

The Structure Research on the Post-Modernism Feminism of Luce Irigaray

Zihui Zheng

School of Foreign Languages, Anyang Institute of Technology, Anyang, Henan, China
20210026@ ayit.edu.cn

Abstract

This dissertation demonstrates the thoughts on the outstanding theory of Luce Irigaray. In the introduction part of this dissertation, it specified the research perspective, research features and research significance. This dissertation is to study the feminist theory of Irigaray from the perspective of postmodernism. One thing is that the feminist research has entered the postmodern context as of the period of Irigaray's theory creation, hence, as Irigaray is deeply influenced by the western postmodern philosophy, her theory therefore reflects the deconstruction philosophy significantly. Whereas, this dissertation interprets the general context of the development of western feminist movement and feminist literary criticism and then explains the basic position of deconstruction philosophy.

Keywords

Luce Irigaray Postmodern feminist Body Gender politics Female discourse Female genealogy.

Lucy Irigaray, Julia Kristeva and Hélène Cixous are called the "Trinity" of European modern feminists. Irigaray's idea is involved in feminist psychoanalysis theory, feminist discourse theory and gender political criticism theory. Its outstanding characteristics are undoubted deconstruction orientation and the emphasis on differential rights rules. Her theory can be regarded as the study of the difference. On the one hand, Irigaray's feminist theory abandoned the classical feminist theory and focused on the realistic orientation of rights. On the other hand, it hoped to subvert the dual logical thinking mode of the patriarchal society in order to break the micro power cage of the patriarchal discourse through the way of feminist discourse. The postmodern characteristics of Irigaray's theory are embodied in her specific elaboration on the concepts of difference and equality, female sexual discourse and gender culture.

1. The three structure researching modules on the postmodern feminist theory of Luce Irigaray

The research features of this dissertation are three modular paradigms including postmodern psychoanalysis theory, discourse theory and micro power theory. According to the spiritual essence of Irigaray's theory and the phased characteristics of its theoretical development, the theoretical paradigms of Irigaray's postmodern feminism are summarized, that is, the theoretical paradigms and foundations of postmodern feminism psychoanalysis based on female psychoanalysis, the discourse theory paradigm of postmodern feminism constructed by female genealogy and the micro power theory paradigm of postmodern feminism based on the female body. The significance of this study is to present the insight of the theory of Irigaray in the construction of female language and subjectivity, which can help to promote the construction of Chinese feminist literary theory and provide theoretical guidance for the practice of Chinese female literary creation.

In order to show the relationship between the construction of the postmodern feminist theory and the western postmodern cultural ideas better, we can see the relationship between the influence of the postmodern cultural idea on the postmodern feminist theory and the other representative theories of postmodern feminism is profound. The representative theories of postmodern cultural thoughts can be summarized by Lacan's psychoanalysis, Derrida's view of language and difference and Foucault's theory of power discourse. Firstly, Irigaray transformed Lacan's theory of mirror image and generated a feminist inspection of the classic psychoanalytic theory, that is, in criticizing the classic discourse of psychoanalysis such as Oedipus complex, penis envy and castration complex and so on, she showed how they are dominated by men clearly, and then she restored the process of female being cut off and how they got silenced. This process also redefined female sexual experience and endowed female subjectivity so as to establish a female pedigree outside the male-dominated cultural system, which is later centered on female friendship and mother daughter relationship. Secondly, in terms of establishing language, Irigaray accepted Derrida's generative view on language that attached importance to the opening of "signifier chain". She attributed this kind of compass of women's sexual experience to the single and arbitrary language situation of human beings at present. On the basis of encouraging women to make speeches, she advocated the reconstruction of the specialities between male-dominated discourse mode and male-dominated culture mode to form a whole new language based on women's cognitive and physical characteristics. Thirdly, influenced by Foucault's micro power theory, Irigaray put forward that the feminist language is a kind of power theory. Women's access to language power helped them to break through the "supervision" of male discourse on women and the repression concerning women's body, so women could return to their body and life itself for life practice. On this basis, Irigaray finally put forward the theory of constructing female subject based on female language practicing and self creation; and at the same time, the representatives of postmodern feminism and their theories, which include Beauvoir's feminist theory, Kristeva's Semiotics and Hélène Cixous's theory on female writing must be mentioned. Irigaray recognized Beauvoir's banner status and pointed out the importance of her concept of "the other" for the identification of women's humiliating status, but at the same time, she generally accepted the semiotic method of Kristeva's in-depth study of the male cultural system, and carried forward the tradition of women's literary research in the pre-Oedipus period of time. In the mean time, she combined the concept of the "milk like" life energy of women and the theory of white writing of women of Hélène Cixous to put forward some viewpoints, such as affirming female sexual experience, constructing feminist discourse mode of female's speech and experience, and finally, empowering female subjectivity and so on. If it is safely to say that Beauvoir and Kristeva found out that the status of women's being are being named and pressured by men, as well as Cixous proposed that women could have a kind of life energy that they might use to express the women's language with the explanatory power to define themselves, then Irigaray's idea on language pointed directly to women's participation and creation given that women's language is the process and product of women's experience of themselves. Therefore, women's subjectivity is formed by the self-confirmation and satisfaction of creation and self-empowerment. Irigaray interpreted the concept of equal rights in the way of correspondence rather than confrontation. She imitated the personal pronoun system in male discourse, established women's sense of identity and created gender on female subjectivity in the linguistic sense, and then advocated that women should simulate and participate in language games, create female words and experience themselves and create life through these activities.

1.1. The reserach on the criticism of the postmodern feminist psychoanalytic theory on Freud's theory

The contents of the dissertation are focused on the three forms of Irigaray's postmodern feminist theory from the perspective of paradigm research. Firstly, she expounded the criticism of the postmodern feminist psychoanalytic theory on Freud's theory. Men interpreted the discourse rules as the male order and it was based on their own father-son / brothers system, and they internalized the rules of human sexual experience into the sexual order basing on their own father-son / brothers genealogy, which are not only generated the life of a boy's absolute attachment to his father and the male genealogy in the track of growing into a man's life, but also showed some columns of discourse for female sexual experience which was even seemed as taboo about sexual experience. Irigaray's psychoanalytic theory criticized Oedipus complex, penis envy, castration complex and other Freudian terms one by one, pointing out that the discourse conspiracy such as the assignment of motherhood in the classical psychoanalytic theory, and finally put forward the proposition of establishing female genealogy.

1.2. The reserach on the criticism of the the discourse theory of postmodern feminism.

Secondly, she discussed the discourse theory of postmodern feminism. Irigaray discussed that the male discourse cage had deeply restricted women's real display of their sexual characteristics, so women must acquire subjectivity through the establishment of language around female sexual characteristics. This feminist view of language was a subversive interpretation of deconstruction in the context of postmodern theory, which was deemed an important turn of the development of feminist theory itself in the contemporary era, that is, from the study of female literary theory to the practice of language and the specific level of human rights. Irigaray adopted Derrida's theory of deferential language, and advocated that women must realize their intuitive, non purposeful, physical and sexual experience factors in language through imitation and play of language.

1.3. The gender politics theory of post modern feminist theory of Luce Irigaray.

The Last but not the least, she discussed the gender politics theory of post modern feminist. Irigaray respectively discussed the social order that women were subject to concerning the construction of people's physiological and social content basing on gender. Therefore, Irigaray advocated a convert over people's attitude when they freely talked about and dealt with sexual experience issues for establishing and improving the social and cultural structure and institutional framework to protect and present people's sexual characteristics. This is the core principle of the feminist gender political idea from the different perspective between feminist literary theory and traditional feminist rights. From the perspective of confirming the uniqueness of female sexual experience, Irigaray generated the theoretical starting point of avoiding differences to respecting differences, and expanded the scope of striving for the same rights of men and women to striving for the rights and interests of human life. Theoretically speaking, Irigaray pointed out that women's language could break the linguistic logic model of men through the establishment of the concept of women's gender in the linguistic sense, and advocated women's access to a discourse right as to name their own gender. From the perspective of improving the rights mechanism, Irigaray has refined the gender political criticism to regulate the rules of marriage and relationships, life and health, professional rules and women's civil rights, and she put forward a series of specific proposals to ensure rights.

2. The the evaluation of the postmodern feminist theory of Luce Irigaray.

On the the evaluation of the postmodern feminist theory and the introspection of related issues, we must conclude that Irigaray's theory was a subversive reading of the traditional western gender cultural order. She criticized the "femininity" given to women by the western patriarchal society, which hid the craft and conspiracy of the male-dominated discourse rules. It was a kind of monopoly and expansion of masculine power. Therefore, she emphasized the construction of gender difference theory, criticized the egalitarianism and unipolar world, and advocated female gender identity by her sexual writing. She adopted the post-modern philosophical deconstruction position and the Foucault style in archeology and genealogy research method, and put forward the female genealogy with female subculture characteristics that respected the essence of female life. She also put forward solutions to the discrimination and difficulties women were facing in social life, all of which made her theory shown a distinctive style of gender political criticism, which has moved the process of western feminist theoretical researching steps. Like any new theory construction, Irigaray's theory was always controversial, and some scholars questioned it mainly because it gave the characteristics of "biological essentialism" and "non historicism". For the former, this dissertation held that there was kind of a certain truth. Basing on the special physical experience of women, especially the experience of sexual experience, the theory of Irigaray indeed showed the characteristics of biological essentialism. However, it should also be noted that the difference approach of Irigaray's emphasis on female sexual experience was underlined in the fundamental deconstruction of the provisions of male discourse and the search for the basis for the construction of feminist discourse. For the latter, this dissertation held that the affirmation given to Irigaray should be greater and nicer than the criticism. Although she did not construct the theory with linear historical research methods, she used archaeology and genealogy methods to go deep into the pre-Oedipus historical stage, and the female genealogy deduced by referring to the construction of patriarchal discourse was a kind of research of historiography. It's biased to define her theory as "non historicism". Of course, we should also acknowledge that the female genealogy, which was based on the construction of male discourse, not only deconstructed male discourse, but also fell into the pattern of feminism. In fact, her discourse theory fell into the trap of metaphysics by deconstructing the logic of male discourse with difference, which made her theory present one characteristics of micro power by default.

3. The value and limitations of Irigaray's postmodern feminist theory.

The value and limitations of Irigaray's postmodern feminist theory can be seen from a broader perspective. Irigaray's feminist discourse would effectively enrich the expression space of human language, which was mainly because she proposed that women should obtain the main position by constantly participating in language games and their own life practice, while countless specific language and life practice created the signifier chain of female so that the language generated new styles and meanings because of its continuous variation. The summation of the signifier world belonging to women made the female human being connected with the concrete existence, thus women realized their own empowerment. The creation of female language could break the dominance of male discourse to make human language rich and colorful. However, Irigaray's theory still showed an utopia nature, that is, the idea that women wrote female genealogy and establish goddess authority would not really overthrow the edifice of male civilization, and that language would lead to ambiguity because of overemphasis on the generation of small-scale meaning and mutual recognition between women, which might make people suspect that Irigaray's theory has contempt on social rules and hold nihilistic tendencies of human existing values. On the whole, however, it is still

possible for Irigaray's theory to help women realize their own speech from the perspective of literature and language. Whether her theory could ever become an academic mainstream is still remained to be proved by history.

References

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