Hamlet's Communication Strategies—A Review of Hamlet from Sociolinguistics Approach

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Abstract—**Shakespeare, who has learned Latin in childhood, has a wide vocabulary and no one can overtake him up to now. His masterpiece Hamlet is not only famous for its rich social content and profound philosophy meanings but also extolled by the ingenious use of language. with the analysis of his speeches and different strategies Hamlet used to communicate with different people who have different social and cultural background, This paper tries to study Hamlet from a sociolinguistic perspective in order to show that how different social and cultural background experiences will affect one's communication strategy and how language forwards the plot.**

Index Terms—**Hamlet, sociolinguistics, communication strategy**

I. INTRODUCTION

Shakespeare, a great English poet and dramatist, is called as the greatest drama genius of human beings by Marx. While mentioning him, almost everyone will think of his masterpiece *Hamlet*. The leading character Hamlet, the famous lines "To be or not to be, that is the question" and the sad and graceful love… all of these has been taken delight in talking about them by people. *Hamlet* leaves its mark on history not only due to its rich social content and profound philosophy meanings but also the ingenious use of language. Shakespeare has learned Latin, literature and rhetoric which laid the solid groundwork for his later literature works. There are two linguists who have counted up Shakespeare's language vocabulary: Mueller from Germany and Holden from America. Mueller thinks that the language vocabulary Shakespeare has used is as large as about 15,000; while Holden's conclusion is about 24,000. This is why Shakespeare can use dialogs which seem as the simplest type of language to successfully portray the character of Hamlet. His Hamlet is good at using communication strategies in different human groups and is a shadow of humanists during Renaissance.

In the drama, Hamlet voices his bitter aspirations by talking to himself- soliloquy sometimes; he gives a long sign as an aside sometimes; sparking a debate with others stormily sometimes or allegorizing sulfurous and bitterly sometimes. There are full of endless powerful sentences, magnificent and wonderful writings, or frivolous and uninhibitedly current slangs and disorderly and unrestrainedly jokes. All these extraordinary communication passages can never be better without speaker's language use and his or her social and cultural background. These passages are also one of the hottest points that sociolinguists study nowadays. Actually, Sociolinguistics is still young for there are only 40 years since it established; consequently, it is necessary to introduce this new subject at first.

II. SOCIOLINGUISTICS

"Sociolinguistics is a subject which studies the relationships between language and society and it approaches language from different social subjects as Sociology, Anthropology, Ethnology, Psychology, Geography and so on" (Chinese Encyclopedia, 1988, p.336). Generally speaking, Sociolinguistics takes the 9th International Linguistics Conference as a mark of its establishment. This interdisciplinary research area which began from mid1960s develops, improves and spreads rapidly later. "Compared with other linguistic subjects, sociolinguistics takes language as a kind of social phenomenon. It advocates the language study by being set in the context of human social background where language started and being used" (Yang, 2007, p.10). At present, the study of Sociolinguistics is in full swing. The new subject, of great value to many areas as law, advertisement, diagnosis and education, now becomes part of our social culture and has attracted more and more attention.

This paper divides Sociolinguistics into three main schools according to different research area. The three schools focus on different aspects. The first one focuses on the variation and variant of language, and Social Dialectics is its representative subject. Social Dialectics, also called language school or variant school, mainly explores and studies the relation between language variation/variant and social aspects, belonging to the Micro-sociolinguistics. Its core issue is

just the dialect which has much to do with job occupation, classes, ages and gender. The second school starts from this point of view: language problem is part of social problems; it specifically studies the more actual social language problems like diglossia/bilingualism, multilingualism or language planning. This school belongs to the Macro-sociolinguistics and sociology of Language is its representative subject. The last one pays more attention to the combining with other subjects and emphasizes on actual communication among people in our daily life. The main subjects include Ethnography of Communication, Social Psychology of language and Interactional Sociolinguistics. All the strategies used below belong to Interactional Sociolinguistics.

Interactional Sociolinguistics is a newborn subject and widely identified by public as an interdisciplinary and closely linked to Anthology, Sociology, Psychology, and other subjects. It "explores and studies language used in real interaction process of daily life to analyze how mutual influence works between language structure as well as its using model and interactional communicating, and make contributions for partners to finish interactional communications in real or scenic situation" (Lin, 2003, p.412), and "it applies to situations of all kinds and do not assume complete cultural homogeneity of linguistic and cultural background" (Gumperz, 2003, p.4). Interactional Sociolinguistics analyzes such interactional communication to show how some specific communication strategies that people used affect workplace climate and individuals to achieve their communicative goal.

To sum up, Sociolinguistics, a young subject has a wide development space and must make contribution to language research and language development as well as its application. At the same time, in literature, "no matter how creative the author is, his language must be limited by social factors" (Li, 2002, p.694), dialogues of portrayed characters must be affected by individual's social and cultural background. In Hamlet, Hamlet uses different strategies to communicate with different people to achieve his final goal-revenge for his father. This paper tries to analyze the dialogues between Hamlet and others from approaches in Sociolinguistics to show his changing in using strategies to various kinds of people whose social cultural backgrounds are different as well.

III.   HAMLET'S STRATEGIES

The author of this paper divides all characters in Hamlet into three types: enemy, lover, and friend. The first kind is two "foxes" who have been living in the palace of Demark, enemies of Hamlet: King of Demark- Claudius and Principle Secretary of the State -Polonius. They are the ones who are so familiar with mutual suspicion and deception and good at going out of their way to curry favor to others. The second type is lover whom Hamlet loves and who loves Hamlet deeply as well. They are Queen of Demark, Hamlet's mother-Gertrude and Polonius' daughter-Ophelia. They love and be loved as deep as being hurt by Hamlet's bitter cruel words. The last one is Hamlet's friends. There are loyal ones like Horatio and perfidious old classmates Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. During his revenge, all the communications with these people show high wisdom and also the weak characteristics. The employment of strategies helps to develop the plot of this drama.

A.   To Enemies-Give an Irrelevant Answer or Change Topic

Hamlet's dialogues with these two people are full of puns and paradoxes which are used to make others feel that Hamlet is mad and also to satirize Claudius and Polonius, thus, they can relax their vigilance to Hamlet's revenge. At first, appellation Hamlet uses shows that they are not closely related at all. After usurping his brother's throne, Claudius called Hamlet in the hall as "My cousin Hamlet, and my son-" (Act I, Scene II: 496), which sounds full of love. But Hamlet says "A little more than kin, and less than kind" in return. The bad or ice indifferent relation is uncovered. To traitorous minister Polonius, the situation is even worse: Hamlet adds his irony. Look at this dialogue:

Polonius: Do you know me, my lord?

Hamlet: Excellent well, you are a fishmonger. (Act II, Scene II: 523)

Hamlet is the prince of Demark and that is why Polonius use "my lord"-for his social class. No matter how unwilling Polonius is, he has to respect Hamlet all the time. However, Hamlet needs not to do this and he uses "fishmonger" instead which is the first bitter jests he used to satirize old fool Polonius. Thus, "fishmonger" is often explained as slang for "pimp". It just expresses how deeply Hamlet loathes and abhors Polonius. Secondly, Hamlet always gives an irrelevant answer or change the topic directly. The followings are good examples.

Claudius: How fares our cousin Hamlet?

Hamlet: Excellent i'faith, of the chameleon's dish, I eat the air; promise-crammed-you cannot feed capons so.

Claudius: I have nothing with this answer, Hamlet. These words are not mine. (Act III, Scene II: 543)[1]

Claudius: Now, Hamlet, where's Polonius?

Hamlet: At supper.

Claudius: At supper? Where?

Hamlet: Not where he eats, but where'a is eaten- a certain convocation of politic worms are e'en at him: your worm is your only emperor for diet, we fat all creatures else to fat us, and we fat ourselves for maggots. Your fat king and your lean beggar is but variable service, two dishes, but to one table-that's the end. (Act IV, Scene III: 565)

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[1] All the quotations of dialogues in this paper are from the following book: William Shakespeare. Tom Griffith. (eds.) (2005). William Shakespeare: The Great Comedies and Tragedies. London: Wordsworth Editions: 488-602.

Actually, there are not too much communication between Hamlet and Claudius. Once they talk, Hamlet always uses this strategy to fend off Claudius' question. Claudius is a well-educated and wise man as Hamlet, that's why Hamlet chooses this strategy; if not, Claudius would see through Hamlet's intention of retaliation. In spite of communication like that, Claudius has been suspecting Hamlet the whole story. On the face of it, to communicate with someone who has the similar social and cultural background, Hamlet has to use this communication strategy-give an irrelevant answer or change topic directly-to achieve his goal. Of course, he cannot use it all the time, no one could do that. The same thing happens to Polonius, the only difference is the addition-jests. Besides "fishmonger", there is more:

Polonius: Not I, my lord.

Hamlet: Then I would you were so honest a man. (Act II, Scene II: 523)

That is to say that Polonius is lower than the lowest of the low, worse than the worst of bad. In fact, Polonius has found something in Hamlet's dialogues, he says, "Though this be madness, yet there is method in't"(Act II, Scene II: 524), however, he would rather to believe that Hamlet is mad and his daughter is the reason, may be more proud of that idea. These strategies protect one again to hide his real thoughts.

B.   To Lovers- Use Bitter Language to Express True Feelings

It is known from the story that Hamlet actually loves the two women deeply: his mother-Gertrude and his girlfriend-Ophelia. Nevertheless, when talking with them, he chooses the most brutal and rough language and even lots of disgusting words. As a matter of fact, Hamlet is trying to express his true feelings: to his mother, he shows his displeasure of her second marriage with Claudius and wants to tell her the truth of his father's death; to Ophelia, Hamlet just wants to protect her to be away from this dangerous revenge; however, the results never come as expected.

What Hamlet calls his mother "your husband's brother's wife" (Act III, Scene IV: 556) is the soft needle he uses to hurt her mother. When telling the truth, he says:

"O shame, where is thy blush?

Rebellious hell,

If thou canst mutine in a matron's bones,

To flaming youth let virtue be as wax

And melt in her own fire. " (Act III, Scene IV: 556)

Each word of each sentence can drive Gertrude mad, but Hamlet never stops. Accordingly, the revenge to Polonius is not only for his father's death, but also his mother's second marriage. This is because of the society Hamlet lives in: they take this kind of marriage as disgraceful one, and what's more his uncle to his father is just like hell to heaven. All the interactional dialogues show readers an unconventional and uninhibited Hamlet.

To Ophelia, Hamlet's more like this: "Get thee to a nunnery, why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners?" or "God hath given you one face and you make yourselves another, you jig, you amble, and you lisp, you nickname God's creatures, and make your wantonness your ignorance" (Act III, Scene I: 538-9). "Jig, amble, lisp and wantonness" each word goes through Ophelia's body like a knife. However, if listening more carefully, she would find this "I did love you once" (Act III, Scene I: 539). This is true, but being buried by the cruel words. In order to pretend to be mad more truly and believable, Hamlet has no choice but pick this strategy; Ophelia's death will be the last thing he can image. Thus, all the used strategies promote more development of the plot.

C.   To Friends- Neither to Humble Oneself Nor to Show Disrespects and Reforms Them

Shakespeare loves to admire great friendship in his works. In Hamlet, Horatio' loyalty has been taken as the classical one. What Horatio calls Hamlet proves that well: "your poor servant ever". Horatio is supposed to call Hamlet like a friend, but considering the social and cultural background, he does not call Hamlet like that, but he calls him "my lord" the whole drama. Instead of it, he has done whatever he can to help Hamlet. At the last moment, Horatio calls him "sweet prince" (Act VI, Scene II: 601) soulfully. The different classes decide the appellation, at the same time, the love and friendship words as well. Hamlet's success cannot be accomplished without Horatio. So even when dying, Hamlet chooses Horatio, the only one he trusts most, to utter his last words:

"O God, Horatio, what a wounded name,

Things standing thus unknown shall live behind me!

If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart,

Absent thee from felicity awhile,

And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain,

To tell my story." (Act VI, Scene II: 600)

To the hypocritical friends who influenced by the social and cultural aspects as well, Hamlet does not use bitter and cruel language but reforming them instead. Like Rosencrantz and Guildenstern who has been classmates of Hamlet. They may be right, the society is wrong: they must obey the King's order. So Hamlet chooses to reform them. As Hamlet says: "To withdraw with you, why do you go about to recover the wind of me, as if you would drive me into a toil?"(Act III, Scene II: 551), actually Hamlet knows exactly what they want to do "That you must teach me: but let me conjure you, by the rights of our fellowship, by the consonancy of our youth, by the obligation of our ever-preserved love, and by what more dear a better proposer can charge you withal, be even and direct with me whether you were sent for or no? "(Act II, Scene II: 526) Just because these strategies as a magic bean to let them open their mouth "My lord,

we were sent for."(Act II, Scene II: 526). Just as mentioned above, to them, Hamlet neither to humble oneself nor to show disrespects. On the other side, Hamlet says "Why, look you now, how unworthy a thing you make of me! You would play upon me, you would seem to know my stops, you would pluck out the heart of my mystery, you would sound me from my lowest note to the top of my compass-and there is much music, excellent voice, in this little organ, yet cannot you make it speak. 'Sblood, do you think I am easier to be played on than a pipe? Call me what instrument you will, though you can fret me, you can not play upon me" (Act III, Scene II: 551). In a word, Hamlet accomplished his plan finally.

IV. CONCLUSION

Reviewing Hamlet's communication with other characters in the Hamlet from Sociolinguistics, the author has found out different kinds of strategies applied for three kinds of people. With studying the different strategies, we can see that contextualization strategies are decided by the social and cultural background of both speaker and hearer which also further illustrate that language is a social phenomenon, what's more, we truly appreciate the excellent details of Shakespeare's language using for depicting the characters and promote the developments of the plot.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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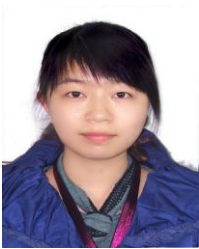
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