

# *The Translation of Kunqu Opera from the Perspective of Dynamic Multimodal Discourse: A Case Study of Li Linde's English Version of Peony Pavilion*

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**Abstract:** Kunqu opera is a treasure in Chinese traditional culture and art, especially in opera art. The two forms of closet drama and on-stage drama have complemented each other and are in parallel since the advent. This study further confirms the feasibility and explanatory power of the dynamic multimodal discourse analysis framework for the stage performance of Kunqu opera and provides a new research perspective for it.

## **1. Introduction**

In combination with the dynamic multimodal discourse analysis framework based on systemic functional linguistics theory proposed by Zhang (2009)[1], this paper conducts an in-depth analysis on the stage performance of Interrupted Dream in Peony Pavilion (youth edition, translated by Li Linde, 2004) [2] from cultural context, situational context and modality, and further develops the dynamic multi-modal discourse analysis framework in the field of Kunqu opera. This is of reference value for the study of other Kunqu operas and other traditional Chinese dramas.

## **2. Study on the Translation of Kunqu Opera Peony Pavilion**

In current translations of Kunqu opera, there is a large number and variety of translated versions of Peony Pavilion - the representative of Kunqu opera. Full translations, selected translations, and compilations have been published, totaling 15, but the research on it is far behind. Foreign studies have not yet discovered. In recent years, it has just attracted the attention of some scholars in China, but there is no related monograph published, and no systematic and comprehensive research results have been published. Therefore, it is necessary to further analyze the dynamic multimodal discourse analysis and translation methods of Kunqu opera, especially Kunqu opera stage performance. The existing researches on the translation of Peony Pavilion mostly equate the original works as dramas with general literary styles without paying attention to their uniqueness as dramas from the perspective of lexical, syntactic, textual, cultural or some existing translation theories. Therefore, it is mostly the literary reading of the translation, that is, the translation study of closet drama. For the study of stage performance, Multimodal Perspective on Kunqu Opera Translation: A Case Study of English Translation of Peony Pavilion of Zhu (2015) [3] conducted a comparative study of the five

versions translated by Bai Zhi, Zhang Guangqian, Wang Rongpei, Li Linde and Wang Ban, and it is found that all five translators pay attention to the multimodality of the original work and express it in different degrees in their respective translations. However, the five translators' translation of the visual modality, the interactive meaning and the compositional meaning in the original work are not balanced in the translation, and the transmission of auditory modal information is also different. Therefore, the author advocates breaking through the traditional translation of the binary opposition between the closet drama and the on-stage drama, and returning to the artistic essence of Kunqu opera – multimodality.

### 3. Theoretical Framework and Research Methods

#### 3.1 Theoretical Framework

The dynamic multimodal discourse analysis framework based on systemic functional linguistics theory is proposed by Zhang (2009) to study the multimodal relationship between images, words and discourses in dynamic multimodal discourse. The framework consists of cultural context level, situational context level, content level and expression level.

From the perspective of this framework, under the influence of certain cultural contexts, the expression of the speaker's discourse meaning should be restricted by the ideology and genre system. At the same time, the meaning of the discourse expressed should be selected according to the context and the purpose of communication. As time progresses, the relationship between different modal discourses also changes dynamically. Sometimes language is the main form of communication in the overall construction of discourse. Other modes such as gestures, postures, and music strengthen the language, otherwise it is opposite. The relationship change between visual modality and auditory modality is closely related to the construction of the entire discourse.

The analysis framework of Dynamic Multimodal Discourse is as shown below Figure 1:

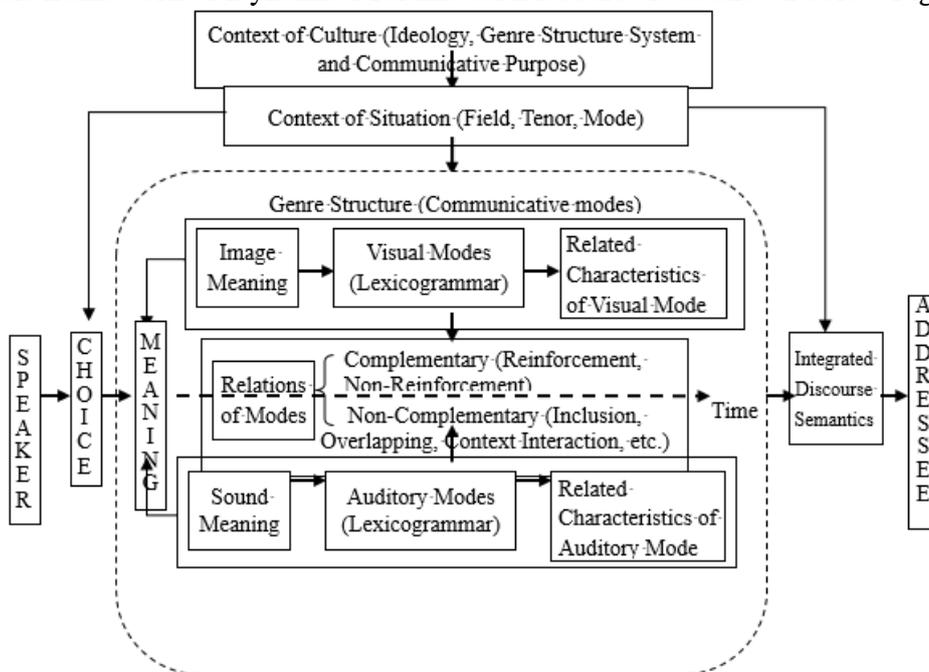


Figure 1: Analysis Framework of Dynamic Multimodal Discourse (Zhang, 2009)

### 3.2 Research Methods

The research method is mainly dynamic multimodal discourse analysis method. In combination with the Dynamic Multimodal Discourse Analysis (DMDA) framework based on systemic functional linguistics theory proposed by Zhang Delu (2009), this paper conducts in-depth analysis on the stage performance of Interrupted Dream in Peony Pavilion (youth edition, translated by Li Linde) from cultural context, situational context and modality. The three criteria of Zhang’s segmentation of dynamic multimodal discourse are used to segment the performance video of Interrupted Dream.

The genre structure of this performance video consists of 4 phases (Ph.), 12 sub-phases(Sub-P.) and 12 episodes (Ep.) , 16 events(E.) and 16 images(E.). It can be seen that each phase consists of several sub-phases, each sub-phase can be divided into several episodes, each episode can be divided into several events, the events are realized by images, each image marks a discourse unit, a grammatical process and a unit of information. The result of the video segmentation is shown in the Figure 2:

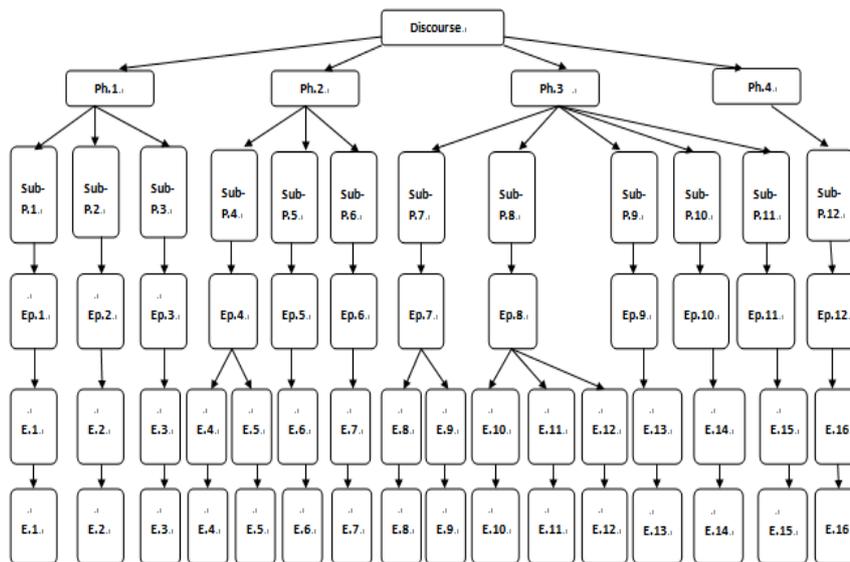


Figure 2: Transcription of Interrupted Dream Video Text

## 4. Dynamic Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Kunqu Opera Peony Pavilion

### 4.1 Cultural Context

Cultural context includes both cultural customs and social norms, and refers to the social and cultural background related to verbal communication (Yang, 2014) [4]. The former is the collective habit or life pattern of people in language, behavior and psychology, and the latter refers to the various regulations and restrictions made by a society on verbal communication activities. According to the purpose of communication, cultural context determines the purpose of discourse communication.

The performance video of Peony Pavilion is a language communication activity in which the voice language is the main means, the body language is used as an auxiliary means, and the props and backgrounds are used to fully express the theme of the repertoire, tell the story or express emotions, and perform the propaganda.

The cultural context of Interrupted Dream video text is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Cultural Context of Interrupted Dream Video Text

Discourse	Sub-phase	Event	The Purpose of Discourse Communication
Phase 1 Making up	Episode 1 Raochiyou	Event 1	showing Du Liniang's dissatisfaction with the situation and her sensation to love
	Episode 2 Bubujiao	Event 2	showing the inner activity of Du Liniang's make up in front of mirror before visiting the garden.
	Episode 3 Zuifugui	Event 3	showing Du Liniang is immersed in the gorgeous appreciation of the costumes and amazing beauty.
Phase 2 Visiting garden	Episode 4 Zhaoluopao	Event 4	showing Du Liniang's feelings of turning sorrow and sighing when watching the scenery in the garden.
		Event 5	
	Episode 5 Haojiejie	Event 6	through the feelings of Du Liniang on the specific scene, to give further grievances.
	Episode 6 Gewwei	Event 7	showing the sadness mood of Du Liniang after the view of scenery.
Phase 3 Meeting in dream	Episode 7 Shanpoyang	Event 8	Chun Xiang temporarily left, Du Liniang went to sleep after a bad mood.
		Event 9	
	Episode 8 Shantaohong	Event 10	dream of meeting, chatting, hugging Liu Mengmei
		Event 11	
		Event 12	
	Episode 9 Huameixv	Event 13	god of flowers in the garden covering their meeting.
Episode 10 Diliuzi	Event 14	two people lingering in the Peony Pavilion	
Episode 11 Shantaohong	Event 15	farewell after a lingering	
Phase 4 Wakening from the Dream	Episode 12 Weisheng	Event 16	Du Liniang felt sad and sorrow when she woke up and found that the great moment was just a dream.

#### 4.2 Situational Context Analysis of Peony Pavilion

According to the theory of systemic functional linguistics, situational context is an important part of cultural context. The situational context mainly includes field, tenor, and mode (Halliday, 1978)<sup>[5]</sup>. Field refers to the specific content involved in the discourse; tenor refers to the identity of the participants and the social role relationship between them, the relationship between the two parties; mode refers to the role of language in the specific environment, that is, the medium and channel of communication. The field of the video is the most exciting part of Interrupted Dream in Peony Pavilion guided by Bai Xianyong and translated by Li Linde; tenor refers to the heroine Du Liniang and the male protagonist Liu Mengmei, and the servant girl Chun Xiang; Mode is a recorded video of the youth version of Peony Pavilion in a global performance. The performers wore professional Kunqu costumes and sang the corresponding Kunqu opera lyrics. The speed of speech was smooth, the language was fluent, and the professionalism was high. The performers mainly conveys the two themes of “visiting garden” and “meeting in dream” through the sound mode, and combine the body modality, posture modality, gesture, scene mode and image mode of the performer to construct dynamic multimodal meaning of Kunqu opera.

### 4.3 Dynamic Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Interrupted Dream in Kunqu Opera Peony Pavilion

This section analyzes the modal relationships embodied in the theme phase - Garden Visiting of Interrupted Dream.

[Zhaoluopao]:

Already, bright purple and passion pink bloom in profusion.

Yet to crumbling well, faded walls, such splendor is abandoned.

But in this glorious season,

Where are the sounds of joy in this garden?

Mornings take wing, evenings unfolded,

beyond green arbor, rosy clouds soar.

In windy strands of rain,

gilded pleasure boats nod in misty waves.

Maidens shielded by brocaded screens, are blinded by this glorious scenes.

(Li Linde, 2004: Section I 00:46:25-00:48:53)

The theme song of Event 4 and Event 5 in Episode 4 is “Zhaoluopao”. Event 4: Du Liniang finishes make up and goes to the garden gate with Chun Xiang. The background of the non-body modality changed from dark black to colorful as they entered the garden door. At this time, the visual mode is the main mode, and the music mode is secondary, a non-enhanced coordination. And then in Event 5, the heroine Du Liniang sings the “Zaoluopao”, the language mode becomes the main mode, and the expression modality and gesture mode play a prominent role.

The communicative mode patterns of the monologue corpus are described down below in Table 2.

Table 2: Dynamic Multimodal Discourse Analysis of the Theme of Interrupted Dream -Visiting Garden

Dynamic Multimodal Discourse Analysis Theme section - Visiting Garden	Textual Meaning	Auditory Mode	Visual Mode	Other Modes	Foregrounded Multimodal Features
	Episode 4 Zaoluopao Event 4	N/A	Image (main mode)	Music (secondary mode)	Visual mode
	Event 5	Main mode	Complementary Non-enhanced coordination	Expression mode Gesture mode (enhanced and highlighting)	Auditory mode

Words and sentences of this tune are unique and ingenious. Words like “Already”, “Yet” are used to express the praise and sighs of Du Liniang to the garden landscape. In addition to the first, second and last sentences, the whole song uses the dual rhetoric. The third and fourth sentences form a stark contrast, depicting the contradiction between scene and emotion, expressing Du Liniang’s psychological resentment for the beauty of the spring. The fifth and sixth sentences

describe painted houses and red curtains. The seventh and eighth sentences describe the stormy boat, showing the gorgeousness of the scenery, and setting off the tranquility of the environment by contrast. The dual sentence is created under the strict rules of the song, but the author can depict the spring garden as realistic and revealing the rich feelings, as if people are seeing this in fresh. It can really evoke the audience or the readers to unconsciously feel the surroundings around them in the mood of the character. It is more difficult to use the dual rhetoric in the translation here, because there is no strict corresponding words in the source language and the target language. So the translator uses the literal translation and inner sentence juxtaposition. For example, the translation of “But in this glorious season, Where are the sounds of joy in this garden?” is in literal translation and “Mornings take wing, evenings unfolded, beyond green arbor, rosy clouds soar.” is inner sentence juxtaposition to make it easy to understand and express the mind of character directly.

In summary, translator’s discourse modal selection is influenced by the modal transformation. It’s suggested that less translations and more images to deliver the discourse meaning when the visual mode is the main mode or the foregrounded multimodal feature, otherwise it is opposite when the auditory mode is the main mode.

## 5. Conclusion

After the analysis of this discourse-Interrupted Dream, it is found that, among the multimodal discourses of Kunqu opera performance, the oral language of performers is the dominant modality (auditory modality). In order to effectively achieve the overall meaning of the performer’s speech content, other modalities such as gestures, postures, and music are needed to supplement or enhance it to strengthen the language. The influence of modal transformation on the translator’s discourse modal selection is also discussed through in-depth analysis of certain episode. It is suggested that less translations and more images to deliver the discourse meaning when the visual mode is the main mode or the foregrounded multimodal feature, otherwise it is opposite when the auditory mode is the main mode.

It is also suggested that since the immediacy of the performance requires the translation to be accepted and understood by the audience in a short period of time, if the translation of Kunqu opera could be as consistent as possible with the cultural context and situational context of the original work, and with the performers’ movements and emotional expressions in modal transformation, the method of literal translation is the priority selection, and other methods such as addition and omission can be appropriately used according to its context, so as to be more intuitive and effective consistent with the stage performance. This is of reference value for the study of other Kunqu operas and other traditional Chinese dramas.

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