

A Cultural Adaptation Study of Code-Switching in the Joy Luck Club

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36348/sijll.2025.v08i08.001>

| Received: 12.07.2025 | Accepted: 05.09.2025 | Published: 06.09.2025

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Abstract

With the deepening of globalization and the increasing frequency of cross-cultural exchanges, Asian films have gradually emerged in the international film market and become an important bridge connecting the East and the West. As a classic Asian film, *The Joy Luck Club*, with its unique narrative and profound thematic connotation, has attracted the attention and love of many audiences. In the movie, the phenomenon of code-switching appears frequently. This paper applies Verschueren's theory of linguistic adaptation to analyze the cultural adaptation embodied in the phenomenon of code-switching in *The Joy Luck Club*, so as to analyze the impact of code-switching on the cross-cultural communication of Asian families. It reveals the complex mentality of cultural identity, identity construction and conflict resolution of Asian groups in cross-cultural communication.

Keywords: Joy Luck Club; code-switching; cultural adaptation; cross-cultural communication.

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1. INTRODUCTION

With the acceleration of globalization and the progress of society, people from different cultural backgrounds have more opportunities to communicate. In the process of cultural communication, people from different countries and regions often use two or more languages, thus code-switching occurs. In a broad sense, code-switching refers to the ability of bilingual speakers to easily alternate between two languages.[1] Code-switching occurs frequently in people's daily lives, for example, in literary works, TV programs and daily conversations. In this paper, using Jef Verschueren's theory of linguistic conformity and Yu's model of linguistic adaptation from the perspective of pragmatics, we analyze the cultural conformity of code-switching in *The Joy Luck Club*, and analyze the impact of code-switching on the cross-cultural communication of Asian families. It reveals the complex mentality of cultural identity, identity construction and conflict resolution of Asian groups in cross-cultural communication.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Linguistic Adaption Theory and Linguistic Adaption Model

Understanding Pragmatics, published by Verschueren in 1999, marked the maturity of linguistic adaptation theory, which, according to Verschueren, is an overview of language use behavior from cognitive, social and cultural perspectives.[2] Pragmatics is a

complex linguistic phenomenon that involves three factors: linguistic, social and cultural. Code-switching is a complex linguistic phenomenon that involves linguistic, social and cultural factors. According to Verschueren's study, linguistic adaptation theory consists of two main aspects: (1) The process of language use is a process of language selection. Speakers need to choose both linguistic forms and linguistic strategies: (2) Language use is an adaptive behavior of human beings, which is reflected in the fact that people constantly make linguistic choices, consciously or unconsciously, for reasons internal or external to the language.[2] In 2000, Yu Guodong proposed a pragmatic model of adaptation on the basis of the theory of adaptation. The model takes into account linguistic, cultural, social and psychological factors as well as the dynamics of code-switching. According to this conformity model, speakers will choose two or more codes or languages in the same communicative situation in order to adapt to the linguistic reality, psychological motivation, or social custom in the communicative situation.[3] The adaptation to linguistic reality actually depends on the degree of lexical accessibility. If a concept exists only in one language and not in another, or if it is difficult to find an exact equivalent in another language, code-switching is used to fill the linguistic gap in order to express the concept better. Adaptation to social conventions refers to the fact that the use of code-switching in communication allows the speaker to dynamically follow the local social culture and avoid cultural conflicts and embarrassment.

Psychological motivation refers to some psychological factors of the speaker. For example, speakers may use code-switching to save face, be sarcastic or get closer to others out of different psychological needs.

2.2 Studies related to The Joy Luck Club

Through the stories of four Chinese-American women, *The Joy Luck Club* demonstrates the complex relationship between the two cultures of China and the United States in the midst of collision, conflict and integration. Scholars have deeply interpreted this work from different angles.

Li Xiaoyun and Li Xiaohong, in their article "From The Joy Luck Club to The Gold Rush: Contemporary Hollywood's Oriental Imagination and the Development of Asian Culture," discuss in depth how contemporary Hollywood has used *The Joy Luck Club* as a starting point to gradually enrich and deepen its understanding and presentation of the Oriental world, especially Asian culture. This is not only reflected in the narrative approach of the movie, but also in the characterization and the use of cultural symbols, making Asian culture blossom with a unique luster on the Hollywood stage.[4]

While exploring the Chinese identity, Yanli reveals the identity dilemma and struggle that Chinese people experience in a foreign country through her interpretation of the movie "The Joy Luck Club". Each character in the movie epitomizes the Chinese people's quest for self-identity and sense of belonging in a foreign country, and their experiences trigger the audience to think deeply about identity.[5]

Xu Yinxue, on the other hand, has carefully studied the imagery of swan feathers in the movie *The Joy Luck Club* from the perspective of multimodal discourse analysis. She believes that this imagery not only has symbolic significance, but also plays an important narrative role in the film, providing the audience with a rich space for interpretation.[6]

Ran Yawei, on the other hand, provides an in-depth interpretation of the novel *The Joy Luck Club* from the perspective of intercultural communication studies. She argues that the novel reveals the differences and conflicts between Eastern and Western cultures, as well as intercultural communication and integration, by presenting family stories in different cultural contexts.[7]

Liu Feng, on the other hand, provides an in-depth interpretation of the theme of *The Joy Luck Club* from the perspective of cultural conflict. He believes that the cultural conflicts in the movie are not only reflected in the family, but also in the society, and these conflicts reflect the profound differences between Eastern and Western cultures.[8]

Song Xiuhua, in her article "Discussing the Cultural Relationship between China and the United States in Tan Enmei's Novel 'The Joy Luck Club'", analyzes in detail the cultural relationship between China and the United States shown in the novel. She argues that the novel reveals the similarities, differences and intermingling between Chinese and American cultures by presenting family stories in different cultural backgrounds, providing readers with a unique perspective to understand the two cultures.[9]

Wang Feng and Zeng Lin, on the other hand, have deeply explored the identity of cultural subjects in *The Joy Luck Club* from the postcolonial context. They believe that in the context of globalization, the identity of cultural subjects faces new challenges and opportunities, and *The Joy Luck Club* is a profound reflection on this issue.[10]

Chen Hong [11], Yang Jiaxin, Guo Yiming, and He Wenfa [12] have conducted a case study of the movie *The Joy Luck Club* from the perspective of cross-cultural communication. They believe that by showing the cultural differences and conflicts between China and the United States, the movie provides the audience with an opportunity to understand the two cultures, and at the same time provides useful insights for cross-cultural communication.

In summary, *The Joy Luck Club* and its movie adaptation not only show us the mingling and collision between Eastern and Western cultures, but also provide us with a unique perspective to understand the two cultures. In the future cultural exchanges, we should cherish this opportunity of cultural intermingling and promote understanding and respect between different cultures.

The phenomenon of cross-cultural communication and dissemination in *The Joy Luck Club* has always been the focus of scholars' attention, but little attention has been paid to the cultural conformity embodied in the code-switching phenomenon of *The Joy Luck Club*. On the basis of previous research results and limitations, this paper will study the cultural conformity embodied in the code-switching phenomenon in *The Joy Luck Club* according to the framework of the conformity model, and further interpret it from the perspective of intercultural communication.

3. CULTURAL ADAPTION THEORY

3.1 Context and Adaption

Context refers to the environment in which language is used, "referring to the context, i.e., the relationship before and after a word, phrase, utterance, or chapter", "Context can often help to understand the particular meaning of a linguistic component such as a word or phrase." [13] Contextual context, as mentioned here, is a narrow concept. The broader context also includes the cultural context in which the language users

live, i.e. cultural context. This concept was first proposed by Malinowski in 1923, and when applied to translation, it refers to the cultural, historical, and social backgrounds to which the source language and the translated language are attached.

Hu Zhuanglin divides context into linguistic context, situational context and cultural context. Linguistic context refers to the internal environment of the discourse, which can be the content of phrases, sentences or paragraphs; situational context is the external environment of the discourse when it is produced, the relationship of the characters involved in the communication, the time, and the place; and cultural context is the socio-cultural, economic, religious, historical and political background of the discourse.[14]

Verschueren puts forward the theory of linguistic synthesis and conformity, which systematically and comprehensively explains the dynamic process of language use from the perspective of linguistic communication and mutual conformity. According to him, language use is, in the final analysis, "a continuous process of language selection, whether this selection is conscious or unconscious, and whether it is due to reasons internal or external to the language". The reason why language users are able to make appropriate choices in the process of language use is that language is characterized by variability, negotiability and adaptability.^[15] Variability makes language choices possible and determines that the choices must be confined within a certain range; negotiability makes language use flexible; adaptability enables people to negotiate and make choices to achieve the desired communicative purposes in the end. Among them, adaptability refers to the ability of a language to allow its users to adapt flexibly from the available options in order to meet the needs of the context. Conformity includes structure-object conformity, context-relationship conformity, dynamic conformity and conformity process awareness highlighting. Among them, context is subdivided into linguistic context and communicative context. The former refers to the various linguistic means chosen according to contextual factors in the process of language use; the latter consists of language users, the physical world, the social world and the psychological world. Context-relative conformity means that the choice of language in the process of language use must conform to the linguistic context and the communicative context.

By comparison, it can be seen that cultural context includes elements of politics, history, philosophy, science, customs, religious beliefs, ways of thinking and geography. Language is a cultural carrier, and its deeper meaning changes with different cultures. To communicate successfully, it is necessary to be responsive to cultural differences and to link words, beliefs and ways of thinking to the cultural context.

3.2 Code-switching as a Language Option

Language use is a process of constant choice, including the choice of linguistic forms and linguistic strategies. Code-switching is itself a linguistic choice. First of all, the code-switcher must be a bilingual or a speaker of more than one language or language variant. In order to achieve a particular communicative purpose in a particular situation, it is necessary to choose a particular language form from among the languages or language variants. Next, the code-switcher has to further select linguistic forms from the chosen language or language variant, including vocabulary, sentence structure, etc. They intentionally engage in code-switching when other communicative strategies are difficult to achieve the communicative purpose. Code-switching reflects the communicator's adaptation to the communicative context and realizes many communicative functions that cannot be achieved with one language or language variant. According to the pragmatics theory of selective conformity, code-switchers engage in code-switching in the process of communication mainly to realize the conformity to the linguistic reality, the conformity to the social statute and the conformity to the psychological motivation [3]. Culture is the foundation on which a society is built, therefore, adapting to social norms means adapting to culture, and the process of code-switching by code-switchers is also a process of code-switching in different cultural contexts. It is also the process of conformity in different cultural contexts.

4. PRAGMATIC FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS OF CODE-SWITCHING IN JOY LUCK CLUB

4.1 Adapting to linguistic realities

The adaptation of linguistic reality refers to the nature and real existence of a certain language. Most of the concepts of traditional Chinese cultural life, customs, history and so on involved in *The Joy Luck Club* are difficult to find corresponding words or appropriate forms of expression in English. Code-switching that conforms to linguistic reality can be categorized into the following three types according to categories:

The first category: address and location, such as "farther down the street was Ping Yuan (plains) Fish Market", "Mai Dong Lou (McDonald)"; the second category is: Mahjong jargon, such as "When the mahjong pai (mahjong tile) were spilled onto the table the only sound was of ivory tiles washing against one another. "pung (bump)" "chr (eat)"; the third category is : objects, e.g. "I remember it was once a lump of syaumei (steamed dumpling), a little dumpling I loved to eat. little dumpling I loved to eat." "hongmu (red wood)". There are many more types of code-switching that can be used to achieve the functions of ease of use, filling lexical gaps and replacing concepts by adapting to linguistic realities.

4.2 Adapting to the Social Statute

Another pragmatic function of code-switching is to conform to social conventions. Since speakers have to carry out social activities, that is, they are socialized human beings, so their behaviors naturally have to conform to social expectations, and their speech behaviors will be subject to the constraints of social norms. Code-switching can dynamically conform to or comply with social norms to avoid violating social taboos or causing social embarrassment. This type of code-switching in English and Chinese is divided into two types of effects.

The first type is taboo avoidance, such as a typical example in *The Joy Luck Club*, "Open Melon". Yingying, the mother, vividly depicts the hidden meaning of "Kai gua":

"Kai gua?"---Open the watermelon---he Then he sank the knife in with a mighty push and his largemouth roared a laugh so big I could see all the way back to his gold teeth. Everybody at the table laughed loudly. My face turned from embarrassment because at that time I did not understand.

Yes, it is true I was a wild girl but I was innocent I did not know what an evil thing he did when he cut open that watermelon. I did not understand until six months later when I was married to this man and he hissed drunkenly to me that he was ready to kai gua.

The word "kai gua" itself has a metaphorical meaning in the Chinese language, which means to acquire female virginity. In traditional Chinese culture, topics related to sex are often considered private, obscure, and not to be discussed openly, so the Chinese in the novel use the word kai gua to replace its original meaning. In fact, the code-switching here not only avoids social embarrassment, but also caters to Western readers' mystical reverie of the East.

The second type is to avoid ambiguity for the purpose of emphasis. For example, "She has a Chinese saying for what she knows. "Chunwangchihan": If the lips are gone, the teeth will be cold. Which means, I suppose, one thing is always the result of another." English-Chinese code-switching of idioms or slang occurs many times between the characters' dialogues, and such usage not only reflects the Chinese immigrants' cultural backgrounds and perceptions, but also conforms to social customs and avoids conceptual confusion through the explanation of Chinese idioms.

4.3 Adapting to psychological motives

The third pragmatic function of code-switching is to comply with psychological motivation. Psychological motivation is a state of mind that is the inner drive that determines behavior, which refers to the fact that the speaker is influenced by some kind of motivation when he or she engages in communication so

as to achieve the desired communicative purpose. And in the process of communication, the communicator's psychological motivation will influence the communicator's linguistic behavior in many cases.

In *The Joy Luck Club*, the mothers at the mahjong table, "They speak in their special language half in broken English, half in their own Chinese dialect." The mothers speak Chinese because they spent their youth in China and their mother tongue is Chinese, which has an innate and natural emotional affinity for them, whereas it is more difficult to speak English.

Similarly, in order to make the language more vivid and express humorous and ironic effects, the mothers would frequently use tone words in Chinese, such as: Nikan! (Look!)、Chiszle (I'm furious.)、Ching Ching! (Please.) Shemma? (What?)、Jrdaole (Got it.)、Choszle (It stinks!)、Yi ding (Certainly)、Nale! Nail! (There is nothing pardon.)、Mei Mei Jandale! (Mei Mei grew up!)、Swanle (It's over.) etc.

5. Intercultural Communication Perspectives on the Joy Luck Club

The four mothers in *The Joy Luck Club* are the first generation of Chinese immigrants to the United States after World War II, and they suffer from the trials and tribulations of life in old China, which is full of holes: Wu Suwang is forced to abandon her twin daughters in infancy in order to flee for her life; Su An-mei's mother commits suicide by swallowing opium for the sake of her daughters' future; Zhong Dong-lin marries a young, unsophisticated husband at the age of 12; and Gu Ying-ying, after being abandoned by her husband and having an abortion, marries someone she doesn't love for ten years of a life of misery. After being abandoned by her husband and having an abortion, Gu Ying-ying lived in poverty for 10 years before marrying a man she did not love, with whom she had little in common. In the end, the mothers are forced to leave their homeland and go to the United States to seek a right to live. However, the U.S., by virtue of its dominant culture, rejects and discriminates against other cultures. In dealing with cultural relations with other ethnic groups, the United States adopts a racist and cultural imperialist stance, either assimilating or discriminating against them. The attitude of the United States towards foreign cultures is reflected in the wanton arrogance of immigration officials towards immigrants entering the country.

Immigrant mothers who have lost their cultural identity and cannot find their place in the new environment are clearly "strangers" in American culture. Mothers did not anticipate the challenges that the new environment would bring them. The Chinese's historical inferiority and invisibility in the U.S. made them the "other" in the eyes of white people from the very

beginning. They were excluded from mainstream American culture, living within it but not of it. Georg Simmel, a German sociologist, first proposed the concept of stranger, which he defined as "a stranger who is not a wanderer who comes today and goes tomorrow, but one who arrives today and stays tomorrow, or can be called a potential wanderer. Though not gone again, the freedom to come and go has not yet been forgotten." The stranger is fixed within a certain spatial sphere, but his place in it is very special. For he does not initially belong to it, and brings with him qualities that were not originally present in it.[7]

Chinese mothers are coming to realize that it is impossible to hold on to their own culture in a cultural community that presents a hegemonic position. Not stepping out of the circle of the Asian community is an escape from life and cannot lead to peace of mind in the true sense of the word. The only way to find a place for oneself is to reconcile the new world with the old and to find one's place in the symbolic order of the two cultures. Their lifestyles, as well as their thinking, are changing: they have their own Chinese mahjong club, but they also go to Christian churches, where they attend Bible reading classes to improve their English, and choirs as a social activity; they continue to speak Chinese, but they also speak broken English; they talk about the past, and they often meet with their husbands to discuss the future. New York stocks and look to the future. The mothers consciously identified with their Chinese cultural identity, but also unconsciously reaped the benefits of that part of their cultural identity as Americans. In the process of navigating their way through the United States, the four mothers find a balance between the poles of their own maternal culture and their own object culture.

5.1 Meaning of "mahjong" imagery

The Joy Luck Club is the name of a mahjong club founded in Guilin by Wu Suwan, one of the four narrating mothers in the story. According to the mother's recollection, it was during the time of the Japanese invasion of Guilin that the four women, who had fled to Guilin from the occupied territories, took turns to be the hosts and met regularly. They ate, drank, and had fun, telling anecdotes at their weekly gatherings, thinking of nothing else, treating each week as a new year, and adding joy to their card games. However, the laughter and entertainment on the surface could not hide the worries and misfortunes as well as the fear and panic in their hearts during the war, as Wu Suwan said, "It's not that we don't have a heart, we don't see the pain. In fact, we are all afraid, we all have our own suffering, but despair can not recover what has been lost, it only prolongs the unbearable pain." So between "sitting there waiting to die with a sad face and choosing their own happiness," they chose the latter. Playing mah-jongg allows them to pass the difficult time "without thinking bad thoughts" and at the same time to hope for good luck and to express their prayers and hopes for life. Therefore,

their mahjong sessions have lost the function of gambling, but are just a kind of ritual and a psychological comfort for survival in adversity. This psychological mechanism for survival, which deconstructs sadness and misfortune to construct happiness and good fortune, is deeply influenced by the Chinese Taoist relativistic view of life. Tan Enmei's use of the mahjong club as a metaphor affirms both the optimistic and progressive outlook on life of Chinese women and their spiritual quality of not succumbing to fate.

The second Joy Luck Club was formed when Wu Suwon arrived in San Francisco and met the remaining three mothers at church. It inherited the tradition of the first Mahjong Club, which took turns being host and meeting regularly. In addition to this, the Mahjong Club in its new environment was a regular social gathering for the women to have fun, chat about their families, and learn together about American customs and ways of being in the world. However, the difference in time and place gave the second Joy Luck Club a deeper meaning, as the four mothers, also as women under the oppression of the patriarchal society in the stormy old China, were ostracized to varying degrees in the United States due to racial and cultural differences. The inferiority and invisibility of the Chinese in American history made them the "other" in the eyes of the white man from the very beginning. They faced the embarrassment of being "excluded from the mainstream culture and not belonging to the American culture despite living in it". Thus, in the situation of "othering", the survival instinct is brought to the forefront. They desperately need to know who they are. In this case, the past becomes the only thing they can rely on to understand themselves and survive, and memory is the only way to retrieve the past. For mothers, reclaiming the past is a way to find new motivation to survive under new pressures. It is a source for them to determine "who they are" in the "other" environment, and a weapon to correct the white man's vision, refute and reverse the racial stereotypes in the white man's mind. Their stories show that Chinese women are not the lowly, submissive, submissive and defiant individuals that white people think they are. More importantly, the telling of such pasts in the form of "stories" not only breaks the shackles of their patriarchal silence and rewrites history, but also allows them to find their own voices. This voice is on the one hand their power to define themselves. On the other hand, it is a valuable legacy that they are proud of and a necessary means of transmitting it. It enables fluent English-speaking daughters to learn the truth about their past, and while it passes on their mother's experiences, ideas, beliefs, aspirations, and spirituality as "the most precious thing" to her daughters, it also empowers their daughters with their own voices, helping them to truly understand the Chinese people, to establish their own identity, and to have what they dream of. "The perfect combination of an American environment and a Chinese personality". This is what it means to establish the second Joyful Fortune Society, as Wu wishes to do. The

second Hei Fu Hui is not only an extension of the first Hei Memory, but also symbolizes the continuation of the spirit. And it is a bridge that connects mother and daughter generations, past and present, East and West, and it is the beginning of establishing one's own identity and its continuation.

5.2 Meaning of "Swan Feather" Imagery

The first appearance of the swan feather suggests the commonalities between the feather and the mother, Wu Hang Wish; lightness, weakness and helplessness, as well as the helplessness of not being able to gain a foothold in a foreign country. The marginalized mothers know nothing about the America they will be living in, and they are isolated and helpless while constructing cultural identity. The swan feather is a metaphor for the mother's hope.

The second appearance of the feather comes after the death of the mother, Wu Suwan. Her daughter, Wu Jingmei, grows up in a complex environment of Chinese family and Western society. Her mother's hope for her son to become a great successor clash with her daughter's value of growing up freely, resulting in her daughter's lack of understanding of her mother's good intentions. The gap between mother and daughter does not really disappear until the mother's death. When she grows up, through eating crabs, the daughter learns for the first time that her mother is the person who knows her best, and she begins to understand her mother. After her mother's death, the daughter listens to her father's stories about her mother, and begins to tolerate her mother's "incomprehensibility" in the past. The daughter, listening for the first time to the story of her mother and her lost sister, clutches the feather in her hand, grieving, and then presses the feather tightly in her hand, unable to believe that she has shouldered all of her mother's expectations. Both father and daughter look fondly at the feather that represents their mother's hopes. The daughter clutches the feather again. This series of actions and the depiction of the swan's feather exemplifies the sublimation of understanding and tolerance between mother and daughter. The swan feather is the mother's hope for survival and all the hope that she passes on to her daughter.

The swan feather appears at the beginning of the story, and like the mahjong, it connects the main thread of the whole story. It represents both the bond of affection between mother and daughter and the transmission of the Eastern cultural traits of the mothers to their daughters who grew up in a Western society.

6. CONCLUSION

As a representative work of Chinese writer Tan Enmei, *The Joy Luck Club* fully demonstrates the

conflicts of the first-generation Chinese immigrant families in the Western society, which is of profound significance for cross-cultural communication and exchange, and it is also a knocking brick that opens the door for the survival of the Eastern culture in the Western society. There are a lot of code-switching phenomena in *The Joy Luck Club*, but the cultural conformity phenomenon embodied in the code-switching content is seldom researched. This paper analyzes the code-switching phenomenon in *The Joy Luck Club* and analyzes it from the perspective of cross-cultural communication according to the theory of conformity. It can be found that the code-switching in *The Joy Luck Club* is accompanied by the collision and fusion of Eastern and Western cultures, and also reflects the journey of the first generation of Chinese immigrants to find themselves.

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