

Study of the Use of Irony in *Fortress Besieged* -- Based on Speech Act Theory

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Abstract

Fortress Besieged is a satirical novel written by Mr. Ch'ien Chung-shu. Focusing on the protagonist Fang Hung-chien's schooling, job hunting and marriage, the book shows in light and humorous language the various difficulties encountered by the so-called intellectuals at that time, and deeply reveals the dark side of human nature: selfishness, incompetence, cowardice and profit seeking, satirizing human nature and society. The biggest feature of the book is its humorous and spicy language, which vividly reveals the ugly side of the characters in the book, either selfish or ruthless, greedy or weak. Under the guidance of the speech act theory, this paper analyzes the wonderful use of irony in the book, so as to tap the deep meaning behind the language and enrich the characters.

Keywords

Speech Act Theory; Irony; *Fortress Besieged*.

1. Introduction

The story of *Fortress Besieged* began in 1937. Returning from studying abroad, Fang Hung-chien worked in his father-in-law's Bank. After his relationship with his father-in-law's family broke down, he had no choice but to work at Sanlu University. In the process of job search and work, he met all kinds of hypocrites, experienced the darkness of society and the unbearable human nature, and finally ended his marriage in disappointment. With his superb language skills, Mr. Ch'ien peeps into the whole picture of society in daily events and satirizes all kinds of human nature in humor, which makes the novel euphemistic, implicit and thought-provoking. This paper selects some fragments of *Fortress Besieged*, based on the perspective of speech act theory, excavates the deep meaning behind the language irony of the novel, so as to truly appreciate its artistic charm.

2. Speech Act Theory and Irony

2.1. Speech Act Theory

Speech act theory was put forward by the British philosopher Austin. Later, in the process of continuous development and improvement of pragmatic research, Searle and other scholars in the United States also made contributions. Austin divided sentences into two categories: performati and constative sentences. The former is used to describe things and explain them, while the latter is used to implement an action. After that, Austin further divided speech acts into three categories: locutionary act, illocutionary act and perlocutionary act. [1] After more in-depth research, Searle divided speech acts into five categories: representatives, expressives, directives, commissives, declaratives. [2] However, according to Henk haverkate's theory, declaratives without sincerity conditions do not have the characteristics of irony. [3] Therefore, this paper will analyze the irony art of *Fortress Besieged* from the other four aspects.

2.2. Irony

Irony is the opposite of what is said. Take literary works as an example, the words said by the characters in the book do not convey the literal meaning, but express the opposite meaning. Therefore, readers usually need to understand the true meaning of this sentence according to the context. As a commonly used rhetorical method in literary works, irony theory and its application have attracted the attention of many scholars. According to the different starting points of work analysis, the classification of irony is also different. This paper will study the application of irony in *Fortress Besieged*.

3. An Analysis of the Use of Irony in *Fortress Besieged*

3.1. An Analysis of the Use of Irony from the Perspective of Representatives

Representatives refer to the speaker's statement of the real thing, rather than the opposite of the fact. When speaking, the speaker does not think what he said is true, or deliberately says something inconsistent with the reality, so as to achieve his real purpose or express his real feelings. This speech phenomenon can directly achieve the effect of irony, which is the most easily recognized. We can also portray the characters from the side through the dialogue full of false information.

In the book, Fang Hung-chien went to visit Mrs. Zhang's house and played mahjong with them and finally won 300 yuan. Then he sighed that he had never been so lucky to win so much money. At this time, Mrs. Zhang said, "We are so confused that we haven't paid Mr. Fang the money we lost." [4] Obviously, Mrs. Zhang pretended that she had forgotten what happened, so as to cover up the embarrassment of losing money and trying not to admit it. Because the fact was that several people were very involved in playing, and they didn't forget the rules and results of playing mahjong. She just tried not to mention it in order to muddle through and not pay the money. This sentence reflects Mrs. Zhang's hypocrisy and greed for money. Although Mrs. Zhang was rich, she was still dishonest and did not have the spirit of contract in this small matter. Those self-righteous people who seem to be in the upper class society can't avoid vulgarity on the issue of money.

3.2. An Analysis of the Use of Irony from the Perspective of Directives

Directives include the command, suggestion, request of the speaker to the listener. The purpose is to ask the listener to do something. In other words, the ending point of directives is the listener's action. If the speaker doesn't really want the listener to do something at all, or deliberately asks the listener to carry out completely unreasonable behavior in the current situation, it will achieve the effect of irony.

After Wang Ch'u-hou failed to match Fang Hung-chien with another staff member at the school, Wang Ch'u-hou said, "There is no point in your doing part-time work in the Foreign Languages Department. Next semester I'm planning to add a philosophy department and ask you to take care of the courses solely within the department." [4] In fact, Wang did not have the right, nor did he really want to promote Fang Hung-chien. These remarks merely pointed out Fang Hung-chien's awkward position in the school. What Wang means: You're just an underappreciated associate professor. The headmaster, colleagues and students didn't take you seriously. I did you a great honor by setting you up with a blind date. The remark expressed his dissatisfaction with Fang Hung-chien's refusal.

3.3. An Analysis of the Use of Irony from the Perspective of Commissives

Commissives are that the speaker uses to undertake future actions, which can be commitment, threat, request and so on. In other words, the speaker has the ability or willingness to complete

an action. If the speaker knows that he can't do what he said, then this sentence has an ironic meaning.

After some overt and covert fighting, a position was vacant for the English teacher in the school. Although Han Hseh-y really wanted his wife to take up the post, the school had decided to let Fang Hung-chien take up the post. So headmaster Kao Sung-nien comforted Han that he would hire his wife next school year. He said, "Faculty members should unite and help each other. We'll certainly hire your wife to help us next school year". But Han replied proudly, "Whether I stay on next year or not is still a question. I have had five or six letters from T'ung-i University asking me and my wife to go there." [4] This sentence is obviously half a threat and half a promise. It not only shows off that he and his wife will have a better job, but also makes the headmaster feel confident that he will not disagree with Fang hung Chien's appointment as an English teacher. However, the fact is that Han was very dissatisfied with the fact that he did not hire his wife. Later, he tried to encourage the students to write a joint letter to the school to expel Fang. The image of Han Hseh-y, a villain who regards himself as noble but does everything by any means, appears on the paper.

3.4. An Analysis of the Use of Irony from the Perspective of Expressives

Expressives state the speaker's views on things and express psychological states such as pleasure, pain, like, sorrow and so on. The speaker expresses his real intention by uttering language completely contrary to his real point of view: dissatisfaction, praise or blame, etc.

After a few days on board, Fang visited Su Wen-wan and she asked him politely and strangely, "Mr. Fang, you are really something! When was the wedding? Here I am, an old classmate from years back, and yet you kept your wedding all to yourself and didn't breathe a word about it. You were coming home to get married after you got your Ph.D., weren't you? That's really a case of having your name on the golden rolls and figured candles in the nuptial chamber-what they call double happiness." [4] In fact, Su did not sincerely congratulate Fang, but satirized that he concealed his engagement and forged his doctoral certificate. While on board, Su had a covert relationship with Fang who did not refuse her or explain to her that he had an engagement. When Su Wen-wan, who got a doctor's degree, learned that he not only had a fiancée, but also had a fake education, she was naturally angry and dissatisfied with Fang's behaviors. So she used these words to express her dissatisfaction and blame Fang for his lack of honesty.

4. Conclusion

Besieged city vividly depicts the multifaceted character with exquisite satire and humorous expression, leaving readers with imagination space. Starting with Searle's speech act theory, this paper aims to analyze the deep meaning behind speech, further grasp the character image, and provide more possibilities for the application of pragmatics in the analysis of literary works.

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