# A Relevance Study of Chinese *Shuangguan*

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## Abstract

*Sperber and Wilson's relevance theory (RT for short) is applicable to the interpretation of communication. Such being the case, quite a few linguists have assumed that RT can provide a good account for Chinese shuangguan processing. However, this theory alone does not satisfactorily account for the fact that addressees often very quickly draw the inferences necessary to arrive at intended interpretations without any noticeable effort. Furthermore, it does not systematically specify the nature of the inference patterns and their cognitive grounding. The present paper shows that a cognitive approach incorporating the notion of the impartment and inheritance of connotation and denotation (IICD for short) can be fruitfully applied to the analysis of Chinese shuangguan. Based on this notion, we propose a five-step hypothesis which serves as an amended framework of RT with the IICD approach. It is demonstrated that this amended framework can effectively elucidate the recognition and interpretation of Chinese shuangguan, and meanwhile, unfold a picture of addressees' mental progress.*

**Key Words:** RT, IICD, amended framework of RT with IICD, interpretation of Chinese *shuangguan*.

## 1. Introduction

Chinese *shuangguan*, approximately equivalent to English puns, has been regarded as a rhetorical device and a communicative strategy in Chinese language. It is widely employed both in literature and in daily life and has gradually received more and more scholarly attention. As a figure of speech, Chinese *shuangguan* has been widely used in advertisements, jokes, riddles, literary works and the like, to make the language lively and impressive and to produce a humorous, jocular or sarcastic effect. In addition, as a prevalent phenomenon, Chinese *shuangguan* has become an increasingly important subject in linguistic research. As Heller (1974) puts it, "The structure of the pun holds implications basic to an understanding of many psychological problems, and knowledge of its dynamic processes offers important insights into the nature of reasoning itself." His claim applies equally to Chinese *shuangguan*. Therefore, the study of Chinese *shuangguan* is believed to be of momentous and far-reaching significance.

Theories on the effectiveness of Chinese *shuangguan* are literally decades old. Today, researchers who apply rhetorical, semantic or relevance-theoretic approaches to the study of *shuangguan* have shifted their interests' from the various rhetorical functions (cf: Ni, 1980), semantic features (cf: Zhang, 1963; Gao, 2000; Hu, 2003; Wang, 2010; etc.) of Chinese *shuangguan* to the successful interpretation of it (cf: Xue &. Li, 2000; Yang, 2004; Li, 2009). When comprehending *shuangguan*, the researchers all assume that the successful interpretation of it requires a certain amount of inferring abilities on the part of the addressees. For example, Xue &. Li (2000) claim that addressees will voluntarily make great efforts to crack the hidden codes and find out the most relevant information intended by the advertisers of Chinese *shuangguan*. In addition, Li (2009) applies blending spaces theory to the interpretation of *shuangguan* within the framework of RT.

Up to now, we have placed ourselves within the long-standing tradition outlined above; that is to say, we have taken RT to be an effective interpretation of Chinese *shuangguan*. However, RT alone is incomplete for the processing of *shuangguan* for two reasons: (1) it does not satisfactorily account for the fact that addressees often very quickly draw the inferences necessary to arrive at intended interpretations of *shuangguan* without any noticeable effort, and (2) there is no systematic account of the nature of the inference patterns themselves and their cognitive grounding.

In what follows, we will firstly introduce the minute differences between Chinese *shuangguan* and English puns and then make endeavor to ensure the effectiveness of the successful interpretation of Chinese *shuangguan* within the framework of RT. Afterwards, we will put forward the inference patterns of *shuangguan* comprehending within cognitive domains so as to contribute to a better understanding of Chinese *shuangguan*.

## 2. Chinese shuangguan

### 2.1 The differences between Chinese *shuangguan* and English puns

For quite a long time, Chinese *shuangguan* and English puns have been considered as equivalents. It is admitted that they do have a lot in common, but strictly speaking, they can only be regarded as being approximately equivalent. Their delicate differences lie in three perspectives, say, their respective etymology, historical status and definitions.

First and foremost, Chinese *shuangguan* and English puns, etymologically speaking, have different origins. Chinese *shuangguan* has been employed in Chinese literature for more than 2,000 years. To put it clearer, it was already employed in a distinguished Chinese ancient book 《诗经》 (*The Book of Songs*), complied more than 2,000 years ago (Zhou, 2010). Later, it became popular in folk songs, folk rhymes and correspondence between men of letters in the period of the Six Dynasties. For example, in 《吴声歌曲·读典歌》 (*wu sheng ge qu-du dian ge*), a poem in the Jin Dynasty, there is a line "zhe yang liu, bai niao ti yuan lin, dao huan bu li kou (折杨柳，百鸟啼园林，道欢不离口)", which means that birds are singing in the garden and that it is full of merriment. Here"欢 (*huan*)"refers to both "merriment" and "the beloved".

Nevertheless, so far there have been few research works on Chinese *shuangguan*. One of the earliest comments on Chinese *shuangguan* was put forward by Fan Zhongyan (范仲淹), a famous Chinese scholar of Northern Song Dynasty about 1,000 years ago. To be specific, *Ci Yuan* (《辞源》) (Ma, 1998) raises the possibility that Chinese *shuangguan* might originate from Fan's *Preface to <Fu Lin Heng Jian>* (《<赋林衡鉴>序》) in which Fan claims that "jian ming er wu zhe,wei zhi shuang guan (兼明二物者，谓之双关)", i.e., those which refer to two things simultaneously are called *shuangguan*. However, the origin of the English word "pun" is unascertained. Best guesses concentrate on the possible relationship between pun and puntiglio. According to the explanation of *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word "might originally be an abbreviation of the Italian puntiglio, small or fine point, formerly also a cavil or quibble…a pun being akin to a quibble; and pundigrion might be a perversion, illiterate or humorous, of puntiglio" (Bates, 1999).

Second, Chinese *shuangguan* and English puns, historically speaking, have undergone quite different fates. Chinese *shuangguan* has always enjoyed a good reputation traditionally. In Chinese rhetorical works, Chinese *shuangguan* is seldom neglected when figures of speech are discussed. It has a long history and attracts much attention from modern Chinese rhetoricians. Chen (2001) observes that the basis of Chinese *shuangguan* lies in the property of sound of linking two things together, one being situational and the other deep in the addresser's heart. It is the linguistic sound that matters. The punny sound reveals the addresser's real intention, while enabling the sentence to make sense literally. Chinese *shuangguan* is often found in early songs and operas, both of which pay much attention to phonetic rhetorical devices. On the contrary, English puns have experienced ups and downs and have been considered as a very controversial linguistic phenomenon. For instance, Lionel Duisit depreciates puns as the "least literary" of figures of speech and Dryden condemns puns as "the lowest and most groveling kind of wit" (Redfern, 1984). However, whether English puns and Chinese *shuangguan* were cursed as a traitor to language or blessed as a welcome guest in the past, they have nowadays developed into a socially-acceptable phenomenon as well as a hot research subject.

Third, the difference between Chinese *shuangguan* and English puns also lies in their definitions. Although the etymology of Chinese *shuangguan* is not as contentious as that of English puns, the definitions of Chinese *shuangguan* seem to be a little bit troublesome. It is generally agreed that Chinese *shuangguan* refers to two signifieds for one signifier, but Chinese scholars cannot reach a consensus about the range of the signifier. In the previous studies, quite a few Chinese scholars maintain that Chinese *shuangguan* only occur at the word level. However, with the deepening of the study, some contemporary Chinese scholars such as Ni (1980), Wang (2010) and Zhong (2002) have improved the original definitions by pointing out that the range of Chinese *shuangguan* can actually exceed the word level, both in the direction of smaller, simpler units (e.g. morpheme) and in the direction of larger units (e.g. phrase, sentence, sentence group, paragraph, etc.).

Unlike the controversy of the definitions on Chinese *shuangguan*, the definitions of English puns raised by various scholars seem to be definite and similar to a great extent. Let's take *Oxford English Dictionary* for example. It defines English puns as "the use of a word in such a way as to suggest two or more meanings or different associations, or the use of two or more words of the same or nearly the same sound with different meanings, so as to produce a humorous effect; a play on words."

## 2.2 The classification of Chinese *shuangguan*

The delicate classification of English puns has always been a headache for scholars. Actually, it is the same case for Chinese scholars to classify Chinese *shuangguan*. As for English puns, Vittoz-Canuto (Attardo, 1994, p. 127) puts forward a detailed classification of puns as follows: exploitation of the signifier, exploitation of the signified, homonyms, exploitation of the signified (polysemy), exploitation of the connotations, neologisms (new signified added to the pre-existing ones), and others. Sherzer (1985, p. 214) also holds that puns can be produced by manipulating different levels and aspects of language such as sound patterns, morphology, syntax and semantics. Besides, Vickers (1988, p. 400) puts forward a very general classification of puns. According to him, puns consist of three types, that is, syllepsis, paronomasia and antanaclasis.

In addition to these overseas scholars, a number of Chinese scholars also make great efforts to explore the classifications of Chinese *shuangguan*. Among them, Wen (1991, pp. 315-318) is worth mentioning. He divides puns into five types, namely, homophonic *shuangguan*, paronomasia, antanaclasis, sylleptic *shuangguan* and asteismus. Besides, Zhong (2002) holds that, according to different punny materials, Chinese *shuangguan* can be divided into five types, namely, *shuangguan* based on phonology, semantics, grammar, context and Chinese character respectively. What is more, she states that puns can sometimes be realized by means of some other rhetorical devices such as metaphor, symbolism and the like. Wang (2010) also believes that Chinese *shuangguan* mainly manipulates three levels and aspects of language: phonology, semantics and grammar.

Up to now, we have named only a few previous studies on classifications of Chinese *shuangguan*, but it seems to be insurmountable challenge to list exhaustively all of the possible classifications and establish a complete and scientific classification of Chinese *shuangguan*. However, the classification of Chinese *shuangguan* is a necessity in our following studies. Therefore, we are going to roughly classify Chinese *shuangguan* into two rudimental categories, which are commonly adopted by most researchers, that is, homophonic *shuangguan* and homonymic *shuangguan*.

Homophonic *shuangguan* refers to punny expression(s) having the same or similar sound but different meanings; it is realized by taking advantage of the phonological similarity of the punny expression(s). Homonymic *shuangguan* is usually signaled by polysemous punny expression(s) and the double meanings conveyed by them are context-dependent. Examples (1) and (2) are a homophonic *shuangguan* and a homonymic *shuangguan* respectively.

(1) 春蚕　　到死　*丝* 方尽，　蜡炬 成灰　　泪 始干。
chuncan　daosi　si fangjin, naju chenghui lei shigan.
Silkworms to death silk no more, candle burned　tears become dry.
The silkworm till its death spins silk from love-sick heart; the candle only when burned has no tears to shed. (Note 1)

　（(李商隐《无题》 Li Shangyin's *Wuti*)

(2) 春 日　在 天 涯，　天 涯　　日 又　　斜。
chun ri　zai tian ya,　tian ya　　ri　you　xie
spring sun　on the horizon,　the horizon　the sun　again　slant.
Spring is far, far away, where the sun slants its ray.
莺 *啼* 如　　有 泪，　为 湿　最 高　花。
Ying ti　ru　　you lei,　wei shi zui gao hua
yingti look like having tears,　for wet highest flower.
If orioles have tears, wet lighest flowers here. (Note 2)

(李商隐《天涯》Li Shangyin's *Wthe End of the Sky*)

As is noted above, example (1) is a homophonic *shuangguan*, in which the punny expression is the pronunciation of "<u>丝</u>", say, [si] in Chinese. The literal meaning of "<u>丝</u>" is silk which is closely associated with the context of the poem that the silkworm keeps on spinning silk until death. Whereas, the implicated meaning of [si] equals to another Chinese character "思", referring to the poet's longing for his lover. As a result, this poem artfully communicates both literal meaning and implicated meaning. As for example (2), it is a homonymic *shuangguan*, in which the punny expression is the Chinese character "啼". "啼" shares two meanings, namely, "crow" and "cry". When it accords with a whitethroat, "啼" conveys the meaning "crow"; while it coincides with the context tears, the meaning of "啼" shifts to "cry". In this poem, "啼"s are nearly equally important and both constitute the intended message of the poet.

## 3. Theoretical framework

### 3.1 Relevance theory

Sperber and Wilson (1995/2001) put forward a general theory of cognition, RT, which brings about a paradigm-change in pragmatics and becomes a point at issue.

In accordance with Sperber and Wilson, addressees infer addressers' meaning through ostension and inference by searching for relevance. Ostension and inference are two sides of the same coin of communication process. Ostensive communication and inferential communication, therefore, are one and the same process, but seen from two different points of view. As a matter of fact, it is addressers who are engaged in ostension and it is addressees who are involved in inference (ibid., p.54).

It is argued by RT that linguistic communication is a purposeful and intentional activity, in which the communicator's intention is communicated. As Sperber and Wilson (ibid., p.50) put it, communication involves two kinds of intention: the informative intention and the communicative intention. Ostension means making manifest one's intention of conveying information. To make their intention understood by the addressees, addressers always try to express their information in a most ostensive way; to understand addressers' intention, addressees, on the other hand, must process the information in an ostensive-inferential way, speculate and make inferences.

It is generally agreed that Chinese *shuangguan* should be an intentional pragmatic act and a conscious phenomenon. That is to say, when the addressers produce *shuangguan* in the communication, they must have made use of the *shuangguan* to accomplish some purposes. For instance, they may intend to exploit *shuangguan* to create humor, to avoid indecency, to attack without any risks, and so on. Nevertheless, whatever the purposes will be, it goes without saying that the addressers always have communicative intentions in the production of *shuangguan*. Therefore, since Chinese *shuangguan* involves both informative intention and communicative intention, it can be regarded as ostensive communication.

(3) (*This is an advertisement for a computer whose brand name is Lianxiang in Chinese:*)

人类　　失去 *联想,*　世界　　将会　怎样？
ren lei　　shi qu  lian xiang,  shi jie　jiang hui　zen yang?
Human beings lose  lianxiang,  the world　would  look like what?
If there are no *Lianxiang* in the world, what would the world look like?

Example (3) is a homonymic *shuangguan*, in which the addressers, say, the advertisers of this advertisement make manifest their communicative intention: they want to emphasize the importance of the computers they produce, and hence to promote the sales of their computers. Upon reading this advertisement, addressees, that is, the would-be consumers are capable of making some inferences to get addressers' informative intention. They may form such contextual assumptions as follows. In this advertisement, the punny expression, 联想, literally means association---a kind of mental ability of human being, which is the informative intention of the addressers. At the first sight, it seems that the advertisers are stressing the importance of association. Coincidently, "联想" happens to be the brand name of the computers which the advertisers intend to promote. For this reason, the punny expression "联想" actually communicates a literal meaning (association) and an implicated meaning (the brand name of the computer).

What's worth pointing out is that although the advertisers are seemingly stressing the importance of association, they actually want to emphasize the importance of their computers because of their profit-driven nature.

Since Chinese *shuangguan* is considered as an act of ostensive communication, it must communicate a presumption of its own optimal relevance. In other words, the addressers must have guaranteed that the Chinese *shuangguan* they produce is relevant enough to be worth the addressees' effort to process it and is the most relevant one compatible with the addressers' abilities and preferences. Therefore, addressers who aim at optimal relevance should try to formulate Chinese *shuangguan* in such a way that besides the literal meaning of *shuangguan*, the first acceptable interpretation to occur to addressees is the intended one. And once addressees have found an interpretation which satisfies their expectation of relevance in a way addressers might manifestly have foreseen, they need to look no further. Let's look at the example below.

(4) (*At the threshold of the year 2009, there was a prevalent blessing nationwide in China:*)

Happy　牛　Year!
happy　*niu*　year
happy　the bull　year
Happy New Year!

Example (4) is a homophonic *shuangguan*, in which the punny expression is the Chinese character "牛". The year 2009 happens to be the Year of the Bull in Chinese lunar calendar. According to the literal meaning of this *shuangguan*, it is to convey best wishes to the whole year of 2009. However, the Chinese pronunciation of "bull", say, [niu] somehow coincides with the English pronunciation "new". Therefore, in accordance with the notion of optimal relevance, in the situation, it is also to send regards to the coming of the New Year. In this Chinese-English compound *shuangguan*, it communicates both the literal meaning and the intended one.

In conclusion, RT abounds with so many daring and thought-provoking ideas that it is impossible for us to present a detailed introduction in this section. However, it is still necessary to highlight some important and useful viewpoints advanced by Sperber and Wilson. First, human beings automatically turn their attention to what seems most relevant to them. Human cognition is not only relevance-oriented, but also oriented towards the highest possible relevance when processing inputs. Second, when the communicators ostensively attract the addressees' attention, they create a presumption that the ostensive stimuli are optimally relevant, i. e., the stimuli they produce must be the most economical ones they could have chosen to achieve the intended effects. Third, a communicator who intends to produce a relevant utterance has two related aims: on the one hand, to create some contextual effects in the addressees, and on the other hand, to minimize the processing effort this involves. However, the communicator should not always be expected to give the most relevant possible information, or to present it in the least effort-demanding way. Instead, what can be expected is that the ostensive communicator will always try to be optimally relevant.

However, as everything has its flaws and every rule has its exceptions, RT also possesses some weaknesses. First, RT falls into the trap of cognitive psychology. Because of its strong dependence on cognitive psychology, which, not fully developed, leaves many of its own questions unsolved, RT fails to make a further study on addressees' application of mechanism to generate a possible interpretation on an utterance. Second, it is hard to determine the degree of relevance. The measurement of contextual effects and processing effort is a difficult task due to the problems of quantification/calculation of mental effects and effort. The degree of relevance is determined by the ratio of contextual effects and processing effort. Sperber and Wilson hold that relevance is a relative notion rather than a quantitative one. Third, relying on RT only, we cannot guarantee the success of communication. According to RT, the success in everyday conversation shows that addressers make all sorts of assumptions and guesses. These are guesses about addressees' ability to access certain assumptions at the proper moment, or in other words, about addressees' cognitive context. All these guesses or assumptions can never be definite, so it is not enough to rely on RT to achieve the goal of verbal communication.

### 3.2 IICD approach

We hold that RT is not omnipotent in accounting for all aspects of Chinese *shuangguan*. Upon context, addressees are able to figure out the optimal relevance of informative intention and communicative intention of Chinese *shuangguan* respectively. But how does the optimal relevance of informative intention arrive at the optimally relevant communicative intention?

The sole application of RT cannot specifically account for these psychological processes. Therefore, in what follows, we would like to suggest that, apart from RT, the IICD approach can provide inference patterns in terms of cognition in the recognition and interpretation of Chinese *shuangguan*.

For cognitive linguists, categorization is an important issue, because it is something that underlies the mental processes of language production and language comprehension. Generally speaking, categorization just refers to a mental process of classification and its products are commonly called cognitive categories (Ungerer & Schmid, 2001, p. 2). In this sense, categorization and the generalization of stereotypical relations share at least one important common point: both of them involve the mental process of classification. According to Xu (2008a, b, c), classification, namely taxonomy, is fundamentally constructed on people's understanding of stereotypical relations among objects and events. Consciously or unconsciously, people apply stereotypical relations to categorizing objects and events in the world into different conceptual systems. These taxonomic systems are the logical generalization of objects and events in the world.

As Xu (ibid.) classifies, type hierarchy structure consists of two types, that is, the taxonomic type hierarchy and the compositional type hierarchy. The former is the aggregate of kindred entities; while the latter is the aggregate of different parts or characteristics of an entity. These two types can respectively embody relations of proximity and/or similarity to some extent. Let's take a well-known category "flower" for example. In light of our encyclopedic knowledge, daisies, lilies, roses and the like are all members of "flower" category, which can be assorted into the taxonomic type hierarchy. In this small-scaled type hierarchy structure, the category "flower" is at the supertype hierarchy; while daisies, lilies and roses which can respectively be called as a kind of flowers stand at the subtype hierarchy. They are proximate in location within the scope of "flower" category. What's more important, all of them share the fundamental attributes of flowers, such as "being colorful", "producing seeds or fruits", and so forth. In this sense, they are similar to one another. This example presents us a vivid description of the taxonomic type hierarchy, which emphasizes more on the relation of similarity than proximity. In terms of the compositional type hierarchy, it is obvious that stamens, petals, receptacles, etc. are compositional parts of a flower, among which the prominent character is that they are adjacently distributed in a flower. Therefore, the compositional type hierarchy focuses more on the relation of proximity. Type hierarchy structure and the relations among different categories will shed new light on our understanding of the world.
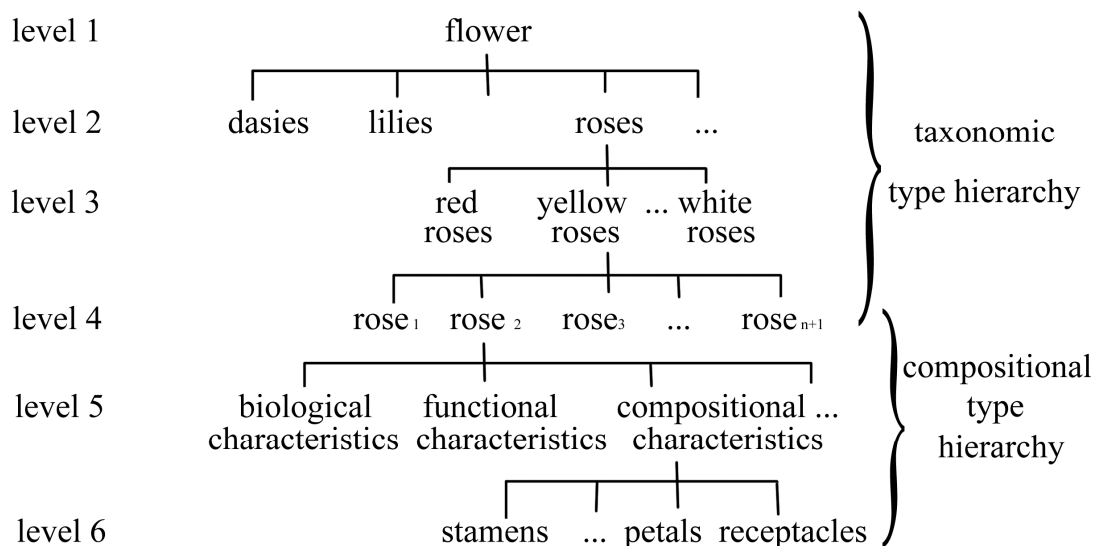


**Figure 1: "flower" type hierarchy structure**

Connotation and denotation are two important terms concerning concept in logic. Connotation is the generalization of the fundamental attributes of a name while denotation refers to a set of objects bearing all these attributes and hence labeled with the name concerned. In order to illustrate their essence, let's take "flower" for example again. As the definition suggests, "flower" is the connotation of all kinds of flowers; meanwhile, each different kind of flowers is the denotation of "flower". To be specific, in figure 1, level 1 (flower) is the connotation of all the entities on level 2 and each kind of flowers on level 2 is the denotation of "flower".

Like it or not, "rose" on level 2 is also the connotation of varieties of roses on level 3 and vice versa. As is shown in figure 1, the continuum of taxonomies from level 1 to level 4 (flower → rose → a certain kind of rose → one rose of this kind) represents the taxonomic type hierarchy. In this continuum, super-class type imparts its essential properties to its sub-class type and the entities in sub-class type inherit the basic properties from their super-class type. The sub-class type is the denotation of the super-class type. Therefore, Xu proposes (2008a, b) that the taxonomic type hierarchy reflects denotation. In other words, in the taxonomic type hierarchy, entities in sub-class type (denotation) inherit basic properties from the impartment of their super-class type (connotation). On the contrary, the compositional type hierarchy reflects connotation. As is already shown in figure 1, level 4 to level 6 reveal the compositional type hierarchy. On level 5, biological characteristics, functional characteristics, compositional characteristics and all the other characteristics are the connotative contents of any rose on level 4; stamens, petals and all the other parts of a rose on level 6 are also the connotative contents of the compositional characteristics of a rose. Each entity in sub-class type is an indispensable part of its super-class type, which embodies connotative contents of the super-class type. Therefore, the compositional type hierarchy reflects the imparted and inherited relations of the connotation.

Generally speaking, logic of taxonomy is the foundation of our better understanding of the world. With the accumulation of our acquisition and experience, we have, consciously or unconsciously, formed type hierarchy structure of the world in mind, which can be categorized into two types, that is, the taxonomic type hierarchy and the compositional type hierarchy. The relations of proximity and/or similarity among genus-species, part-whole and part-part have made it possible to adopt the inherent relations of connotation and denotation to produce and interpret Chinese *shuangguan*. At the end of the IICD approach, one thing should be pointed out in advance that the recognition and interpretation of Chinese *shuangguan* is mainly concerned with the taxonomic type hierarchy.

### 3.3 RT amended with IICD approach

As is already indicated in section 2.2, Chinese *shuangguan* can be classified into two types, that is, homophonic *shuangguan* and homonymic *shuangguan*, both of which are concerned with the taxonomic type hierarchy. Since RT alone cannot provide a satisfactory explanation of how the optimal relevance of the informative intention of Chinese *shuangguan* arrives at the optimally relevant communicative intention of Chinese *shuangguan*, we would like to amend RT with IICD approach and therefore, propose a unified account of Chinese *shuangguan* processing approach. To put it clearer, our approach can be generalized into five steps. First and foremost, with the facilitation of context, the punny expression of Chinese *shuangguan* will carefully be figured out. Second, based on the literal meaning of the punny expression, the possible informative intention(s) of *shuangguan* will be revealed. Next, the punny expression will furthermore be mentally analyzed in type hierarchy structures, in which the super-class type is the connotation and entities in the sub-class type are its denotations. The succeeding step is the constant impartment and inheritance of the connotation and denotation between the super-class and an entity in the sub-class or/and among different entities of the same class until the understanding of the possible communicative intention(s) of the Chinese *shuangguan* is approached. Finally, based on the principle of optimal relevance, the optimally relevant informative intention and communicative intention will be ultimately determined.

In this five-step proposal, something should be noted so as to facilitate our understandings. To begin with, searching for relevance goes through the entire process of Chinese *shuangguan* processing. It is obvious that step two and step five are the application of RT. However, the two steps solely fail to indicate us a vivid picture of our mental processes of *shuangguan* processing. As a matter of fact, every step in this proposal relies on relevance. In step three, the mental analyses of the Chinese *shuangguan* should be relevant to its possible informative intention(s), and the IICD approach in step four is supposed to be carried out in a way that is optimally relevant to context. Hence, the application of IICD approach in step three and step four serves as remedial measures against the deficiency of RT. In a word, the IICD approach has bridged the gap between the informative intention and the communicative intention of Chinese *shuangguan*. Second, in a type hierarchy structure, the super-class imparts its basic feature to the sub-class, and the sub-class hereby inherits the basic feature from the super-class. As for homophonic *shuangguan*, the basic feature is, on the first place, the similar or identical phonology, and then being the basic meaning of a phonologically similar word; while concerning homonymic *shuangguan*, the basic feature is the basic meaning of the hinge. Third, the entities in the type hierarchy structures are inherently capable of being imparted and inherited, thanks to the relation of proximity and/or similarity among them. Last but not the least, in the course of the impartment and inheritance, context will play a crucial role in *shuangguan* processing.

In order to ensure the reliability and validity of our study, all the above steps will be applied to practice in the following sections.

## 4. Application of the amended relevance framework to the interpretation of Chinese shuangguan

### 4.1 Interpretation of homophonic *shuangguan*

In accordance with the classification of Chinese *shuangguan*, we would like to firstly analyze a homophonic *shuangguan*, which is an often-quoted classic example.

(5) 杨 柳 青青 江水 平, 闻 郎 江上 唱 歌 声。
　yang liu qing qing jiang shui　ping,　wen lang　jiang shang chang ge sheng.
　willows green　river　level, hear gallant on the river singing voice
Between the willows green the river flows along; my gallant in a boat is heard to sing a song.

东 边 日 出 西 边 雨, 道 是 无**晴** 还有 　**晴**。
　dong bian ri chu xi bain　yu, dao shi wu qing hai you　qing.
　the east sunrise the west rain, say is no clear still having clear

The west is veiled in rain, the east enjoys sunshine; my gallant is as deep in love as the day is fine. (Note 3)

〈刘禹锡《竹枝词》 (Liu Yuxi's *Zhuzhici* )〉

As has already been proposed in section 3.3, the first stage of the interpretation of Chinese *shuangguan* is to figure out the punny expression. The success of this *shuangguan* relies on the double contexts, one being concerned with the scenery and the other being related to the people. Therefore, it is not difficult for us to find out that the punny expression lies in the last line of this poem, that is, the word "晴" [qing]. The literal meaning of "晴" refers to a clear sky after rain, which is relevant to the immediate context, that is, "东边日出西边雨". As a result, the informative intention of this *shuangguan* is to depict the spectacular scenery.

The above are the first two stages of *shuangguan* processing and the following stage is the analysis of the type hierarchy structure of the punny expression. Considered as the super-class type, this punny expression "晴" is the connotation of its denotation "雨停少云" (a clear sky after the rain). In the sense of "雨停少云", several examples can be touched upon, such as "天晴" (a fine day) "晴空万里" (a vast clear sky) and the like, among which "天晴" optimally relevant to the context of scenery. The clue can be unfolded like this: "晴 → 雨停少云 → 天晴". However, the entity "晴", together with "清" "请" "情" and so forth, can be ascribed to a new type hierarchy structure, say, "[qing] →{晴, 清, 请, 情, etc.}". "晴" "清" "请" "情" and the like are the sub-class type of their super-type, namely, the similar phonology [qing]. To sum up, the above analysis of the punny expression "晴" can be shown like this: "[qing] → 晴 → 雨停少云 → 天晴". Figure 2 is a vivid revelation of these complicated mental processes.
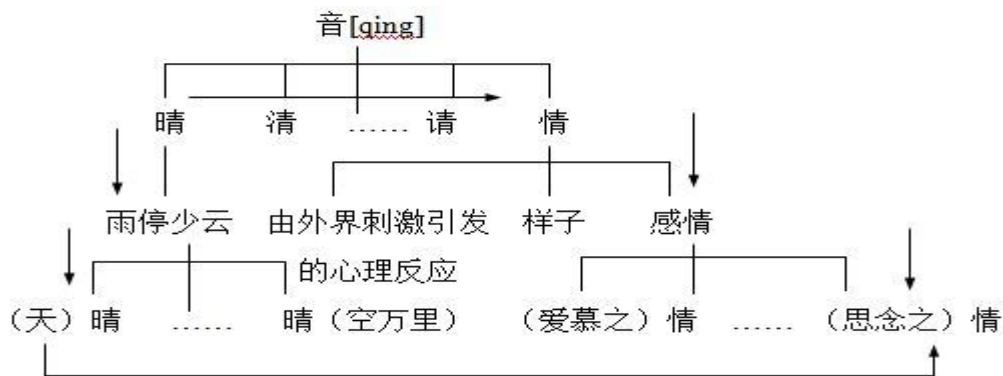


**Figure 2: IICD approach to the interpretation of "晴"**

The next stage is the constant impartment and inheritance of the basic property of the punny expression among the connotation and denotations until the most appropriate interpretation of *shuangguan* has been approached.

Figure 2 not only illustrates the above-analyzed mental processes of the IICD approach, but also indicates the sequence of impartment and inheritance. In the type hierarchy structure of "晴 → 雨停少云 → 天晴", the basic property to be imparted and inherited is its essential meaning. Meanwhile, "晴" "清" "请" "情" can be ascribed to another new type hierarchy structure "[qing] →{晴, 清, 请, 情, etc.}" because they together share the similar phonology [qing]. Together severed as the denotations of [qing], the entity "晴" is capable of imparting its basic property to another entity on the same level. From the contextual implication in the sentence "闻郎江上唱歌声", the optimally relevant entity to inherit the basic property from "晴" is the entity "情". As for the entity "情", it also embodies a type hierarchy structure, namely, "情 → 感情 → 思念之情 (longing for)". Therefore, the connotative meaning of "晴", say, "a clear sky after rain" can be associated with the poet's longing for his lover in this Chinese *shuangguan*.

Consequently, taking both context and the principle of optimal relevance into consideration, the optimally relevant informative intention of this *shuangguan* refers to a clear sky after rain while the optimally relevant communicative intention of this *shuangguan* refers to the poet's longing for his lover. The punny expression "晴" successfully conveys both intentions. The cognitive processes of this punny expression from informative intention to communicative intention have been unfolded in the above analyses. What's worth mentioning is that the two intentions do not share the same level of importance: the communicative intention is more important than the informative intention.

## 4.2 Interpretation of homonymic *shuangguan*

The amended relevance framework of shuangguan processing has been proved effective in the recognition and interpretation of homophonic *shuangguan*. In this section, we are going to spare no pains to continue testing its reliability and validity of homonymic *shuangguan*. Let's look at the following example:

(6) (*This is a caption in an advertisement for breast cream, which is accompanied by a picture of a sexy charming beauty with extremely big breasts.*)

做　女人　　***挺*** 好。
zuo　nu ren　　ting hao
be　female　　very good
It is very good to be a female.

As is indicated, the first stage of *shuangguan* processing is to find out the punny expression. Since the formation of this *shuangguan* is easy, the only possible punny expression is the word "挺". Upon the principle of optimal relevance, the most possible literal interpretation of this caption is that it is quite good to be a female, whose informative intention is to praise being a female.

Admittedly, this interpretation is reasonable. But it isn't informative enough and relevant enough in terms of the fact that this is an advertisement used for promoting the product of breast cream. For this reason, the insufficient relevance of the first interpretation forces us to reanalyze the punny expression.

Thereupon, the third stage, say, the analyses of the punny expression in type hierarchy structures has been called upon. The punny expression "挺" can be exploited as different parts of speech, namely, the adverb form, the adjective form, the verb form and the like. The adverb form of "挺" stereotypically serves as the meaning of "very" to modify an adjective. Heretofore, we are able to form a type hierarchy structure of "挺" as follows: "挺 → 副词 (adv.) → 很 (very) → 挺好 (very good)". But as has already been pointed out, this interpretation is not relevant enough to the context; therefore, this possible interpretation has to be turned down. At the meantime, we are also capable of formulating other type hierarchy structures of "挺", such as "挺 → 形容词 (adj.) → 直而硬 (straight and hard)→ 笔挺（very straight)", "挺 → 动词 (v.) → 伸直 (straighten) → 挺胸 (throw our one's chest; straighten up)" and so forth. To illustrate the detailed presentation of these mental processes, figure 3 is thus provided.
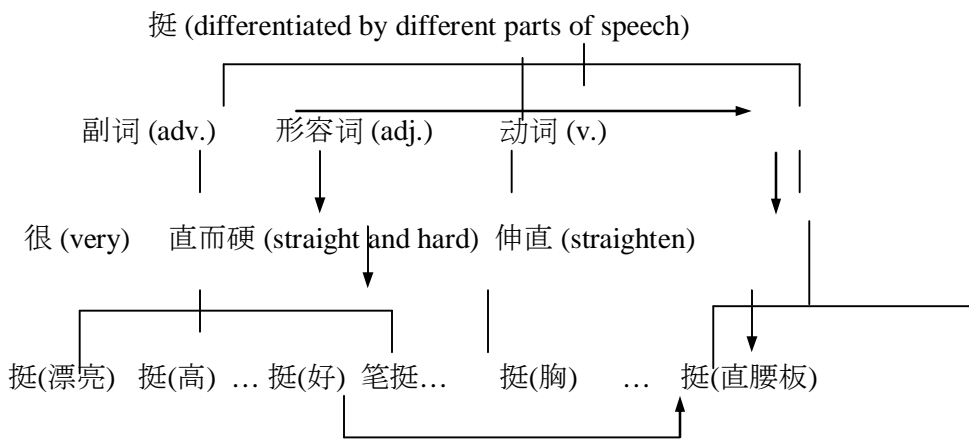
挺 (differentiated by different parts of speech)

副词 (adv.)      形容词 (adj.)      动词 (v.)

很 (very)      直而硬 (straight and hard)      伸直 (straighten)

挺(漂亮)  挺(高) … 挺(好) 笔挺…      挺(胸)    …   挺(直腰板)

**Figure 3: IICD approach to the interpretation of "挺"**

Upon our proposition, the next stage is the constant impartment and inheritance of the basic property of the punny expression among the connotation and denotations until the most appropriate interpretation of *shuangguan* has been reached. As has been discussed above, the most possible interpretation is this type hierarchy structure "挺 → 副词 (adv.) → 很 (very) → 挺好 (very good)". However, this seemingly most possible interpretation has been rejected because of the context. As is indicated in figure 3, entities such as the adverb form, adjective form, and verb form all serve as the denotations of their connotation "挺". As a result, the entity, say, the adverb form of "挺" can impart its basic property to another entity on the same level. Taking the context, i. e., the breast cream promotion into consideration, the entity, say, the adverb form of "挺" is the optimally relevant entity to inherit the basic property. As is already shown, this entity also embodies its own type hierarchy structure, say, "挺 → 动词 (v.) → 伸直 (straighten) → 挺胸". Therefore, the punny expression "挺(好)" can be associated with another interpretation that "it is good for a female to have big breasts".

Consequently, taking both context and the principle of optimal relevance into consideration, the optimally relevant informative intention of this *shuangguan* means that it is quite good to be a female while the optimally relevant communicative intention of this *shuangguan* means it is good for a female to have big breasts. The punny expression "挺" successfully conveys both intentions. The success of this *shuangguan* lies not only in communicating two different meanings with one word, but also in talking about taboos in public in a decent and polite way.

## 5. Conclusion

The present paper has taken the position that RT is basically helpful in the recognition and interpretation of Chinese *shuangguan*. Yet RT is deficient in two respects: it does not satisfactorily account for the process of *shuangguan* interpretation and has little to say about the conceptual nature of the inference patterns involved. In order to solve the problems, we amended RT by means of a cognitive approach of the impartment and inheritance of connotation and denotation, and hence the amended framework of RT with IICD is proposed. The amended framework, when applied to analyze Chinese *shuangguan,* consists of five main steps as follows: (1) figuring out the punny expression(s) by means of relevance; (2) finding out the possible informative intention(s) of *shuangguan* by means of the principle of optimal relevance; (3) analyzing the punny expression mentally in type hierarchy structures, in which the super-class type is the connotation and entities in the sub-class type are its denotations; (4) analyzing the constant impartment and inheritance of the connotation and denotation between the super-class and an entity in the sub-class or/and among different entities of the same class until the understanding of the possible communicative intention(s) of the Chinese *shuangguan* is approached; (5) reaching the optimally relevant informative intention and communicative intention by means of the principle of optimal relevance. The application of the amended framework to different types of Chinese *shuangguan* proves that the recognition and interpretation of Chinese *shuangguan* can be successfully reached.

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## Notes

Notes 1. The English version of the poem is taken from Xu Yuanchong et al. (1987, p.547).
Note 2. The English version of the poem is taken from Xu Yuanchong (2007, p.48).
Note 3. The English version of the poem is taken from Xu Yuanchong (1990, p.19).