

## Cultural Conflicts and Integrations Between the Two Generations in *The Joy Luck Club* From Pragmatics

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Received 8 September 2020; accepted 26 December 2020  
Published online 26 February 2021

### Abstract

This paper analyzes talks between two generations based on two important methodologies of Pragmatics to find out useful pragmatic meanings from their conversations in *The Joy Luck Club* and reveals the changes in *The Joy Luck Club* from conflict to integration. Besides, reading many books, periodicals, and papers about Pragmatics to make sense of the back ground of this novel helps to understand the essence of this paper with the combination of Pragmatics. Through typical 11 conversations, we have better understanding about the change from cultural conflicts to cultural integration. These four mothers and daughters in *The Joy Luck Club* have gone through many difficulties in order to survive in America and integrate themselves into America culture, teaching their daughters how to cope with conflicts. In this sense, it lays a strong methodology foundation to highlight the theme, which contributes to analyzing the implication of conversation.

**Key words:** *The Joy Luck Club*; Pragmatics; Culture conflict; Culture integration

Fuo, J. Y. (2021). Cultural Conflicts and Integrations between the Two Generations in *The Joy Luck Club* From Pragmatics. *Studies in Literature and Language*, 22(1), 61-65. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/sll/article/view/12051>  
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/12051>

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Literature and language also are indispensable parts in literary works. However, in the early years, scholars partly focus on feminism, female identity, symbolic meaning,

oriental and western element, and both conflicts and integration in mother and daughters' relationship. But with the development of linguistics since 1950s, many researches have been carried out from linguistic view. Examples are as follows, Xu Dan employs the speech act theory and the cooperative principle to cultural integration and conflicts, Zhu Susu employs the cooperative principle and the politeness principle to search for keywords in the corpus in order to study the deep meaning in the process of conflicts.

These four mothers, who inherit traditional Chinese culture of modesty and demureness, often express wrong thoughts but they carry ambitions for their daughters. However, misunderstandings are often made since daughters do not know intentions of their mothers. As a result, these conversations between mother and daughter provide juicy corpus in the research.

In order to distinguish the former studies from this paper, the new conversations and new perspectives of this novel are presented in this paper to make a clear analysis of the conflicts and integrations of two generations. In this paper, to demonstrate the conflicts and integration of this novel between two generations, the two important theory of Pragmatics, the speech act theory and the cooperative principle, become the theoretical support to pragmatic analysis. Besides, the new perspectives, such as equality, custom, and the relationships between mother and daughter, are talked about in this study.

### 2. PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF CULTURAL CONFLICTS IN *THE JOY LUCK CLUB*

#### 2.1 An Introduction to Cultural Conflicts

At the beginning of *The Joy Luck Club*, the author writes,

“On her journey she cooed to the swan: ‘In America I will have a daughter just like me. But over there nobody will say

her worth is measured by the loudness of her husband's belch. Over there nobody will look down on her, because I will make her speak only perfect American English. And over there she will always be too full to swallow any sorrow! She will know my meaning, because I will give her this swan—a creature that became more than what was hoped for." and "This feather may look worthless, but it comes from afar and carries with it all my good intentions." And she waited, year after year, for the day she could tell her daughter this in perfect American English." (Tan, 1989, p.17),

which represents mother's great intentions for their daughter.

These four Chinese mothers come to America with great intentions. However, due to cultural differences and misunderstandings, there are big gaps between them, lying plenty of conflicts among them. through a large number of communications, conflicts can be found easily since language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols used for human communication.

Conflicts between mothers and daughters are shown in several aspects. Firstly, language is the main point. For example, Lindo says, "I was born in Taiyuan", she said, "Taiwan is no China." And Anmei said, "Why can you talk about this with psyche-atic and not with your mother?" "psychiatrist" "psyche-atricks," she corrected herself. From the examples above, it can be concluded that knowing and understanding each other are of utmost importance for people. So language plays an important part in communication and mutual understanding. Besides, from the perspective of cross-cultural marriage in this novel, views on marriage are totally different that are represented in equality and customs. These four Chinese-American daughters are undoubtedly kinds of productions mixed with American culture and Chinese culture. On the one hand, Chinese mothers want their daughters to be obedient and excellent but not to duplicate their tragic experiences any more meanwhile mothers also instill traditional culture to their daughters. On the other hand, however, their daughters, who are born in America, a country full of equality, freedom and dream, receive advanced education. Daughters' treatment on their marriage tracing to their mothers' thinking patterns, causes many marriage crisis. In the following chapter, the cross-cultural conflicts in *The Joy Luck Club* will be analyzed through these two aspects. (Xu, 2011)

## 2.2 Pragmatic Analysis of Conflicts of Language

Since *The Joy Luck Club* is an American-Chinese literature, its language in this novel is distinguishing from other works written in English. Mothers and daughters often switch languages between English and Chinese. This situation often appears in mothers since they are not good at English in foreign environment. When confronted with unfamiliar expressions in daily life, they often use Chinese in pingying or unauthentic English expressions though their daughters do not know Chinese, which

becomes one reason of misunderstandings between mother and daughter. Several conversations from *The Joy Luck Club* are selected to reveal misunderstandings because of languages. (Xu, 2011)

"Who's ready for dessert?" he asks, reaching into the freezer.

"I'm full," I say.

"Lena cannot eat ice cream," says my mother.

"So it seems. She's always on a diet."

"No, she never eats it. She doesn't like."

And now Harold smiles and looks at me puzzled, expecting me to translate what my mother has said. (Tan, 1989, p.162)

This talk is from Chapter American Translation. Lena's mother, Yingying, visits Lena and her son-in-law, looks the equal sheet on refrigerator. She saw the ice cream payment, but Lena always hates eating ice cream. Yingying says Lena do not eat ice cream. According to the cooperative principle, Yingying respects the principle of quality, she says the truth of Lena hating ice cream. Harold do not know Lena's habit, so he answers Lena is keeping a diet in order to avoid embarrassment meanwhile Harold is respecting the principle of relation but violating the principle of quality. Yingying observes Harold do not know hers words, so Yingying says Lena's habit again, hoping Harold could know Lena's habit. But Harold do not know the meaning of Yingying.

"I guess we've evolved to just winning in the toy and electronics market," I said.

"How do you know this?" she asked eagerly.

"You see it on everything. Made in Taiwan."

"Ai!" she cried loudly. "I'm not from Taiwan!"

And just like that, the fragile connection we were starting to build snapped. (Tan, 1989, p.183)

From this conversation, Waverly is trying to make judgement about Lindo's hometown, but Waverly pronounces mistakenly. She pronounces Taiyuan as Taiwan, which irritates Lindo. Waverly do not know the quite difference between Taiyuan and Taiwan, she thinks them different in pronunciation. Lindo raises with a question of violation of the maxim of the manner, because she has found the mistake Waverly has made in pronunciation. (Xu, 2011)

From this talk, mother and daughter are disconnected by wrong pronunciation and misunderstand each other. As a result, language is a big problem between mother and daughter.

## 2.3 Pragmatic Analysis of Conflicts in Marriage

### 2.3.1 Pragmatic Analysis of Cultural Conflicts Over Equality in Marriage

In traditional society, women, who are angels of the house, should obey and love her husband in any condition. Mothers, who have suffered from plenty of tortures in China, received and accepted these pieces of beliefs. Their daughters are instilled with these beliefs so that these daughters are at a loss when being caught in marriage crisis. There are several examples to improve.

"I don't know.... I don't know. Everything...the way we account for everything. What we share. What we don't share. I'm so tired of it, adding things up, subtracting, making it come out even. I'm sick of it."

"You were the one who wanted the cat."

"What are you talking about?"

"All right. If you think I'm being unfair about the exterminators, we'll both pay for it."

"That's not the point!" (Tan, 1989, p.164)

This conversation is from Chapter American translation. Lena tries to talk with Harold about equality that they share. But being unable to get Lena's point instead of talking about the cat, Harold violates the maxim of relation. Next, Lena performs the illocutionary act to express her meaning not about the cat but the equality. Harold continues to violate the maxim of relation and he cannot understand Lena's intention. Harold and Lena share things equally after marriage. Harold bought Lena a cat that is a symbol of love, but Lena pay for the exterminators solely. This marriage seems to be equal but love is not equal.

Last month, when he was leaving for a two-day dermatology course in Los Angeles, he asked if I wanted to come along and then quickly, before I could say anything, he added, "Never mind, I'd rather go alone."

"More time to study," I agreed.

"No, because you can never make up your mind about anything," he said.

And I protested, "But it's only with things that aren't important." (Tan, 1989, p.120)

This conversation is from Chapter Half and half. To begin with, Rose and Ted have no equal status. Rose, a Vietnamese, marries Ted, who is an American and a perfect husband. As a result, their races are different. Ted does not care Rose's nationality, but Rose really cares. Secondly, Rose inherits the traditional belief that a wife should love her husband under any conditions. As a result, Rose has no idea about decisions, but giving authority to Ted without spirit. She thinks that Ted's love is more worthy than hers.

Ted is going for a course while he wants Rose to go with him but violating the maxim of quality. From the literal meaning, Ted wants to go alone, but he wants to stimulate Rose to go with him and express her idea. Rose knows Ted's meaning, but she tries to pretend to be a tender and considering wife so she answers him with a satisfactory answer meanwhile she violates the maxim of relation. Ted sees Rose hasn't known his intention, so he performs a locutionary act to express his intention directly. But Rose believes that Ted is the most valuable thing. So, in the process of looking down upon her love, Rose loses the initiative in love, for which Ted is going to get a divorce with her at last.

### 2.3.2 Pragmatic Analysis of Cultural Conflicts Over Freedom

In cross-cultural marriage, the wife, who inherits the spirit of tolerance in traditional Chinese culture that wife needs

to follow husband's advice under no condition, always suppresses her spirit and idea. However, as woman's status has improved with the development of society, women's spirit has been liberated. They try to express their ideas loudly and freely.

"I've already found a place," I said quickly, because right then I knew where I was going to live. His eyebrows raised in surprise and he smiled—for the briefest moment—until I said, "Here."

"What's that?" he said sharply. His eyebrows were still up, but now there was no smile.

"I said I'm staying here," I announced again.

"Who says?" He folded his arms across his chest, squinted his eyes, examining my face as if he knew it would crack at any moment. That expression of his used to terrify me into stammers.

Now I felt nothing, no fear, no anger. "I say I'm staying, and my lawyer will too, once we serve you the papers," I said.

Ted pulled out the divorce papers and stared at them. His x's were still there, the blanks were still blank. "What do you think you're doing? Exactly what?" he said.

And the answer, the one that was important above everything else, ran through my body and fell from my lips: "You can't just pull me out of your life and throw me away." (Tan, 1989, p.196)

Ted and Rose are going to get a divorce, so they have a talk face to face in their courtyard. Ted is determined to get a divorce with Rose, but he does not want to talk about divorce resolutely. As a result, he proposed an illocutionary act, meaning that Rose does not worries about no home to live in. but Rose says she is going to live here though they are divorced. Rose violating the maxim of relation because Ted just wants Rose to move out the house but Rose refuses to move. Ted is surprised to hear about these words, because Rose always obeys to Ted and she has no idea about Ted's affairs. Ted violates the maxim of quantity, knowing that Rose does not want to move out. Rose is not afraid of Ted leaving herself anymore and she expresses her thought directly with a locutionary act. Ted is surprised at the change in Rose's attitude. Without blame and impatience, Ted wants to know Rose's thought with an illocutioary act. Rose answers him with a locutionary act and refuses to be treated unfairly. Finally, Rose dares express her thought freely and is aware of her worth.

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## 3. PART III PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF CULTURAL INTEGRATION IN *THE JOY LUCK CLUB*

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### 3.1 An Introduction to Cultural Integration

In *The Joy Luck Club*, four mothers come to America, facing plenty of difficulties, such as different customs, traditions, languages and belief systems. They all try to integrate their own cultures with these cultures of

America and also the popular culture of their daughters meanwhile daughters also integrate American cultures with Chinese culture from their mothers. Since the integration of cultures will lead to mutual understandings and reconciliation, all of them spare no effort to integrate these cultures in order to narrow the gap between mother and daughter, in other words, conflicts of two different cultures.

### 3.2 Pragmatic Analysis of Cultural Integration of Language

Although improper languages would cause misunderstandings between mother and daughter, these two generations try to overcome the obstacles in their own ways and integrate the two cultures in unique ways.

*"A mother is best. A mother knows what is inside you," she said above the singing voices.*

*"A psyche-atricks will only make you hulihudu, make you see heimongmong." (Tan, 1989, p.188)*

In terms of the Speech Act Theory, An-mei performs an illocutionary act, expressing that Rose should tell her problem to An-mei. Mother does not know how to describe her intentions, as a result, she says in Chinese words hulihudu and heimongmong, which flouts the maxim of manner, but Rose understand mother's meaning by thinking of her surroundings and experiences. (Xu, 2011)

*So with him, she spoke in moods and gestures, looks and silences, and sometimes a combination of English punctuated by hesitations and Chinese frustration: "Shwo buchulai"—Words cannot come out. So my father would put words in her mouth. (Tan, 1989, p.106)*

This conversation is from chapter The Voice from the Wall. Lena says her mother sometimes expresses her thought in Chinese or gestures. Shwo buchulai means her mother does not know how to express her idea in English accurately. Yingying violates the maxim of relation, which produces misunderstandings. But being helped by her father, Lena is aware of mother's meaning.

### 3.3 Pragmatic Analysis of Cultural Integration of Chinese American Female Identity Between Mother and Daughter

#### 3.3.1 Pragmatic Analysis of Cultural Integration of Chinese American Female Identity From Mother's Perspective

Cultural integration is never defined, but is constructed by different sources of culture and languages. In other words, it is defined as one's sense of belonging to certain beliefs, cultures, and ethnic group. Four mothers, carrying with traditional Chinese culture, migrate from China. In order to live better in America, they try to integrate foreign culture system with Chinese belief system. (Qin, 2012)

*"Ma, why don't you ever use those new dishes I bought you? If you didn't like them, you should have told me. I could have changed the pattern."*

*"Of course, I like," she said, irritated. "Sometime I think something is so good, I want to save it. Then I forget I save it." (Tan, 1989, p.208)*

This conversation is from Chapter Best Quality. Jinmei feels upset because she picks up the bad crab when having dinner with Lindo's families. Suyuan comforts her daughter, Jinmei. Jinmei is confused with her mother all the time. She asks her mother why she does not use these plates that Jinmei bought her, performing an illocutionary act with request. Suyuan is so enjoyable with these plates that she grudges using these plates, following the maxim of quality. But Jinmei misapprehended her mother before. Now, she comprehends her mother.

*"A girl is like a young tree," she said. "You must stand tall and listen to your mother standing next to you. That is the only way to grow strong and straight. But if you bend to listen to other people, you will grow crooked and weak. You will fall to the ground with the first strong wind. And then you will be like a weed, growing wild in any direction, running along the ground until someone pulls you out and throws you away." (Tan, 1989, p.191)*

This conversation is from Chapter Without Wood. An-mei tells Rose that she needs to see her worth but An-mei violates the maxim of manner. An-mei compares Rose to a young tree, and she is supposed to know her own worth, refusing any unfair decisions. However, these words confuse Rose until it is dawn on her that Ted and she are equal to share love and take responsibility. An-mei's mother, who was raped, did not know her own worth before her suicide. It is until An-mei witnesses her mother's death that she can distinguish sham and reality, seeing the essence of life.

*"It makes us look devious." She looks pleased.*

*"What is this word, 'devious,'" I ask.*

*"It means we're looking one way, while following another. We're for one side and also the other. We mean what we say, but our intentions are different."*

*"People can see this in our face?"*

*My daughter laughs. "Well, not everything that we're thinking. They just know we're two-faced."*

*"This is good?"*

*"This is good if you get what you want."*

*I think about our two faces. I think about my intentions. Which one is American? Which one is Chinese? Which one is better? If you show one, you must always sacrifice the other. (Tan, 1989, p.266)*

This talk is from Chapter Doubleface. Lindo and her daughter Waverly go for a haircut. Lindo finds that Waverly's nose is like her devious nose. Lindo asks Waverly the meaning of devious. Waverly explains it to Lindo, following the maxim of quality. Lindo comprehends daughter's meaning, and asks Waverly whether people can see through the devious thing under the face. Waverly laughs about the innocence of her mother, saying that people will not observe the devious character but these



two different faces, which follows the maxim of quality. Lindo asks Waverly whether this devious character is good with an illocutionary act. But Waverly follows the principle of quality, but violates the principle of relation. She says what she knows, but does not tell the intentions of Lindo. Lindo also reflects on her identity, whether she wears the American mask or the Chinese counterpart. At last, Lindo takes a balance between Chinese culture and American one.

### 3.3.2 Pragmatic Analysis of Cultural Integration of Chinese American Female Identity From Daughter's Perspective

Cultural integration is related to Chinese American female identity that is one's sense belonging to certain culture or ethnic groups. Cultural integration requires people distinguishing these different cultures around them so that they are able to understand the essence of one kind of culture and avoid culture conflicts. (Qin, 2012)

"Someday you will see," said my mother. "It is in your blood, waiting to be let go." (Tan, 1989, p.267)

This conversation is from Chapter a Pair of Tickets. Jinmei comes to China for having a reunion with her two sisters. When arriving at China, Jinmei thinks herself a Chinese in blood, which reminds her of that her mother have said these similar words before her mother's death. Suyuan, however, violates the maxim of manner since she does not express clearly so that Jingmei is confused with her words.

## CONCLUSION

In the final analysis, Pragmatics helps to reduce cultural conflicts. The speech act theory enables us to know whether the implication exists in speaker's words. As for The cooperative principle, it works how to find out the implication, and what we should do to avoid misunderstandings, contributing to cultural integration.

On the other hand, the process from cultural conflicts to cultural integration is propitious to the development of pragmatics, assisting in recognizing pragmatics better.

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