the process of communication is in fact the process of human cognition of the world.

Finally, we want to claim that there couldn't be any absolute distinction between pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic failure. Because of different contexts, communicators may have different intentions and different understandings about the utterance to each other. So, inappropriate utterance may be viewed as pragmalinguistic failure from one aspect, but sociopragamtic failure from another. For example, in a department store if a Chinese salesclerk greets his English customers by "What do you want?", which is used in the Chinese context to greet customers, the English customers will feel he or she is very rude, because "What do you want?" is not an equivalence of the English customer-greeting expression "Can I help you?"or "What can I do for you?", so the salesclerk's utterance failed both pragmalinguistically and sociopragmatically.（何自然、阎庄 1986 : 53）

Chapter Three Factors Resulting in Failures in Cross-cultural Communication

According to Sperber and Wilson, it is the degree of relevance that guides how speakers in communicative situations formulate their utterances in order that hearers will understand the intended message. For them, any perceptual stimulus, verbal or non-verbal, is relevant in a context to the degree that its contextual effects are large and the processing effort required to produce those effects is small.

In the last two chapters, we suggested that relevance theory is able to account for the failure of cross-cultural communication which occurs when the processing load is too great for relevant assumptions to be recovered or when the addressee lacks sufficient contextual resources to infer the explicatures and implicatures which prove the relevance of the utterance. Relevance Theory is to be preferred over other approaches to utterance understanding to the extent that it recognizes and can account for the fact that not all utterances are successfully understood, and that a particular utterance may be understood in different ways. This chapter is about the extent to which RT is a candidate theory of pragmatic usage by virtue of its ability to show why utterances are understood to different degrees by different hearers and how pragmatic failures occur. Here,we want to examine five features of RT, which can be invoked to account for the understanding difficulties.

3.1 Failures to Recognize Intended Assumptions

> We will call an explicitly communicated assumption an explicature. Any assumption commnunicated but not explicitly so, is implicitly communicated: it is an implicature. (Sperber & Wilson 1995: 182)

Sperber and Wilson differentiate between explicature and implicature. Then they distinguish between two kinds of implicatures: implicated premises and implicated conclusions. "Implicated conclusions are deduced from the explicit content of an utterance and its context." (Sperber & Wilson 1987: 705) Explicature express the face-value meaning of utterances. The speaker is fully responsible for what she explicitly says. On the other hand, implicatures give more freedom to the hearer to use the context for the recovery of the implicated intention, and lay less responsibility on the speaker in implicating the deducible intention; in other words, implicatures are not fully determinate. In cross-cultural communication implicatures can pose real difficulty in understanding, simply because they need to be interpreted in the light of contextual information that might not be available to the foreign hearer.

Here are two jokes from the British television program. When the studio audience burst into laughter, we got quite confused. The reason why we did not laugh was that we failed to understand the implicatures.

Tonight's story, was actually handed down to me by my dear old gra ndfather (pause) the other night as he was clearing out our attic.

Part of the explicating process is to disambiguate *handed down*, which appears to be used here as a phrasal verb meaning 'bequeathed'. This explication is presumably based on the inference that when *handed down* occurs in close proximity to someone referred to as a 'dear old grandfather', the phrasal verb reading is the most relevant. Thus one implicature of the explicated utterance is that the joke-teller's grandfather is no longer alive, There is then a pause just long enough to cause the studio audience to think the sentence is complete and therefore to confirm to themselves that the explicature and implicature recovered are the most relevant understandings. But, the joke-teller then continues *the other night as he was clearing out our attic*. Discovering that the joke-teller's grandfather is still alive causes us to revise the original explicature and substitute the new explicated meaning that *handed down* is not a phrasal verb at all but a regular verb followed by an adverb.Unless you got the inappropriate explicature the first time (e.g the phrasal verb determination), you could not get the joke, which consists in denying an implied meaning. It turned out that L2 speakers were not able to process *handed down* before the continuation of the joke confirmed it as verb + adverb, and therefore did not get the crucial implicature.

It was a scrapbook really of all the ecstatic rave reviews of my past perfomance (pause) I let of it at one point and it nearly floated out the window.

Although the first part of this sequence up to the pause implies that the joke-teller was a successful entertainer, the second part requires the implicated premises that scrapbooks containing large numbers of rave reviews are heavy, that this scrapbook is not heavy and that therefore it did not contain any rave reviews. Without these implicated premises, the implicated conclusion that the joke-teller was an unsuccessful entertainer is not recoverable. The Chinese did not succeed in discovering the implicated premise necessary to understand the joke, presumably because they were satisfied that the first part of the sequence up to the pause had conveyed what the joke-teller actually intended them to think, so if a hearer cannot recover implicated premise, implicated conclusion cannot be correctly inferred.

The following dialogue took place between me and one of my foreign friends in Changsha who just returned to his office after a two-week vacation. It can be another example to show how misunderstanding occurs due to failures to recognize implicature.

Friend: I spent the whole two weeks helping my wife paint the rooms in our house.

Me: Does she do that often?

Friend: Well, when we moved in a few years ago, the guest room was 9 by 12, now it is 8 by 11.

In this example, my friend deliberately shortened the length and width of the guest room by one inch just in order to express his annoyance with his wife.

3.2 Dim Consciousness of the Hearer's Abilities of Utterance Interpretation

The speaker must make some assumptions about the hearer's cognitive abilities and contextual resources, which will necessarily be reflected in the way she communicates, and in particular in what she chooses to make explicit or what she chooses to leave implicit (Sperber & Wilson 1995: 218)

It seems obvious that a speaker who intends an utterance to be interpreted in a particular way must also expect the hearer to be able to supply a context which allows that interpreation to be recovered. Of course, these are not new ideas, but they have not been so clearly stated before and they remind us that if the speaker overestimates the hearer's resources, then intended implicit meanings may not be recovered. The misunderstanding often occurs when there is lack of or negligence of 'ostensive stimulus.'

Consider, for example, the following dialogue:

A: The place I've always wanted to visit is …what's it called … Portmeirion.

B: Oh yes. We went there. It's really strange.

A: Is it?

B: Yes, and full of tourists. Really crowded. Anyway, I went to Number Six's house.

We suspect that many readers will be as baffled as me by B's last contribution. He has mistakenly assumed that A knew that Portmeirion was the setting for a cult television series called "The Prisoner', in which the hero was referred to as Number Six. More accurately, he had assumed that the mention of Portmeirion would have given A access to this information which A has stored in his memory. In other words, he has assumed that A could extend his initial context by accessing information stored in memory under an entry Portmeirion.

As we have said, he was mistaken and communication failed at this point. The following are two more examples to illustrate failures of understanding due to the overestimation of hearer's resources.

A: Do you like rugby?

B: I am a New Zealander.

A: What are you doing tonight?

B: I wanna read about 'Ministry'.

A: Ministry?

B: Ministry of Sound. A club in London. Heard of it?

The conversations above both reflect that B had over-estimated A's contextual resources. The interpretation of the first conversation depends on the hearer's ability to supply the contextual information that all New Zealanders are rugby fans. In the second conversation, A failed to understand it in the very beginning just because A didn't know what Ministry here referred to?

I once read a headline in The Times:

'Mad sheep' fears prompt slaughter.

The title is also beyond our understanding, for Chinese did not have the contextual resources to know what 'mad sheep' was. If we know that there is a risk of mad cow disease spreading to sheep and that slaughtering infected animals is an allowed policy in Britain, we might understand the sentence.

3.3 Failures to Share the Same Implicated Premise

Implicated premises must be supplied by the hearer, who must either retrieve them from memory or construct them by developing assumption schemas retrieved from memory. What makes it possible to identify such premises as implicatures is that they lead to an interpretation consistent with the principle of relevance, and that they are manifestly the most easily accessible premises to do so. (Sperber & Wilson 1995: 195) Once the propositional form of an utterance has been fully elaborated, the utterance may be regarded as a premise, which taken together with other non-linguistic premises available to the hearer as contextual resources, enable him to deduce the relevant understanding, However, that deductive inferences are still not feasible in conversation. This is because we cannot guarantee that the premises recovered by the addressee are those the speaker wishes to entertain, for interpretation varies from individual to individual, As one may have experienced, hearers' choice of contextual premises does not always match the ones envisaged by the speaker. That is, the communicators do not share the same implicated premise.

For example:

(At shoe repair's)

A: The shoes you repair are very strong?

B: Sure, you can wear them for the rest of your life.

A: (angry) you mean my life is so short?

According to RT, different hearers may arrive at different implicated premises even from the same utterance. In this conversation, the implicated premises of B's utterance are totally different from A to B. B thinks the shoes he repairs are in very good quality because life is very long, while A believes even if the shoes are strong enough, it can only last several years at most. It is obvious that the misunderstanding is caused by the different implicated premises between the speaker and the hearer. The following example took place between me and David, one of my foreign friends in a chat:

Me: What's on television last night?

David: Nothing.

Normally, there is more than one assumption from David's utterance: "Nothing worth watching"; or "Nothing. All the TV stations are on strike", or "Nothing. The TV broke down", etc. As the process of inferential comprehension is non-demonstrative, there is no proof to confirm whether the hearer's assumption is true or not. Any conclusion on the basis of the assumptions is probably right. Indeed, there is no limit to the premises that the hearer could supply.

Let's look at another example:

A: Are you going to the seminar?

B: It's on pragmatics.

Obviously, different sets of premises may be supplied by different hearers on different occasions. From this conversation, we could construct such premises as 'If the seminar is on pragmatics, very few people will attend, so I wouldn't go', 'If the seminar is on pragmatics, I must go because the teacher would call the roll', 'If the seminar is on pragmatics, I'll go because I'm interested in it', etc. Although it is logically possible that the hearer could bring any assumptions to bear on the interpretation of a given utterance, this is clearly not psychologically possible. In fact, on each occasion the hearer performs a deductive inference from a specific set of premises. If the hearers' choice of contextual premises does not match the ones intended by the speaker, the failure would occur.

3.4 Inability to Determine Potential Relevance

People hope that the assumption being processed is relevant (or else they would not bother to process it at all), and they try to select a context, which will justify that hope: a context which will maximize relevance. In verbal communication in particular, it is relevance which is treated as given and context which is treated as a variable. (Speerber & Wilson 1995: 142)

Every utterance comes with a guarantee of its own particular relevance. Thus to understand an utterance is to prove its relevance. Determining relevance (and not only the relevance of utterance) is our constant aim. As Sperber and Wilson say, 'an individual's particular cognitive goal at a given moment is always an instance of a more general goal: maximizing the relevance of the information processed '. (1995: 49)

The most accessible interpretation is the most relevant. This is an important notion because it enables us to discriminate, by taking into account the degree of processing effort, between the various inferences which we might discover. Hence there is a trade-off between relevance and processing effort:

> An assumption is relevant to an individual to the extent that the positive cognitive effects achieved when it is optimally processed are large. An assumption is relevant to an individual to the extent that the effort required to achieve these positive cognitive effects is small.(Sperber & Wilson 1995: 265, 266)

Thus the greater the contextual effect of an utterance, the more relevant it is. Similarly, the contextual effects need to be economically achieved. The harder we have to try to understand something, the less relevant it is. This principle reflects relevance is a matter of degree, which makes the communicator's utterances relevant or less relevant or irrelevant in terms of the interpretive process available to the hearer in that context.

Thus, irrelevant implications on this scale may result from a mismatch in the cognitive environment of the communicator and addressee, and consequently form a mismatch between their assumptions about the world. In fact, the irrelevance here does not mean that it is not relevant at all. It seems to be irrelevant; actually there still exists a kind of potential relevance between utterances. For example:

A: Well, how do I look?

B: Your shoes are nice.

A: I'm starving now.

B: Hurry up girl.

A: So what do you think of Mark?

B: His housemate's a wonderful cook.

Here, all of B's utterances seem not relevant to the preceding remarks. However the relevance could still be achieved, not through its content, but by drawing the hearers' attention to the fact that B is deliberately ignoring A's remark. It is important, that relevance is defined not as a relation between utterances, but as a relation between propositions or sets of propositions. Within this framework, utterance comprehension is ultimately a matter of hypothesis formation and confirmation: the best hypothesis about the speaker's communicative intentions is the one that best satisfies the principle of relevance. Here, the speaker deliberately made an allusion that she wanted to shift to another topic. As a hearer, he should acquire new information not only from the explicit content of an utterance and its implicated conclusions, but also from its implicated assumptions. For the examples above, if the hearer is incapable of establishing this potential relevance between utterances, the pragmatic failure would definitely occur.

3.5 Mismatch of Cognitive Environments for Communicators

> Since physical environments are never strictly identical, and since cognitive abilities are affected by previously memorized information and thus differ in many respects from one person to another, people never share their total cognitive environments. Moreover, to say that two people share a cognitive environment does not imply that they make the same assumption. (Sperber & Wilson 1995: 41)

In cross-cultural communication, different people might have different cognitive environments. To a certain degree, no two people have exactly the same communicative background. Even if they all shared the same narrow physical environment, the cognitive environments would still differ, for perceptual abilities vary in effectiveness from one individual to another. Inferential abilities also vary. As a result, people construct different representations and make different inferences.We think this discrepancy in cognitive environments is one of the main causes of pragmatic failure. We shall make some analyses about the differences between English and Chinese cognitive environments. we cannot cover all due to the limitation of space and focus of my research. The analyses are mainly made from the following two aspects.

3.5.1 Discrepancy in Natural Environments

Quite a few people might be deeply impressed by Shakespeare's *Sonnet* 18, in which there is a well known verse:

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?

We know, in this Sonnet, the poet writes beautifully on the conventional theme that his poetry will bring eternity to the one he loves. But how could Shakespeare compare 'thee' (a young pretty girl) to a summer's day? Indeed, this comparison is quite confusing to us. The association of a summer's day is usually unpleasant, sultry and scorching. But when we consider the weather in Britain, we've realized summer in Britain is their best season, lovely and temperate. Without such knowledge, it seems unlikely to appreciate the poem very well. Similarly, *Ode to the West Wind* written by another great English poet Shelley also reflects the discrepancy of cognitive environments between the east and west. Here, the poet is eulogizing the "wild West Wind". This passionate love of nature is an expression of the poet's eager aspiration for something free from the squalor of real life. "If winter comes, can spring be far behind?" has already become a household word. However we may have the question in our mind while reading the poem: Why do the English always sing the praise of the west wind? If we think it over, we may find the geographical location of Britain is just opposite to ours. The European Continent is to the east of it and Atlantic Ocean is to the west. So its west wind is just like our east wind, pleasantly warm and genial. So when Henry Hart , professor in California university , translated " 闲愁万种，无语怨东风" (《西厢记》), he made a literal translation of 东风, but he made a footnote : The east wind is symbolic of spring, with its urge to love and mating. Here are more examples:

雨后春笋 spring up like mushrooms

多如牛毛 plentiful as blackberries

3.5.2 Discrepancy in Cultural Norms

As there exists great difference between Chinese culture and western culture, there should be something different in terms of cultural norms. That is to say, the two peoples respond differently to the same culture-loaded speech acts as a result of the influence from their own culture.

(A Chinese student gives a birthday present to her English friend)

English: Thank you. It's beautiful.

Chinese: Don't mention it. It is only a small thing.

In many cases, when a native speaker thanks a Chinese speaker for his /her kindness or a favor he/she has done, the Chinese, out of his cultural norms, may respond with "no, no, this is what I should do", "Don't mention it" and "It's really nothing, " (which are literal translations of Chinese utterances in receiving thanks). However, English speakers, in a similar situation, would say something like "With pleasure" or "I'm glad to be of help" to acknowledge and accept the thanks. "Not at all "or "It's nothing" are sometimes used by Englishmen to turn down thanks:

English: Your English is very good.

Chinese: No, no, my English is very poor.

Typical Chinese responses to compliments on one's excellence in certain skills are "There is nothing worthy of note", "You are over-praising me", "You may be joking" or "It is really difficult for me to do it well", "I have been really working hard on it", etc. These responses are typical Chinese expressions when receiving compliments, for the Chinese speakers are being humble and reserved. However, people in the West tend to accept compliments more directly, generally "Thank you" will be sufficient, or sometimes "Thank you, but it's nothing really", so one who is not familiar with Chinese customs would generally find these responses to compliments annoying or impolite.

As both English and Chinese have many idioms that refer to animals, in this part, we also want to focus on cultural similarities and differences relating to animals.

We can see that there are some similar expressions in English and Chinese when certain qualities are associated with certain animals. Both cultures will describe a person as cunning as a fox, or as meek as a lamb, or as happy as a lark, or as foolish as a donkey. But there are more different associations. English-speaking people say somebody is as strong as a horse , but the Chinese will say 壮如牛; or as stubborn as a mule, 犟得像头牛; or as stupid as a goose, 蠢得像头猪; 牛饮 in English is *drink like a fish*, 吹牛 is *talk horse* .

When describing a person who is untrustworthy or difficult to manage, English-speaking people will say he is as slippery as an eel, while the Chinese will say 那个家伙像条泥鳅.

"As wise as an owl" indicates that English-speaking people associate wisdom with this bird. In English books and cartoons, the owl is usually solemn and wise. Among many Chinese, however, there is a superstitious belief that this bird is a sign of bad luck. If Chinese people use an animal image to describe cleverness, they often say he/she is 猴子般精灵.

To the English, and to most Westerners, "the king of the beasts" is the lion. The lion enjoys high prestige, as can be seen from the expression *as majestic as a lion*. In Chinese culture this beast seldom has such associations. It is regarded commonly as being fierce and powerful, but not necessarily majestic. To us, it is the tiger that is more likely to evoke such associations.

Chapter Four
Implications for Communicative Language Teaching

Communicative competence was first proposed by Dell Hymes in his paper *Competence and Performance in Linguistic Theory*, published in 1971. In this paper Hymes argumented Chomsky's notion of linguistic competence with knowledge of appropriateness, performance and feasibility. He thinks the competence consists of 4 components:

(1) Possibility – knowledge of systematic potential, or whether or not an utterance is a possible grammatical structure in a language.

(2) Feasibility – whether and to what extent something is possible under particular circumstances.

(3) Appropriateness- whether and to what extent something is suitable.

(4) Performance-whether and to what extent something is done.

Among them, "possibility" belongs to linguistic competence, and the other three: feasibility, appropriateness and performance, all belong to pragmatic competence. Hymes' notion of communicative competence illustrates that communicative competence involves knowing not only the language code but also what to say to whom, and how to say it appropriately in any given situation. It also involves the social and cultural knowledge speakers are presumed to have which enables them to use and interpret linguistic forms. Communicative competence extends to both knowledge and expectation of who may or may not speak in certain settings, when to speak and when to remain silent, whom one may speak to, how one may talk to persons of different statuses and roles, what nonverbal behaviors are appropriate in various contexts, what are the routines for turn taking in conversation, how to ask for and give information, how to request, how to offer or decline assistance or cooperation, how to give commands, how to enforce discipline , and the like — in short , everything involving the use of language and other communicative dimensions, in particular social settings. Therefore, communicative competence might be broadly defined as what a speaker needs to know to communicate appropriately within a particular speech community.

The concept of communicative competence has important implications for language learning and teaching. Within the definition of communicative competence, the content of what a speaker needs to know depends on the social context in which he or she is or will be using the language and the purposes he or she will have for doing so. From this perspective, we see that understanding the context within which the communication takes place is the most important overriding skill in improving communicative competence. Only with enough encyclopaedic knowledge and awareness of context, could the hearer infer the meanings presumably intended by their speakers.

In the first part of the chapter, we shall introduce some characteristics and roles of context for the sake of manipulating it better. We shall focus on the significance of cultural teaching and learning in the second part of the chapter

4.1 Manipulation of Context

As context is to a large extent culturally determined, as defined in

Relevance, and culture is part of context, which is the main factor making up the communicator's cognitive environment, so we shall discuss about context

4.1.1 Definition of Context

According to Sperber & Wilson, the set of premises used in interpreting an utterance constitutes what is generally known as the context. A context is a psychological construct, a subset of the hearer's assumptions about the world. It is these assumptions, of course, rather than the actual state of the world, that affect the interpretation of an utterance. A context in this sense is not limited to information about the immediate physical environment or the immediately preceding utterance: expectations about the future, scientific hypothesis or religious beliefs, anecdotal memories, general cultural assumptions, beliefs about the mental state of the speaker, may all play a role in interpretation. (Sperber & Wilson 1995:15, 16)

Context determines the speaker's use of language and also the hearer's interpretation of what is said to him. Without such knowledge, linguistic communication would not be possible, and without considering such knowledge, linguistic communication cannot be satisfactorily accounted for in a pragmatic sense. Look at the following sentences:

(1) How did it go?

(2) It is cold here.

(3) It was a hot Christmas day so we went to the beach in the afternoon and had a good time swimming and surfing.

Sentence (1) might be used in a conversation between two students talking about an examination, or two surgeons talking about an operation, or in some other contexts; sentence (2) might be said by the speaker to ask the hearer to turn on the heater, or leave the place, or to put on more clothes, or to apologize for the poor condition of the room, depending on the situation of context; sentence (3) makes sense only if the hearer has the knowledge that Christmas falls in summer in the southern hemisphere.

4.1.2 Features of Context

Context is a subset of mentally represented assumptions which interacts with newly impinging information (whether received via perception or communication) to give rise to contextual effects. In ostensive communication, utterance interpretation is a process of selecting and establishing context based on the principle of relevance. In traditional pragmatic studies, pragmatists usually determine the context first, and then determine the utterances' relevance to this context. Sperber & Wilson consider that this model of utterance interpretation is not feasible, because communicators should not only measure the relevance of the utterance, but also strive for the high proficiency in utterance interpretation, that is, acquire the most knowledge at a shortest period of time. Based on this consideration, Sperber & Wilson establish a model opposite to the traditional one: first determine the existence of relevance in an utterance, then select the context for utterance interpretation according to the principle of relevance and try to make the relevance prominent in the context.

Sperber & Wilson hold the opinion that communication develops in spirals: after one round of communication is over, the meaning of utterance derived from this round is grouped into the immediate context, which constitutes one part of the context necessary for the next round of utterance interpretation. The hearer should extend this immediate context from three respects before establishing a final integrated context: first, include the relevant implications of the previous utterance; then, activate the relevant contextual resources from his encyclopaedic knowledge; last, add in the relevant information from behavioral environment (non-linguistic information)

In the dynamic process of language communication, the process of selecting and establishing context also presents a tendency of dynamic development. Only when the communicators realize such a property of context, can they consciously take advantage of such a property for the improvement of their own art and proficiency of utterance interpretation. Also, the feature of context points out some new practical implications to communicative teaching, syllabus design as well.

4.1.3 Context and Relevance Theory

As explained above, context is a crucial factor in pragmatic analysis. It influences what people say, how they say it, and how others interpret what they say in a given situation. So, it is of great significance in guiding communicative language teaching, such as designing language teaching materials and language learning activities. Before analyzing the relationship between context and RT, we want to identify the following relevant contextual information first:

(1) The participants: their roles, the amount of power differential

between them, the distance—closeness between them, the number of people present.

(2) The message content: how 'costly' or 'beneficial' the message is to the hearer and / or speaker, how face-threatening it is, whether it exceeds or stays within the rights and obligations of the relationship.

(3) The communicative activity (such as a job interview, a lecture or a medical consultation): how the norms of the activity influence language behavior such as right to talk or ask questions, discourse structure, and level of formality.

According to Sperber&Wilson, we first determine the existence of relevance in an utterance, then select the context for utterance interpretation according to the principle of relevance and try to make the relevance prominent in the context. Unfortunately, context is sometimes taken to be the concrete aspects of the environment in which an exchange takes place and that have a bearing on the communication process. But in pragmatics, a more psychological notion of context is crucial. The physical environment (the time, the place, and the objects and people present) does not impinge directly on utterance production and interpretation; it does so only indirectly via people's representations of it. For example, if you do not want your colleague in the next office to hear what you are about to say, you may speak in a low voice. However, your decision to speak in this way depends not so much on whether your colleague is actually in the next office or not so much on your belief about his or her possible presence and ability to overhear your conversation. So it is important for communicators to remember that context is created dynamically as an interaction proceeds. But in fact, what people say and how they do it in a specific context depends on a cognitive psychological notion of context which consists of logical information, lexical information and the encyclopaedic knowledge of both the speaker and the hearer.

By identifying the contextual information we mentioned above, students can learn (explicitly or implicitly) about the influence of context on language use. In lessons following the standard "Presentation, Practice, Production"(PPP) structure, for example, it is standard practice to present and practice the target teaching points in as authentic a context as possible. Similarly, in EFL examinations such as IELTS and PETS, it is now rare for writing tasks as "Write an essay about friendship" to be set, where the writing purpose and target audience are unclear. Instead, writing tasks are normally contextualized, with quite detailed information such as "You are —, you want—, here are the facts—, do this". The test-takers are thereby told what role they should assume, what their writing purposes are, and who their target audience is.

From a teaching point of view, it is also necessary for teacher to focus on the features of context while they are teaching, for students are faced with the kind of context which people are faced with in general communication, in which RT plays an important role.Take the following dialogue as an example, if the teacher does not emphasize the immediate context in this dialogue, the student may not understand it very well.

(Laszo's assumption: Rick can help him to get a passport)

Laszo: Isn't it strange that you always happened to be fighting on the side of the underdog?

(Rick made a response and offered a new stimulus.)

Rick: Yes, I found it an expensive hobby, too. But then I never was much of a businessman.

(Laszo thought his original assumption was wrong, so he made a new assumption: Rick wanted money)

Laszo: Are you enough of a businessman to appreciate an offer of 10,000 francs.

(Rick didn't accept it and offered another new stimulus).

Rick: I appreciate it but I don't accept it.

(Laszo went on adjusting his contextual assumption: Dick thought the money was not enough.)

Laszo: I'll raise it to 20,000.

(Rick still didn't accept it and made a further stimulus to maintain the conversation)

Rick: My friend, you can make it a million francs or three. My answer would still be the same.

The example above clearly shows that in the verbal communication the context is a dynamic, not a static process. It keeps changing all the time. In this way, relevance can be determined as the context changes, in which utterances can be fully interpreted. Any assumption that the context is determined in advance of the comprehension process will lead to the failure of communication.

4.2 The Teaching of Culture

Second language learning in some respects is often second cultural learning because of the highly social context of language. In order to understand what and how second cultural learning is, first we need to understand some basic concepts about culture such as ethnocentricity, the nature of acculturation and culture shock.

4.2.1 Ethnocentricity

While most of us will agree there are differences between peoples and cultures, very few of us are prepared to accept the full consequence of such a view. As a native speaker of a particular language and as members of one particular culture, we instinctively assume that all other cultures are strange, or our own culture is superior to others. Such an approach to the problem of cultural and linguistic diversity could be called ethnocentric.

The culprit behind much cross-cultural fatigue is an ethnocentric outlook. According to classic definition, ethnocentrism may best be described as a syndrome involving at least three basic factors: integration and loyalty among in-group members; hostile relations between in-group and out-group members; and positive self-regard among in-group members in contrast to derogatory stereotyping of out-group characteristics. One important component of this syndrome is an acceptance of in-group values and standards as universally applicable.

Actually every culture has its right to exist. People nowadays are motivated by a desire to keep as many varieties of language as possible in the name of a linguistic ecology, understood as the need to protect diversification in the world of speaking. As a result, our proper attitude toward culture should be cultural relativism.

4.2.2 Acculturation

If an Englishman is primarily cognitive-oriented and an American is psychomotor-oriented and a Chinese speaker is affective-orientated, it is not difficult to understand the complexity of acculturation, the process of becoming adapted to a new culture. A reorientation of thinking and feeling is necessary.

In considering the relationship between second language learning and second culture learning, it is very important to consider three different types of second language learning contexts.

(1) Learning a second language within the culture of that second language; for example, a Chinese speaker learning English in UK.

(2) Learning a second language within one's own native culture where the second language is accepted and used for education, government, or business within the country; for example, learning English in the Philippines or India.

(3) Learning a non-native language in one's own culture with few immediate and widespread opportunities to use the language within the environment of one's own culture, for example, learning English in China.

Each type of second language situation involves different degrees of acculturation. Second language learning in a second culture (type 1) clearly involves the deepest form of acculturation. The learner must survive within a strange culture as well as learning a language on which he is totally dependent for communication. Second language learning in type (2) varies in the severity of acculturation experienced by the learner, depending upon the country, the cultural and sociopolitical status of the language, and the motivations or aspirations of the learner. For instance, learning English in India really does not involve taking on a new culture.

It is not difficult to find that the foreign language context (type 3) produces the most variable degrees of acculturation since people attempt to learn a foreign language for such a variety of reasons. A person may learn a foreign language in order to communicate someday with the people in another culture; others learn foreign languages for instrumental purposes---for example, fulfilling a foreign language requirement in a university or gaining a reading knowledge within a field of specialization. Still others learn a foreign language simply out of an interest in languages, ranging from passing curiosity to highly technical linguistic interest in the language. Since the language is almost always learned in a context of understanding the people of another culture, the second language learning in type 3 is most culturally loaded than the other two types.

Acculturation, as a gradual adaptation to the target culture without necessarily forsaking one's native language identity, has been proposed as a model for both the adult entering a new culture and the students in the bilingual program in a school.

4.2.3 Culture Shock

Culture shock is a common experience for a person learning a second language in a second culture. Culture shock refers to phenomena ranging from mild irritability to deep psychological panic and crisis. It is associated with feelings in the learner of estrangement, anger, hostility, indecision, frustration, unhappiness, sadness, loneliness, homesickness, and even physical illness. The person undergoing culture shock views his new world out of resentment, and alternates between being angry at others for not understanding him and being filled with self-pity. Edward Hall (1959:59) describes a hypothetical example of an American living abroad for the first time.

At first, things in the cities look pretty much alike. There are taxis, hotels with hot and cold running water, theatres, neon lights, even tall buildings with elevators and a few people who can speak English. But pretty soon the American discovers that underneath the familiar exterior there are vast differences. When someone says 'yes' it often doesn't mean yes at all, and when people smile it doesn't always mean they are pleased. When an American visitor makes a helpful gesture he may be rebuffed; when he tries to be friendly nothing happens. The longer he stays, the more enigmatic the new country looks.

This case of an American in Japan illustrates the point that initially the person in a foreign culture is comfortable and delighted with the exotic surroundings. As long as he can perceptually filter his surroundings and internalize the environment in his own world view, he feels at ease. As soon as this newness wears off, and the cognitive and affective contradictions of the foreign culture mount up, he becomes disoriented.

Thus, the anthropologist George M. Foster (1926:87) is right in saying "Culture shock is a mental illness, and as is true of much mental illness, the victim usually does not know he is afflicted. He finds that he is irritable, depressed, and probably annoyed by the lack of attention shown to him".

4.3 Significance and Skills of Cultural Teaching

As revealed in this thesis, language is much related to cognition, and cognition in turn is related to the cultural setting. Learning a language is inseparable from learning its culture. When learning a foreign or second language, we should not only learn the mere imitation of the pronunciation, grammar, words and idioms, but also learn to see the world as native speakers do, that is to say, learn the ways in which the foreign language reflects the ideas, customs, and behavior of that society, learn to understand "their language of the mind", or acculturation. That is to say, we need to learn enough about the language's culture so that we can communicate in the target language properly to achieve not only the linguistic competence but also the communicative competence as well. This is of great significance in learning a foreign language. Otherwise the ignorance of cultural differences can create barriers in learning the target language and in communication, thus causing some unnecessary misunderstandings and confuses sometimes.

Therefore, increasing the students' awareness of cultural factors in teaching activities should be one goal of classroom instructions. As the learners are not well aware of the cultural difference involved in their first language and second language, the author, therefore, proposes that in CLT instruction we should pay enough attention to the development of learners' awareness of cultural difference. The teaching principles to develop students' awareness of culture are put forward here:

(1) Access the culture through the language being taught;

(2) Make the study of cultural behaviors an integral part of each lesson;

(3) Aim for students to achieve the socio-economic competence,

which they feel they need;

(4)Aim for all levels to achieve cross-cultural understanding---awareness of their own culture, as well as that of the target language;

(5) Recognizing that not all teaching about culture implies behavior change, but merely an awareness and tolerance of the cultural influences affecting one's own and others' behavior.

No doubt that such teaching principles make higher demands on the teachers, for example, their attitudes, skills, and techniques, etc. All of these might lead to the success of cultural teaching. The attitudes and skills are as follows:

Attitudes:

(1) Teachers who are meant to educate learners towards "international learning" must be "international learners" themselves;

(2) Teachers should be prepared to consider how others see them and be curious about themselves and others;

(3) Teachers should be prepared to experiment and negotiate in order to achieve understanding on both sides;

(4) Teachers should be prepared to share meaning, experience and affects with both people from other countries and students from their own country in the classroom;

(5) Teachers should be prepared to take an active part in the search for the modern languages contribution to international understanding and peace making at home and abroad;

(6) Teachers should aim to adopt the role and function of social and intercultural interpreter.

Skills:

(1) Teachers should have and develop further appropriate communication skills in language which are suited for negotiation both in the classroom and in intercultural communications outside.

(2) Teachers should have and develop further text skills, i.e. the ability to deal with authentic data in all media (print, audio, audio-visual) and in face-to-face interaction.

(3) Teachers should have and develop further the necessary skills to connect the student experience with ideas, things and objects outside their direct reach and to create learning environments which led themselves to experience learning, negotiation and experiment.

We have analyzed communicative competence and its implications for language teaching, what's more, context, as a psychological construct, consists of a subset of the hearers' assumptions about the world, which plays a very important role in utterance interpretation. Second language teaching and learning, as a communication in classroom between students and teachers, can also be guided with the help of what we have discussed, that is to say, with the five factors which will cause pragmatic failures in cross-cultural communication. In addition, the role of culture in cross-cultural communication can not be ignored.

In the following final part, we shall summarize the reason why we draw RT in analyzing the cross-cultural pragmatic failure, reach some conclusions as to what practical implications this study may have in the area of foreign language learning, and recommend further research in related areas.

Conclusion

As I have stated above in this thesis, Relevance Theory is able to account for the failure of cross-cultural communication. Detailed analyses of the cognitive environments and the misunderstandings in verbal communication between Chinese and English speakers have further revealed that RT can be adopted to account for the facts that not all utterances are successfully understood, and that a particular utterance may be understood in different ways and to different degrees by different hearers.

"Pragmatics is the study of the general cognitive principles and abilities involved in utterance interpretation, and of their cognitive effects" (Sperber and Wilson, 1987 : 5). The definition indicates that the success or failure of communication depends on the interpretation of the intended lines. Relevance Theory is intended to match human performance in communication comprehension. Thus, it can be inferred that RT can be relied on to give reasonable account for both failure and success on communication.

Sperber and Wilson hold that it is the degree of relevance that guides how speakers in communicative situations formulate their utterances in order that hearers will understand the intended message. For them, any perceptual stimulus, verbal or non-verbal, is relevant in a context to the degree that its contextual effects are large and the processing effort required to produce those effects is small. So this relevance, as a matter of degree in terms of contextual effects and processing efforts in utterance interpretation, is the driving force behind pragmatic failure. With resort to cognitive principles and to the Principle of Relevance, we summarized in this thesis the five aspects which will result in failures in cross-cultural communication:

1. Failures to recognize intended assumptions;
2. Dim consciousness of the hearer's abilities of utterance interpretation;
3. Failures to share the same implicated premise;
4. Inability to determine potential relevance;
5. Mismatchof cognitive environments for communicators.

Accordingly, the practical implications related to communicative language teaching, syllabus design can be deduced. First, communicative competence and social appropriateness can be achieved through the teaching of the foreign language in context. This context must be taken as that of the situation of talk and of the psychological construct of the learner, particularly her cultural beliefs and social values. In this case, explanation of how the foreign word is used is necessary; simulation of the cultural context of the foreign word in which it can be used is a good strategy. Raising the consciousness of the learners about the fact that language is used in context — a context of situation and a context of culture —can be very useful and may motivate the learner to know more about the other culture through its language — which may lead him /her to self-reliance and further motivation. Second, the comparison of different cultural mismatch should be embodied in the syllabus design and foreign language teaching material. This certainly needs well-qualified teachers and syllabus designers. Raising the consciousness of learners can enable the whole teaching process to be learner-centered. This means that the role of the teacher or the syllabus designer as embodied in the teaching materials and the teaching methodology will motivate appropriate processes of learning. Learning is less of a product than a process.

Cross-cultural communication is an extremely complicated process, and can be quite painful at times. Nowadays, as the globalization of world economy gathers its pace faster than ever before, with the internet tearing down national boundaries, cross-cultural communication is part of our everyday life. On the cultural level, particularly in relation to misunderstanding, more research on cross-cultural pragmatic failure is urgently needed. Though the research that we have undertaken in this thesis has opened up a new area of investigation in cross-cultural analysis, there still exist so many limitations. Very important research is strongly recommended here for the exploration of the role of pragmatic presupposition in causing misunderstanding between Chinese and English speakers. The findings of such research could throw new light on the validity of misunderstanding and the actual role of the discrepancy in social values in causing communicative breakdown between Chinese and English speakers. In other words, it could show how far the differences in the cognitive environments of the communicators cause misunderstanding, and how far presupposition goes in enhancing pragmatic failure. As most of my research only concentrates on the sociopragmatic field, another new research can be made to both linguistic studies and cultural differences, for the language errors involved in causing misunderstanding in verbal communication are also quite numerous, their weight is by no means negligible. If the role of culture is exceptionally important in conveying the communicator's intent, teachers of foreign languages, syllabus designers and communicatos in general must remember that language is the carrier of the cultural norms revealed and negotiated in verbal communication. Only by paying adequate attention to both can we avoid a reasonably degree of pragmatic failure in cross-cultural communication.

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