



An Analysis of Conversational Implicature in *Pride and Prejudice*

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Abstract

Pride and Prejudice is the masterpiece of the English novelist Jane Austen and is noted mainly for its successful characterization through conversations. Witty and delightful dialogues run through a large part of the book. Through the dialogues and their implied meanings, readers can gain revealing insights into the inner world of the characters, their personalities, desires and intentions and also their weaknesses. This paper attempts from the perspective of Grice's Conversational Implicature Theory to analyze the potential meanings of conversations in the novel, mainly those between Mr. and Mrs. Bennet, Elizabeth and Darcy, Elizabeth and Mr. Collins, and finds that conversational implicature is generated via the violation of Grice's Cooperative Principle, namely, maxims of quantity, quality, relation and manner. Thus readers can further understand the characters' feelings, images, the theme of the work and the artistry of the authors. It is hoped that the study aims to deepen the understanding of Conversational Implicature Theory and the novel as a world classic.

Subject Areas

Linguistics

Keywords

Conversational Implicature, *Pride and Prejudice*, Conversation, Characters' Inner World

1. Introduction

Conversational Implicature was proposed by H. P. Grice. It is used to analyze the potential meanings behind a dialogue. Conversational Implicature Theory is the backbone of pragmatics and is indispensable in verbal communication. Philo-

sophers and linguists are keen on it on account of its novel content.

Just taking the representative work of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* as an example, although it has been in a high position in world literature, with many experts and scholars having studied it, researchers are mostly concentrated on the field of literature, such as on the story itself and theme of the novel content, character images, the writing style of Jane Austen and her views of love, marriage and money, genre of the novel, as well as from the perspective of feminism on the image of the analysis and so on. It was not until many years later that some scholars began to use Speech Act Theory to study the role of irony in this novel. It is a fact that over half of the novel are about conversations, so it is very necessary to analyze the hidden meanings behind the conversations by using the theory of Conversational Implicature. Though so far even using linguistics theory to analyze novels has become popular, there are relatively few studies. At present, cross-disciplinary research has begun to rise. Multi-dimensional analysis of a matter can provide different views and ideas. In literature, it is important to have a further understanding of the character's image and to know clearly how the author uses language to depict a character. Through previous studies, we can clearly know that the charm of characters is also demonstrated by dialogue. If there is only a single planar narrative, it is impossible to create a three-dimensional and unforgettable character, and a novel cannot be successfully spread throughout the world. Applying the Cooperative Principle of Conversational Implicature Theory to analyze *Pride and Prejudice* can encourage people to understand the characters under the author's pen from multiple dimensions, understand different images, appreciate the charm of language, and improve their own literary appreciation level. At the same time, Conversational Implicature Theory can also be used in daily communication to improve the effectiveness of communication.

2. Concept of Conversational Implicature

2.1. The Definition of Conversational Implicature

H. P. Grice was the presenter who put up with the concept that when people talk, their words may contain some potential meanings. He believed that if people have the same purpose, they may understand each other's intention behind their conversations. On the contrary, their talking is nonsense.

As soon as it was put forward, it reached the top. With its introduction, the theory of pragmatics has made great progress. Because of this principle, in the following decades, scholars began a new round of legitimate study of speech acts, rather than speculating on the accumulated experience from everyday life. For example, Levinson (1983) extended and developed the theory based on the study of those predecessors [1].

Moreover, in order to better apply Conversational Implicature Theory to life, Grice also proposed the Cooperative Principle, namely the four criteria, to remind people to act according to the rules when communicating, or to judge the meaning behind a person's speech. These four maxims are going to be described

in detail in the following chapter.

2.2. Cooperative Principle and Associate Maxims

As mentioned above, Cooperative Principle (CP) was produced in order to deal with the problem of how to know the invisible meanings in the utterance. Grice defines this principle as “make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or the direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged” [2]. There are four kinds of maxims under it, namely, quantity maxim, quality maxim, relation maxim, and manner maxim. Later they will be introduced one by one in detail [2].

1) The maxim of quantity:

- i. What the listener answers should be exactly what the questioner asks;
- ii. The words should be as simple as possible as what the listener should reply.

2) The maxim of quality:

- i. The participants are not supposed to say something that himself or herself has already known is wrong;
- ii. The speakers must not say something heard by others without proven news.

3) The maxim of relation:

Your answers should be concerned with the questions.

4) The maxim of manner:

- i. The words used should be easy and simple to get it;
- ii. Utterances should not be more than one meaning in a conversation;
- iii. Say something in a laconic expression;
- iv. Organize words in apple-pie order.

All above are the criteria of CP. By following them, speakers and listeners might make an effective dialogue. It is a fact that this theory is a part of pragmatics, so it has been rarely applied to the study of literature. Therefore, in fact, the current application of this theory is still at an immature stage. By immature, it means that there is no complete system to guide the elaboration of the application of this theory in the appreciation of literary works. Most of the experts and scholars have fully understood the theory, but the problem existing is that the linguistic theory is relatively more esoteric. Many readers just exclaim over the thoughts from the perspective of pragmatics, without deep contemplation of the use of pragmatics, a demerit to the development of the Conversational Implicature and the development of the whole linguistics. Before going further study, it is said that the best way to learn, master and use knowledge is to get a systematic and thorough understanding. Hence, from this people would know that it is a good chance to combine literature with linguistics. After having learned the assistance of linguistics to literary works, the author was very surprised. The surprising point is that two irrelevant theories could really solve the problem. That's maybe why Grice presented this theory. As an old saying goes, there is no separation between literature, history and philosophy. Indeed, it will be historic progress for the future of literature to be able to integrate all fields. However, people will

find that even though this theory has been put forward for a long time, it is still not known by many people, unlike some other literary theories, which are familiar to people. As a result, the theory does not play its due value in the public. And that's why the author feels that this theory is immature, immature in its application not in itself. Although many people argue that it has a lot of flaws, the author is of the opinion that its shining points should not be covered by its flaws. This is why the author decided to write this paper with this theory, more classic and useful.

3. Conversational Implicature Generated in *Pride and Prejudice* through Violation of Cooperative Principle

As mentioned above, there are so many dialogues in this novel that flout the maxims of the Cooperative Principle. Due to the classification of the maxims, the paper is going to discuss some of the classic conversations in sequence. Grice's Cooperative Principle Theory tried to "explain how a hearer gets from what is said to what is meant, from the level of expressed meaning to the level of implied meaning" [3], so this is the reason why the theory is applied here. This paper mainly uses Grice's Cooperative Principle to make a pragmatic analysis of some classic conversations in *Pride and Prejudice*, so as to bring the classic characters to the public again in a diverse way. What the author wants to say is that different from other theories, Grice's Cooperative Principle is not based on the study of grammar which may contain errors in content and form. It is mainly dependent on context. For the study of a novel, the author doesn't want to study the grammatical mistakes the authors made without cautiousness and it might not show what a character is like. It may be just a slip of the pen. The research done on characters is more based on the characters themselves, such as their actions, words and external image, so that readers can know what kind of person they are. Just like in life, it is impossible for people to know what a person is like by his or her grammatical mistakes. At best, people can only know that he or she may not have abundant knowledge reserves, so he or she may make low-level errors. However, the author contends this does not affect a person being a good person. Therefore, based on the text the author has studied, the writer selects the Cooperative Principle only.

3.1. Violation of the Maxim of Quantity

The principle of quantity requires that utterances should contain the information needed for conversation, but not more than the information needed. Therefore, the violation of the quantity criterion includes two situations: insufficient or redundant information [4]. During daily life, it is easy to see that not everyone will follow the rules of the maxim of quantity. It is also true of the literature books. A close reading of *Pride and Prejudice* finds this phenomenon common in the book. It will be cited to see and then the invisible meanings and the cha-

racter's images will be analyzed. Due to the fact that space is limited, the author won't list all the conversations, instead, the author will just select one or two utterances to explain.

Example 1:

"Come, Darcy," said he, "I must have you dance. You had a much better dance."

"I certainly shall not. You know how I detest it unless I am particularly acquainted with my partner. At such an assembly it would be insupportable. Your sisters are engaged, and there is not another woman in the room whom it would not be a punishment to me to stand up with" (*Pride and Prejudice*: 9) [5].

So the readers can see that Mr. Darcy answers more than what is needed. He firstly refuses Bingley's propose and then says a lot about why he didn't dance with others, which may be not as simple as what Bingley wants. He obviously flouts the maxims of quantity. And he explains the reason why he did not dance, but from his words audience could feel that he has an innate sense of superiority, or I would like to describe it as arrogance. At bottom, he thinks that the ladies at the ball are so vulgar that they cannot dance with him. He implies that it is not his fault to stand alone, but because of no suitable partners. As readers, even if we don't know the personality of Darcy, from this dialogue, we would find that he is arrogant and somehow impolite. Throughout the former text, Austen did not say more about the character of Darcy, but the author finds that through his talking, readers could generalize his features. Words are such magic things that though you don't give any adjectives, others could infer what you might be like from your utterances. And here Darcy's words make him a so proud nobleman, leaving a bad impression on Elizabeth and the readers. Readers will feel that Darcy is a vicious leading actor, who looks upon others without further contact, which gives hints on the later plots.

Example 2:

"But afterward she seemed to improve on you, and I believe you thought her rather pretty at one time."

"Yes," replied Darcy, who could contain himself no longer, "but that was only when I first knew her, for it is many months since I considered her as one of the most handsome women of my acquaintance" (*Pride and Prejudice*: 285) [5].

Darcy violates the maxim by explaining more. From this short message, readers would know that Elizabeth has become the greatest woman in Darcy's heart. He has realized that what had said before was wrong, and readers could feel that he feels a little regretful for evaluating someone without knowing more. So readers might doubt why he changed his mind so differently, through reading, they could find the idea that he falls in love with Elizabeth on his side. Under regular conditions, Darcy just needs to reply to only one word, that is, "Yes", but this time he adds the reasons so as to tell Miss. Bingley that he really did make a mistake in the past. And just to imagine how proud Darcy is, but he admits his errors immediately. This shows his personal growth, and he wants others to know that he

really loves Lizzy. His violation also shows his determination about his appreciation of Lizzy, which depicts a person who dares to love.

3.2. Violation of the Maxim of Quality

When people tell somebody something that is unsure or has already been known is wrong, there always might be some reasons behind why he's doing so, physical or mental. In this novel, if readers are careful about every dialogue, they might find so many examples. Let's have a look.

Example 3:

“You excel so much in the dance, Miss Eliza, that it is cruel to deny me the happiness of seeing you; and though this gentleman dislikes the amusement in general, he can have no objection, I am sure, to oblige us for one half-hour.”

“Mr. Darcy is of all politeness,” said Elizabeth, smiling (*Pride and Prejudice*: 27) [5].

This is a conversation between Sir William and Elizabeth. In fact, Elizabeth hated Darcy because of his arrogance. But here she said that Darcy is polite, to show her politeness. So Elizabeth's answer violated the maxim of quality. She didn't express what she really thought about Darcy. She did this because she didn't want to embarrass Sir William. The reason why Elizabeth violated the maxim of quality is that Austen wanted to show Elizabeth's irony about Darcy. Readers should care about Elizabeth's changes in her feelings for Darcy.

3.3. Violation of the Maxim of Relation

When talking with someone about one subject that people hate to raise, they always change the topic in a subtle way, indicating that they don't want to go on the same topic any longer. But they express their intentions politely in this way rather than refuse aggressively. He Zhaoxiong (2005) has concluded this in one sentence, that is, relevance criterion requires the content of discourse to be relevant [6].

Example 4:

“How good it was in you, my dear Mr. Bennet! But I knew I should persuade you at last. And it is such a good joke, too, that you should have gone this morning and never said a word till now.”

“Now, Kitty, you may cough as much as you choose,” said Mr. Bennet (*Pride and Prejudice*: 6) [5].

It is clear to see that Mr. Bennet says to his daughter without reacting to his wife's praise. The meaning he wants to convey is that he feels shameful about what his wife did and said. Here he says this just wants to tease Mrs. Bennet's change of attitude. He hates her about being vulgar. But he doesn't say any more about this or argue more, leaving with sarcasm. It shows unlike other squires, Mr. Bennet pays more attention to his daughters not just on money but their happiness. He doesn't like to pay visits to those nobles or the rich. In other words, he has his own pride and self-esteem, preferring living on his own to flattering others. It

can also be concluded that Mrs. Bennet is a woman who is shallow and mean. At first, she is angry for her husband not doing what she asked before, but later knows the truth, she changes her words quickly and begins to compliment him with exaggerate expressions. She doesn't have some further thoughts. The only thing she does the most is to look for rich families for her daughters' marriages.

Example 5:

Mrs. Bennet, with great civility, begged her ladyship to take some refreshment; but Lady Catherine very resolutely, and not very politely, declined eating anything; and then, rising up, said to Elizabeth, "Miss Bennet, there seemed to be a prettyish kind of a little wilderness on one side of your lawn. I should be glad to take a turn in it, if you will favour me with your company" (*Pride and Prejudice*: 371-372) [5].

Lady Catherine suddenly says something irrelevant to what Mrs. Bennet is doing at that time. She, in fact, wants to talk with Elizabeth alone, but she does not peak it out directly. Instead, she says that she would like to take a walk on the green lawn on the surface. However, readers all know that it cannot be exactly what it means, that is, an excuse of doing what the speaker intends to do. Here Lady Catherine comes with a purpose, that is, to warn Elizabeth not to marry with Darcy. She thinks that Elizabeth doesn't match her nephew, so she tells Elizabeth not to seduce Darcy anymore. What she does and says makes her an arrogant, impolite old woman. She doesn't respect Elizabeth, just like Darcy before, looks upon the country people.

3.4. Violation of the Maxim of Manner

As words have many different meanings, the chances are that the listeners might misunderstand the meanings if not expressed clearly.

Example 6:

"You are so cruel," said her sister, "you will not let me smile, and are provoking me to it every moment."

"How hard it is in some cases to be believed!"

"And how impossible in others!" (*Pride and Prejudice*: 254) [5].

The latter two parts of the excerpt are just like a tongue twister that is not easy to understand at the first time. It violates the rule of being brief and clear. Readers just could not understand what Elizabeth and her sister Jane were talking about in the literary meaning due to the ambiguity of references in their words. Because they don't want anyone else to know that Jane deeply loves Mr. Bingley. The reason why Elizabeth smiled when Jane said she was happy about the gentlemen coming to have dinner is that she knew Jane was telling a lie and she was content just because of the arrival of Mr. Bingley. However, she didn't point out the truth by just smiling to express her attitude, maybe somehow lucid. It also shows that the relationship between the two sisters is easy, simple and great, so that Elizabeth makes fun of her sister because she knows her sister wouldn't be angry.

Example 7:

“Are you quite sure that I ought to do, when you ought to do?”

“Oh, yes! You will only think I feel more than I ought to do, when I tell you all.”

“What do you mean?”

“Why, I must confess that I love him better than I do Bingley. I am afraid you will be angry” (*Pride and Prejudice*: 393) [5].

What Elizabeth says is not brief and vague. Jane doesn't understand her sister's reply. Elizabeth hadn't told anyone things that happened between Darcy and her. So no one knows why they fall in love with each other so deeply. From Elizabeth's message, readers could feel that she is so happy that she talks with her sister naughtily. The utterances made by her express her happiness and her real appreciation. These words mean that she loves Darcy more than anyone else and she thinks Darcy is the best one in the world. Here Austen depicts a lovely girl who is looking forward to her love and marriage. Although Elizabeth may sometimes be so tart on others, she is still in essence a little girl who longs for love. She is a woman who dares to love and hate, a vivid character. This is also the reason why readers like her so much.

4. Conclusions

In conclusion, people are usually accustomed to analyzing literary output with literary theories, from which they can know the thoughts, personalities and so on of the authors and the characters in books. But this paper uses the pragmatic theory, namely the Cooperative Principle, which provides readers with a chance from a new angle to study the book and describe the roles more perfectly and fully to the public. Then next time when they read again, they will have different ideas and unique feelings of the conversations, which seems to be with empathy. At the same time, readers also go further appreciation of the author's words, no longer on the surface as well as understand the charm of the language of that time. The target readers might improve their level of literary appreciation and their own quality.

Explained on the basis of the theory of pragmatics, as mentioned above, can bring different experiences, and at the same time, Grice's theory also can leave people with a deep impression. It's really a good way of expanding the linguistic audience through *Pride and Prejudice*. Consequently, in daily life, people might consider if there are more meanings behind the conversations. When they do not want to say something directly, they can breach the maxims of the Cooperative Principle to express their ideas. Meanwhile, it also provides a new way to do the analysis of literature works, improving people's problem-processing skills.

Above all, there are also some shortcomings of this article. First, the author doesn't study all the examples of the novel, just selects some of them that might not be so typical. Then the article doesn't discuss more about the features of the characters in this novel. And this paper just uses one theory to illustrate the nov-

el in linguistics; however, more can be studied combined with other theories such as politeness theory, to make the study deeper.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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