

An Analysis of Figures of Speech from the Perspective of Relevance Theory-Case Study of Alice's Adventures in Wonderland

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Abstract: This paper attempts to analyze the use of various figures of speech in literature from the perspective of Relevance Theory and take the figures of speech used in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland as an example. By using the Relevance theory, an important theory of cognitive pragmatics, the author tries to interpret the process of readers' understanding these figures of speech when reading the novel. In this paper, five important figures of speech, including parody, pun, malapropism, simile and allusion have been discussed respectively. After analysis of the figures of speech under the guidance of Relevance Theory, some main findings have been obtained. Firstly, the understanding of all of the figures of speech appropriately involves a process of ostension and inferences, getting the optimal contextual effects and seeking the optimal relevance between the speaker and the addressee. Secondly, the analysis of the figures of speech used in the novel gives some important hits to the reasons or mechanism of the humorous and critical effects of this novel. All in all, this study provides a little experience towards the study of the use of figures of speech used in literature. Hopefully, its efforts will make some contributions to the future research.

Keywords: Relevance Theory, Figure of Speech, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

Over the decades, pragmatics has witnessed a spectacular development, which has come into an important branch of linguistics. Now, pragmatics has entered a flourishing period. It has developed a series of comparatively systematic theories which have been put into practice increasingly and extensively. The publication of the book *Relevance: Communication and Cognition* written by Sperber, D. & D. Wilson in 1986 symbolized the birth of Relevance Theory, which had made a big splash. The domestic and foreign scholars had been paid a great attention to this theory. They have been trying their best to study, to illustrate, to interpret this theory deeply. Nowadays, this theory, as an important part in cognitive pragmatics, has been applied into different fields, such as semantics, discourse analysis, philosophy of language, psychological linguistics, cognitive science and rhetoric; at the same time, it has an direct effect on other discipline such as computational linguistics, sociolinguistics, literature theory, translation and so on, which shows the large explanatory power of it.

Figures of speech, as a special way of communication are employed in different contexts, such as advertisement, literary works and so on, which can be used to deliver information or to express people's ideas. Since the Relevance Theory has a strong power in explaining people's communicative behaviour, there is no doubt that it can be applied to the study of figures of speech. According to the research of the author of this thesis, so far, in terms of the studies of the use of various figures of speech from the perspective of Relevance Theory, scholars' focus is mainly concentrated on the analysis of them used in advertisement or the translation of them used in advertisement. For example, at home, *The Interpretation of Pun Used in Advertisement from the Perspective of Relevance Theory* by Yan Amu; *On Translation of Rhetorical Devices in Advertisement ---- from the Perspective of Relevance Theory* by Huang Mulan; *Study on the Creation and Rhetoric in Advertising ----Based on Relevance Theory* by Li Jing; *A Study of Parody in Advertisement from the Background of Relevance Theory* by Yang Liu; *A Study of Rhetorical Figures in Advertisements from the Perspective of Relevance Theory* by Peng Jing;

The Interpretation of Relevance Theory and Rhetoric by Wang Weimin and so on; at abroad, it has a broader scope in terms of the study of rhetoric and Relevance Theory. For example, *Irony as Relevant Inappropriateness* by Salvatore Attardo; *Metaphor Interpretation and Motivation in Relevance Theory* by Huang Huaxin and Yang Xiaolong; *The Pragmatics of Verbal Irony: Echo or Pretence?* by Deirdre Wilson and so on. However, according to the research of the author of this paper, on the one hand, only a few scholars pay much attention on the interpretation or analysis of the figures of speech which are used in literature frequently, which means that there still exists a great research space in this direction. On the other hand, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, written by Lewis Carroll, an English writer who is recognized as one of the most distinguished writers for children literary books, employs a large number of figures of speeches, such as pun, simile, parody, malapropism, allusion and so on, which will be a very appropriate instance that can be analyzed by utilizing Relevance Theory. Therefore, this paper is supposed to take this novel as an example to analyze the rhetoric from the perspective of Relevance Theory.

1.2 Research Significance

As for the research importance of this paper, it mainly lies in two points. In the first place, as the author has mentioned above, the previous study of rhetoric is mainly focused on its use in advertisement and this paper aims to analyze the rhetoric appearing in literature, which is able to make some contributions to the study of figure of speech to some degree. In the second place, in terms of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, previous studies are mainly concentrated on its translation from different perspective and a few scholars pay attention to the various figures of speech employed in it. Therefore, the studies of this paper can make some contributions to it to some degree.

1.3 Structure of the Thesis

In terms of the structure of this thesis, it mainly divided into five parts. The first part is the introduction, including the research background, the research significance and the main structure. The second part is the literature review. In this part, the previous studies concerning about the Relevance Theory and *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* will be presented, which will give readers a general idea about this theory, and this novel. The third part is the theoretical framework. In this part, the main concepts or the main ideas of the relevance theory will be given. The fourth part is the analysis of the figure of speech appearing in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by using the Relevance Theory. And the last part is the conclusion, which will present the major findings and limitations of this thesis and also will give some suggestions about the future research.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Study on Relevance Theory

Relevance Theory, the cornerstone of cognitive pragmatics, was put forward by Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson in the 1980s, which is designed to illustrate communication from the cognitive perspective. Since the publication of *Relevance: Communication and Cognition* in 1986, scholars and researchers at home and abroad have paid growing attention to Relevance theory. In this part, the thesis focuses on the previous studies on Relevance theory abroad and at home.

2.1.1 Studies on Relevance Theory abroad

In 1986, Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson put forward Relevance Theory. It is considered as an inferential theory of communication, which aims at making clear how the addressee infers the communicator's intended meaning (Sperber & Wilson, 1986). Sperber and Wilson assume that all utterances are relevant to a certain extent. To understand utterance is to search for its relevance. To put it simply, people involved in communication would give priority to the relevant information (Li 2016). Apart from Sperber & Wilson themselves, there are many other scholars coming from different fields have conducted a lot of researches on this theory. For example, in the field of translation, Ernst August Gutt, after grasping the Relevant Theory and finding the relevance between the theory and translation practice, attempted to apply it into translation studies (Huang, 2011). He put forward the relevance translation theory in his doctoral dissertation---"*Translation and Relevance: Cognition and Context*". In the field of advertisement, *Under the Relevance Theory in the title of Advertising Language* written by Keiko Tanaka in 1994 demonstrates the relation between Relevance theory and the advertising and

marketing field; In terms of the application of Relevance Theory to figures of speech, there are also many works. For example, *Metaphor Interpretation and Motivation in Relevance Theory* written by Huang Huaxin and Yang Xiaolong; *The Pragmatics of Verbal Parody* written by Deborah F. Rossen-Knill and Richard Henry; *The Pragmatics of Verbal Irony: Echo or Pretence?* written by Deirdre Wilson; *Irony as Relevant Inappropriateness* written by Salvatore Attardo and so on. What is more, in other fields, this theory is also applied. *An application of relevance theory to the analysis of L2 interpretation processes: The comprehension of indirect replies* written by Naoko Taguchi; *A relevance theory perspective on grammaticalization* written by Steve Nicollet in 2009; *Relevance Theories of Communication: Alfred Schutz in Dialogue with Sperber and Wilson* written by Jan Strabheim in 2010; *Relevance Theory and Citations* written by Howard D. White in 2011 and so on.

2.1.2 Studies on Relevance Theory at home

In China, at the beginning, almost no scholars showed interests in the introduction of Relevance Theory. It was Shen Jiaxuan who wrote "Review: D. Sperber and D. Wilson *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*" who is regarded as the first scholar to introduce Relevance Theory to people in China to some degree. Lin Kenan made an early research of Relevance Theory and translation in article with the title of "A Brief Introduction to Relevance and Translation" (as cited in Li, 2016). In 1998, He Ziran and Ran Yongping wrote a paper whose title was "Relevance Theory---the Foundation of Cognitive Pragmatics". After thirty decades, Relevance Theory has witnessed a great development in China and has become mature gradually. So far, scholars have yielded a lot of fruits. As far as the studies of Relevance Theory and rhetoric is concerned, scholars mainly pay their attention to the interpretation or analysis of figure of speech used in advertisement. For example, *The Interpretation of Pun Used in Advertisement from the Perspective of Relevance Theory* by Yan Amu, *On Translation of Rhetorical Devices in Advertisement --- from the Perspective of Relevance Theory* by Huang Mulan; *Study on the Creation and Rhetoric in Advertising Based on Relevance Theory* by Li Jing; *A Study of Parody in Advertisement from the Background of Relevance Theory* by Yang Liu; *A Study of Rhetorical Figures in Advertisements from the Perspective of Relevance Theory* by Peng Jing; *The Interpretation of Relevance Theory and Rhetoric* by Wang Weimin and so on.

2.2 Study on Alice's Adventures in Wonderland

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, written by Lewis Carroll, is considered as one of the most wonderful books for children literary books. Since its publication, it had drawn many scholars' attention. And this part will give a brief introduction to the previous studies on this novel in China.

After this novel was introduced in China, scholars' focus is mainly concentrated on its different versions of translation and they studies the translation strategies or methods of this novel from different perspectives and by using different theories. For example, *On Translation of Figures of Speech in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland from the Perspective of Adaptation Theory* by Tang Jiawei; *A Comparative Study of Humorous Utterance Translation in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland from the Perspective of Relevance Theory* by Deng Yiwei and so on. What is more, many researchers study this novel from other directions. For example, *An analysis of Alice's Growing-up in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland from Young Readers' Perspective* by Han Yi; *A Systemic-functional Analysis of Cohesion and Coherence in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Gong Li; *The Criticism of Authority in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland---from the Perspective of Politeness Principle* by Zhong Minjun and so on.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Main Concepts of Relevance Theory

In 1986, *Relevance: Communication and Cognition* was published, which symbolized the birth of Relevance Theory. It is an attempt to employ an implicit set of descriptive and cognitive notions to analyze a complicated set of phenomenon concerning comprehension and communication (ibid, 2016), which brought light to human communication. As far as the purpose of this thesis is concerned, in following part, some core concepts of Relevance Theory will be introduced.

3.1.1 Ostensive-Inferential Communication

Ostensive-inferential communication is a process during which the communicator produces a stimulus that can make it mutually manifest to the communicator (Sperber and Wilson 1995 p63). Sperber and Wilson thought that the essential mental faculty which enables human beings to

communicative with each other successfully is the ability to draw inference from utterances among them (He, 2011). Ostension and inference are the two aspects of the same process. According to the Relevance Theory, on the one hand, communication is a process of making ostension, which refers to that the speaker manifests his intention to the hearer in an ostensive way. On the other hand, communication is a process of drawing inferences, which refers to the fact that the addressee draws the implied intention from the information given by the speaker (Liu, 1997).

There are two layers of information involved in ostension in the process of understanding, which are informative intention and communicative intention. The former refers to the fact the speaker wants to inform the addressee something or a set of assumptions so as to make sure that the communication can go ahead successfully. The later refers to the fact that the speaker expects that the addressee can be aware of his informative intention so that the communication goes on smoothly (Peng, 2014). According to Sperber and Wilson, the fulfillment of the communicative intention is the key point for a successful communication; otherwise, the communication may be failed.

3.1.2 Cognitive Context

From the perspective of cognition, Sperber and Wilson put forward cognitive context or cognitive environment which is different from the traditional view of context. According to them, context refers to “a psychological construct, a subset of the addressee’s assumption about the world and it is the set of premises used in interpreting utterance” (as cited in He, 2011). Cognitive context focus on the psychological state and cognitive processes in verbal communication from a dynamic point of view. It is a good explanation in the process of verbal communication (Deng, 2018). According to Sperber and Wilson, there are three types of cognitive contexts, including logical information, lexical information and encyclopedia information. The first one is acquired from deductive rules and it is supposed to be finite and will not go through extreme changes and different people are entitled with similar logical information. The second one is made up of the information which is used for explaining some concepts. And the third one is the connotation of concepts, which is assumed to be open-ended because the new information are added to it continuously (Zhou, 2016).

Different people have different experience, knowledge structure and cognitive ability; therefore, different people have different cognitive context. As time goes by, people’s cognitive context may be expended or be modified with the new information or knowledge added. Therefore, in the process of communication, the speaker should take the cognitive ability of the addressee into consideration before producing an utterance so as to make sure that the addressee have the capability of drawing the intended meaning from the ostensive stimulus; otherwise, it will lead to the failure of communication.

3.1.3 Principle of Relevance

3.1.3.1 Processing Efforts and Contextual Effects

Sperber and Wilson defined “Relevance” as “an assumption which is relevant in a context if and only if it has some contextual effects in the context.” (Sperber & Wilson, 2001). Relevance is a relevant concept and it is a matter of degree. Some assumptions can be more relevant than others. Usually, there are two components that are able to be used to measure the degree of relevance. One is the processing efforts which are involved in the mental processes and the other is the contextual effects of an assumption in a given context. Put them in detail, in communication, processing efforts refer to the energy or time that the addressee spends in understanding the intended meaning conveyed by the speaker; contextual effects refer to the relationship between the assumptions derived from the communicator’s ostensive act and the context of the utterance (He, 2011).

Generally, the contextual effects are in positive proportion to the degree of relevance and the processing efforts in negative proportion to it. That is to say, the greater the cognitive effects, the greater the relevance; the smaller the processing efforts required to derive the contextual effects, the greater the relevance. And the two factors interact as a ratio: $\text{Relevance} = \text{cognitive effects}/\text{processing effects}$ (White, 2011).

3.1.3.2 Cognitive Principle and Communicative Principle

According to Sperber and Wilson, there are two principles of relevance, which are cognitive principle and communicative principle respectively. The cognitive principle of relevance refers to the fact that human cognition tends to be geared to the maximization of relevance. And communicative principle of relevance refers to the fact that every utterance or the acts of its inferential communication communicates a presumption of its own optimal relevance (as cited in Cen, 2017). The cognitive principle is the basis of the communicative principle, which informs people that a communicator, in the

performance of communicating with others, is looking forward to the optimal relevance. Therefore, the key of carrying a successful communication is the realization of optimal relevance in terms of both the speaker and addressee instead of maximal relevance (ibid, 2016).

3.1.3.3 Optimal Relevance

Every act of ostensive communication communicates a presumption of its own optimal relevance (as cited in Peng, 2014). That is to say, what the speaker and the addressee tries to seek is the optimal relevance. According to Sperber and Wilson, an utterance is optimal relevance if and only if it achieves enough contextual effects to be worth the hearer's attention and it puts the hearer to no gratuitous processing effort in achieving those effects. Therefore, in order to make successful communication, the speaker is supposed to choose the most relevant stimulus for the addressee to realize his or her informative and communicative intention. Otherwise, the communication will be failed.

3.2 Introduction to Figure of Speech

3.2.1 Definition of Figure of Speech

According to Li Yanan and Li Dingkun, figures of speech are the recognized forms of expression which have the different construction, order, or significance from the common ones, aiming to achieve special effects or meanings (as cited in Deng, 2018). Han Zhongqian divided language into two types, including literal language and figurative language. Literal language can be understood from the literal meaning, while figurative meaning should be understood beyond the literal meaning of the words. If a figure of speech is taken literally, the real meaning of it will be mistaken. A figure of speech can achieve a special effect by using words in a distinctive way. Its usage is often different from the usual way as well (Han, 2013).

3.2.2 Function of Figure of Speech

Figures of speech are employed frequently in daily communication, public discourses, literature and so on. They attach the abstract concepts to the concrete objects; therefore, they are instrumental in creating powerful and dynamic communication (Tang, 2016). The use of figures of speech can make one's writing full of life and vitality, activating the reader's or listeners' imagination. When someone employs the figures of speech in his or her writing or speech, he or she does create concrete images in the mind of readers or listeners. These images can make the words more vivid and help the reader or listener to understand the real meaning beyond the words faster and more exactly. What is more, the employment of figures of speech always can make special communicative effects, such as sarcasm, humour, criticism, the defusion of awkwardness and so on. For example, a person says "What a lovely day" in a rainy day when he or she is ready to go out for a picnic. In this case, he or she uses irony to express his or her sarcasm of the bad weather which stops him or her from going out. In a word, by using figures of speech, the users can convey meanings colorfully and the readers and the listeners can receive a multidimensional communication.

3.3 The Application of Relevance Theory to Figures of Speech

As the foundation of the cognitive pragmatics, the Relevance Theory can be used to explain the way of human beings' communication which greatly depends on language and the figure of speech is an indirect instrument to express people's intentions and thoughts by means of language. Therefore, it is not only possible but also meaningful to interpret the use of various figures of speech so as to understand the intended or real meaning behind this kind of special language use. What is more, novel, as a special form of communication which is always used to express people's feelings and thoughts, employs various figures of speech frequently. Therefore, in the following part, this thesis will analyze the various figures of speech in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* via the Relevance Theory.

4. Analysis of the Rhetoric in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland is regarded as one the most classic children's literature which receives a high reputation all over the world. One important reason for its charm is the adoption of various figures of speech, which makes its language more colorful and vivid. Although the figure of speech in this novel is innumerable, five representative ones will be discussed because of the limited time of the author of this thesis and the length of this paper.

4.1 Parody

4.1.1 Definition

According to Oxford Advanced Learner's English-Chinese Dictionary, parody is defined as a piece of writing, music, acting, etc. That deliberately copies the style of sb/sth in order to be amusing. It is a kind of figure of speech which imitates and modifies the existing language forms to generate novel expressions according to speaker's purpose (Xu, 2005). Parody aims to make fun of the original writer, the original work or the fans of them with the imitation of the characteristics of the original language. It is often presented by changing parts of the original work which includes three ways of changing. The first one is to change a word or phrase. The second way is to change several words but with the structure kept. The third way is to change the syntactic structure of a sentence (ibid, 2016). In terms of parody, there are two parts which are called the conventional expressions and parody expressions respectively. The former is the original expression and the later is the one that imitates the original one (Luo, 2012). Generally speaking, the parody can be classified into two categories, which are positive parody and the negative parody respectively. The use of negative parody can always produce the sense of humour and sarcasm and the use of the positive parody tends to add vividness to the language.

4.1.2 Analysis and Examples

From the perspective of Relevance Theory, parody is a kind of special ostensive-inferential mode. According to the Relevance Theory, on the one hand, communication is a process of making ostension, which refers to that the speaker manifests his intention to the hearer in an ostensive way. On the other hand, communication is a process of drawing inferences, which refers to the fact that the addressee draws the implied intention from the information given by the speaker. The general communication has only one process of inference, which is ostension-inference; however, parody has two processes (ibid, 2012). First of all, parody expression is a kind of ostension. In a parody, the speaker gives a stimulus through the parody expression in an ostensive way to manifests his or her informative intention to the addressee. The parody expression alters the cognitive context of the addressee, which lead them to make inferences. According to the cognitive context, including the logical information, lexical information and encyclopedic information stored in their mind, they make less processing efforts, which can help them to achieve the maximal relevance and the maximal contextual effects of the conventional expression which will give an implicit stimulus to the addressee. Secondly, under this two stimulus, the addressee continues to make efforts to draw inferences from the parody expression which has produced a set of assumptions on the basis of their cognitive contexts. After that, the addressee will get the optimal relevance and the optimal contextual effects of the parody expression, which can help the addressee to recognize the communication intention of the speaker. Generally speaking, the contextual effects are always similar between the conventional expression and the parody expression when the parody is positive. While there will exist a great contrast in terms of the contextual effects between the conventional expression and the parody expression, which will produce humour or sarcasm.

In *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, the kind of figure of speech is often used in poems. For example, the poem *You Are Old, Father William* in chapter five:

“You are old, Father William,” the young man said,
‘Are your hair has become very white;
And yet you incessantly stand on your head---
Do you think, at your age, it is right?’
‘In my youth,’ Father William replied to his son,
‘I feared it might injure the brain;
But, now that I’m perfectly sure I have none,
Why, I do it again and again.’
‘You are old,’ said the youth, ‘as I mentioned before,
And have grown most uncommonly fat;
Yet you turned a back-somersault in at the door----
Pray, what is the reason of that?’

....

‘You are old,’ said the youth, ‘one would hardly suppose

That your eye was as steady as ever;

Yet you balanced an eel on the end of your nose----

What made you so awfully clever?’

‘I have answered three questions, and that is enough,

Said his father; ‘don’t give yourself airs!

Do you think I can listen all day to such stuff?

Be off, or I’ll kick you down stairs!’ (Carroll, 1871)

In this poem, the Caterpillar asks Alice to recite the poem *You Are Old, Father William*; however, it seems that Alice has forgotten it, so she does not recite the original poem and she makes an imitation of the didactic poem called *The Old Man’s Comforts and How He Gained Them* which was written by Robert Southey, a famous English romantic poet. This original poem is a long dialogue between a young man and William Father. The young man asks why William Father feels so good and happy but does not feel sad for growing old and the flying time. William Father answers that he always has a positive and appropriate attitude toward life because he has known that the time flies in his youth. When readers (addressees) read this imitation, they may think of the original poem written by Robert Southey because of the explicit stimulus of the parody expression. The original poem expresses the positive life attitude of the old man who reckons that the virtue in youth is rewarded in old age. He is described as a wise man by Robert Southey. Since readers always think that the author will say something relevant and hides the informative intention in the parody, so under the stimulus of the conventional expression, they will make some processing efforts to draw inferences, which will help them to realize the maximal relevance and the maximal contextual effects of the conventional expression. Here, the readers may expect that the parody expression will convey a similar image with the original poem because they assume that what the author says always has the optimal relevance in order to realize the communicative intention. Then, readers will continue to make efforts with the aim of getting the optimal relevance of the parody expression so as to obtain the optimal contextual effects. Generally speaking, when the contextual effects are similar, which means that there exists a little contrast in terms of the contextual effects between the conventional expression and the parody expression, the sense of humour is relatively small. However, in the poem of this novel, the old man is portrayed as one who not only cannot stand on his head and do backward somersault but also can eat a goose with the bones and the beak and balance an eel on the end of your nose. The old man with odd behaviour and absurd words is totally rude and funny, which gives readers a completely different image of the old man. In other words, the contextual effects that readers experience after reading this poem greatly differ from what they expect under the stimulus of the conventional expression, which produces a sense of humour. At the same time, taking the social background at that time into consideration, the use of this negative parody criticizes relentlessly the British society.

4.2 Pun

4.2.1 Definition

In general, puns refer to “the usually humorous use of a word in such a way as to suggest two or more of its meanings or the meaning of another word similar in sound” (Mulken & Dijk & Hoeken, 2005). According to Oxford Advanced Learner’s English-Chinese Dictionary, “puns refer to the clever or humorous use of a word that has more than one meaning, or of words that have different meanings but sound the same. Therefore, puns are a form of figurative speech, a trope in which the message has at least two different meanings. McQuarrie and Mick qualify puns as one of the more complex forms of rhetoric: puns generally require more processing effort than message where simple forms of rhetoric, for example, rhyme or alliteration, are used (McQuarrie & Mick, 1996, 1999).

4.2.2 Analysis and Examples

From the definition, it can be seen that at least two kinds of puns can be categorized, which are polysemy and homophony respectively. However, no matter which category a pun is, it is a kind of language form which is used to express the speaker’s communication intention indirectly and which has two contexts (Yan, 2010). The appropriate understanding of a pun is the process of seeking the

optimal relevance between the pun and the context (Wang, 2005). As has been mentioned above, the degree of relevance is in negative proportion to the degree of processing efforts, which means that the lower the degree of relevance is, the more the processing efforts needs; the degree of relevance is in positive proportion to the contextual effects. A pun is an indirect expression to deliver the speaker's communicative intention; therefore, the degree of relevance between the utterance and the context may be relatively lower. Therefore, when interpreting a pun, the addressee has to expend extra mental effort to draw inferences from the surface meaning of the pun on the basis of his or her cognitive contexts which include his or her logical information, lexical information and encyclopedic information so as to refute the inappropriate assumptions on the surface. Finally, the addressee gets the most appropriate contexts that is used to interpret the pun, which help the addressee to obtain the optimal relevance and identify the real communicative intention.

Though interpreting a pun needs extra processing efforts, the addressee may be pleasant to expend because the certain effort-demanding interpretative paths are favored in exchange for an increase in humorous effects. What is more, sometimes, out of some reasons such as the lack of appropriate cognitive contexts or the ignorance of the optimal cognitive contexts on purpose, the addressee may avoid the optimal relevance between the utterance (the pun) and the cognitive contexts and gives the speaker a response which is relevant to the topic but is far away from the communicative intention of the speaker, which can also produce a sense of humour or sarcasm.

In *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, there are plenty of puns which produces a sense humour, which is one of the important reasons for the charm of this novel. For example:

At last the Mouse, who seemed to be a person of authority among them, called out, ' Sit down, all of you, and listen to me! I'll soon make you dry enough!' They all sat down at once, in a large ring, with the Mouse in the middle. Alice kept her eyes anxiously fixed on it, for she felt sure she would catch a bad cold if she did not get dry very soon.

"Ahem!" said the Mouse with an important air. "Are you all ready? This is the driest thing I know. Silence all round, if you please! (ibid, 1871)

In these sentences, the word "dry" has more than one meaning. Firstly, the word "dry" in the sentence "I'll soon make you dry enough!" means without water or moisture. When readers read this sentence, the word "dry" give them a ostensive stimulus which may produce a set of assumptions. On the basis of their all kinds of cognitive contexts, including their logical information, lexical information and encyclopedic information, they may get an assumption that the Mouse has some method to remove the moisture of Alice's clothes. And then, what readers expect from the following parts may the specific methods that the Mouse will use because this kind of interpretation is the most appropriate and optimal. However, when readers read the following sentence "Are you all ready? This is the driest thing I know.", which is produced by the Mouse, they may feel very puzzled because the word "driest", the superlative form of the word "dry", means boring and uninteresting, which is totally different from the former one. At this time, the readers have to expend extra efforts to continue to seek the optimal relevance. Finally, on the basis of the cognitive context, the readers understand that the method of the Mouse is to tell a boring and uninteresting story and the real communicative intention of the Mouse is to show off himself.

In Victorian era, people obeyed the rigid dogma and they were conservative and dull and even the storybook was full of preaching and killing; at the same time, the school system remained the same all the time; therefore, children were so tired of it. The Mouse in this novel symbolizes the rigid and dull teaching atmosphere. In order to show off himself, the Mouse recited several paragraphs of history textbook drily and he didn't even stop to catch his breath. The author, here, employs the pun not only to produce a sense of humor but also to criticize the society at that time (Zhang, 2012).

4.3 Malapropism

4.3.1 Definition

According to Oxford Advanced Learner's English-Chinese Dictionary, malapropism refers to "an amusing mistake somebody makes when they use a word which sounds similar to the word that they wanted to use, but means something different. It is a brilliant and witty figure of speech in literary work. It comes from a comic character named Mrs. Malaprop. In Sheridan's play called *The Rival* Mrs. Malaprop usually used the incorrect words which sound similar to the words she intends to say. People, therefore, regard this misuse of a word as malapropism. According to Li Changbao (2003),

malapropism has four major functions. Firstly, it makes the depiction of the picture vividly. Secondly, sarcasm can be produced when using malapropism. Thirdly, it can enhance readability and make the work full of humorous effects. Last but not least, work can be more suitable and cater to the certain character. Because of the difference in spelling and pronunciation, some malapropisms can easily be recognized by source language readers, but for target language readers, it cost lots of efforts to obtain meaning of the words, let alone getting the same humor effects (Deng, 2018).

4.3.2 Analysis and Examples

According to the Relevance Theory, successful communication depends upon on the listener's abilities to recognize meanings within the speaker-intended context of utterance. And communication is a process of ostension and inference. In malapropism, the incorrect words that the author give offer an ostensive stimulus. Then, the readers take advantages of their cognitive contexts to draw inferences from the stimulus given by the author. Since the incorrect words are less relevant, the readers need to expend extra efforts to draw inferences so as to produce enough contextual effects, which guide them to obtain the optimal relevance and understand the meaning of the author.

In *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, the author employs plenty of malapropism. For example:

“Well, there was Mystery ,” the Mock Turtle replied, counting off the subject on his flappers.---- “Mystery, ancient and modern, with Seaography; Then Drawing. (ibid, 1871)

In this example, on the basis of the real word, the author purposely uses malapropism words to create humorous effects. He changed “history” to “mystery”, “geography” to “seography”, and “drawing” to “drawling”. All of those words are linked to the sea world in wonderland. Under indirectness where the utterance seems irrelevant or less relevant, the readers are expected to exert much efforts to draw inferences from the ostensive stimulus given by the author on the basis of their cognitive environments so that the optimal relevance can be reached, which will help them to understand the author's real meaning and get the humorous effects.

4.4 Simile

4.4.1 Definition

According to Oxford Advanced Learner's English-Chinese Dictionary, simile refers to “a word or phrase that compares something to something else, using the words like or as, for example a face like a mask or as white as snow; the use of such words and phrases”. As one of the most common figures of speech, simile is widely used in the daily life or in the literary works. It means that an object can be compared to another one for the reason that they are similar with each other in some certain aspect. Through comparison, the simile make the abstract things concrete or make something difficult to understand easy. It can be classified into three categories based on different functions, which are descriptive simile, the illustrative simile and the illuminative simile. Simile is composed of three elements which are the tenor, the vehicle and the connective word. The tenor is the thing described; the vehicle is the thing compared to and the connective word is the word connecting the tenor and the vehicle, such as “like”, “as”, “as if” “as though” and so on.

4.4.2 Analysis and Examples

According to Relevance Theory, communication is a process of ostension-inference, which seeks for the optimal relevance. For the speaker, it is a process of offering the ostensive stimulus so as to deliver his or her informative intention, while for the addressee, it is the process of drawing inferences so as to recognize the communicative intention of the speaker from the information given by the speaker. In simile, the speaker uses the vehicle to offer the ostensive stimulus to the addressee. For example, this sentence “life is like a journey” is a simile. In this sentence, the vehicle “journey” is an ostensive stimulus, which can stimulate the addressee to draw a set of inferences. On the basis of his or her cognitive context, including the logical information, lexical information and encyclopedic information, the addressee may get a series of assumption relevant to journey and because different people have different cognitive contexts, the assumptions may be very different. For example, the journey is long and interesting or the journal is terrible and disappointing. Then, the addressee may continue to draw inferences according to the context of the communication, which can help them to find the optimal relevance between the speaker and himself. Finally the addressee will get the communicative intention of the speaker.

Simile is also employed in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, for example:

Last came a little feeble, squeaking voice, ('That's Bill,' thought Alice,) 'Well. I hardly know--no more, thank ye; I'm better know----but I'm a deal too flustered to tell you---- all I know, something comes at me like a Jack-in-the-box, and up I goes like a sky-rocket!' (ibid)

In this example, there are two similes. In the first simile, the tenor is one of Alice's foot which is super big because she has drink half bottle of a kind of strange water and the vehicle is "Jack-in-the-box which is a children's toy that outwardly consists of a box with a crank. In the second simile, the tenor is the Bill which is an animal and the vehicle is "sky-rocket". Both of the connective words in these two similes are "like". When reading these two similes, from these two vehicles by which the author uses them as ostensive stimulus, readers will draw some inferences. For example, the object is super big and strong and it has some features which are similar to the children's toy. Then, on the basis of their cognitive context, such as their encyclopedic information, logical information and lexical information, readers will find the optimal relevance, which finally guides them to understand the author's communicative intention. By using similes, the readers can imagine how big Alice's feet are after she drinks the strange water concretely. What is more, the use of them adds vividness to the language.

4.5 Allusion

4.5.1 Definition

According to Oxford Advanced Learner's English-Chinese Dictionary, allusion refers to "something that is said or written that refers to or mentions another person or subject in an indirect way.". Allusion is a kind of figure of speech, meaning that saying or writing an object or circumstance covertly or indirectly. Allusions are produced from cultural heritage familiar to people with the same historical and cultural backgrounds which add its cultural characters, including historical events, mythology, religion, literature works, fables and old legends.

4.5.2 Analysis and Examples

People always use old allusions in new contexts to convey their new implications or their intended meaning. According to the Relevance Theory, relevance is determined by context and a sentence may have much different difference in different contexts, which has important meaning in understanding allusions, the successful understanding of allusions is decided by the context of the readers (Liu, 2014). By using an allusion, the author provides an ostensive stimulus for the readers to present his informative intention. And the readers will draw some inferences from the stimulus on the basis of their cognitive context which include logical information, lexical information and encyclopedic information. However, for readers who lack the relevant cultural knowledge, especially for those readers whose cultural background is different from the author, they may not produce enough contextual effects, even if they expend extra efforts. Therefore, they may not reach the optimal relevance, which will stop the readers from recognizing the communicative intention of the author.

In *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, the author also employs some allusions. For example:

'I don't like the look of it at all,' said the King: 'however, it may kiss my hand if it likes.'

'I'd rather not,' the Cat remarked.

'Don't be impertinent,' said the King, 'and don't look at me like that!' He got behind Alice as he spoke.

'A cat may look at a King,' said Alice. 'I've read that in some book, but I don't remember where.' (ibid, 1871)

In this example, the sentence "A cat may look at a King" is an old saying which means that the humble person can have the rights in front of the power. That is to say, no matter who you are and no matter how low your status is, you have the same rights as the king do. When readers read this sentence, if they don't know this old saying, they can draw nothing from this ostensive stimulus given by the author because the cognitive context stored in their mind can not be activated well to help them to draw relevant inferences so as to produce enough contextual effects. Therefore, they can not reach the optimal relevance and they may not understand what the author's communication here is. Taking the social background into consideration, the author uses this allusion to express his criticism of or dissatisfaction with the ruler.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Major Findings

This thesis mainly analyze various figures of speech used in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* under the guidance of the Relevance Theory. In this paper, five important figures of speech which are parody, pun, malapropism, simile and allusion in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* have been discussed one by one. After analysis of the figures of speech from the perspective of Relevance, some main findings have been obtained. Firstly, as an indirect way of communication, understanding all of the figures of speech appropriately involves a process of ostention and inferences, getting the optimal contextual effects and seeking the optimal relevance between the speaker and the addressee. Secondly, the analysis of the figures of speech used in the novel gives some important hits to the reasons or mechanism of the humorous and critical effects of this novel. In the past, people tended to contribute the reasons of the humorous or critical effects to the use of figures of speech purely; however, after the analysis of various figures of speech from the perspective of Relevance Theory, people can interpret the humor from a new angle.

5.2 Limitation

In this paper, the author tries to employ a new perspective to analyze the use of figures of speech employed in literal works, aiming to give a novel interpretation to the use of rhetoric in literature. Although the author of this thesis spares no efforts to make this thesis as perfect as possible, due to all kinds of reasons, this paper is far from satisfaction and inevitably, a few limitation exist. Firstly, due to the limited time and energy, the author does not read the original work written by Sperber and Wilson completely and comprehensively and only read a few chapters. Most of the concepts or ideas of them have been obtained by reading the relevant articles written by other scholars, which may stop the author from understanding the thoughts of the theory exactly and deeply. Finally, it may lead to the relatively shallow analysis of this paper. Secondly, there are more than five kinds of figures of speech in the novel, but only five of them are discussed here, which is not very complete. Therefore, there still exists a big space for future exploration.

5.3 Further Exploration

As has mentioned above, in *Alice's Adventure in Wonderland*, the author employs plenty of figures of speech which can create a sense of humor and criticism. But owing to the limited time, the author have not discussed all of them. What is more, the author have not discussed the mechanism of humor or criticism created by the use of figures of speech under the guidance of the Relevance Theory, which needs to be explored in the future.

All in all, this study provides a little experience towards the study of the use of figures of speech used in literature. Hopefully, its efforts will make some contributions to the future research.

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