

Analysis of the Conversational Implicature of Dialogues in *Before Sunrise* from the Perspective of Violation of the Cooperative Principle

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Abstract—A lot of information in conversation is not directly expressed, but implied and indirect, which often violates the cooperative principle in verbal communication and requires listeners to obtain the real meaning of the speaker through a series of “translation” behaviors. The study of conversational implicature is conducive to the correct interpretation of the speaker's real intention, so as to give full play to the communicative function of language. Based on previous studies, this paper takes the Cooperative Principle of Grice as the theoretical framework and the dialogue between the hero and heroine in the movie *Before Sunrise* as the research material, by discussing the effect produced by the violation of Cooperative Principle in their dialogues, so as to deepen the audience's understanding of the movie and provide reference for communication in daily life.

Index Terms—Conversational implicature, violation of cooperative principle, *Before Sunrise*

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Research Background and Significance

Communication is taking place in every moment of human life, functioning as a bridge connecting two persons or two communities. But to achieve a successful communication, participants need to work out the true meaning of a conversation, which requires efforts from both sides of a conversation.

In Grice's theory, there is a set of over-watching assumptions guiding the conduct of conversation in daily life: to make your contributions such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged. These assumptions, in other words, maxims, specify what participants have to do in order to communicate in an efficient and cooperative way: they need to talk sincerely, relevantly and clearly, while offering sufficient information [1]. Those maxims constitute the Cooperative Principle. However, not all conversations proceed following the Cooperative Principle. In some actual cases, participants of a conversation may deliberately violate that principle for certain intention, for instance, avoiding embarrassment. Therefore, the real meaning of the dialogue may become implicit, and that is conversational implicature.

The smooth development of verbal communication requires both parties to follow the Cooperative Principle (CP) to ensure that they can obtain the information which enable the conversation to proceed in the current context. When one

of the participants violates the cooperative principle, that is, “the answer is not what is asked”, the other party has to rely on special contextual conditions to deduce the implied information in the discourse [2]. In today's society, no matter the dialogue in real life or the language of public media, all reflect the adherence to or violation of the Cooperative Principle, which requires the audience to understand the intention of the discourse through deduction.

The movie *Before Sunrise* is a classical love movie. It tells a story of Jesse, an American youth, and Celine, a French schoolgirl, who met as strangers on the train and talked happily, and then visited Vienna together. They spent 14 h altogether, talking about each other, and their love spread everywhere they went together, so they made a promise that they would meet again at the station in Vienna about six months later. One feature of this film is that there are almost only dialogues between the male and female protagonists, which run through from their first acquaintance to the final departure. Large sections of dialogue provide an excellent base for the study of conversational implicature that violates the cooperative principle, and the results of the analysis help the reader to better understand how their dialogues function in their emotional contact.

Through analyzing the dialogues of *Before Sunrise*, readers can acquire a further understanding of conversational implicature and the Cooperative Principle.

Apart from it, this thesis can provide a new angle to appreciate this movie from the perspective of Pragmatics.

B. Research Questions

Massive conversation is the most important characteristics of *Before Sunrise*. The dialogue on the one hand is a tool to drive plots forward, while on the other hand records their confluence of affection. Thus, this research aims to figure out:

1. How is the conversational implicature generated in the dialogues between Jesse and Celine?
2. What are the effects of violating the Cooperative Principle in the interaction between Jesse and Celine?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Criticisms on Conversational Implicature

The Conversational Implicature Theory is so classical that it has been applied in the field of Pragmatics in analyzing diverse dialogues which take place in all kinds of situations.

In teaching research, scholars tend to explore how the conversational implicature can be figured out in dialogues, thereby helping students truly understand the real meaning of the listening materials. Ding pointed out that teachers shall

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consciously cultivate students' awareness of inferring the conversational implicature based on context or background knowledge to improve their performance in business English listening tests [3].

Dialogues in films and televisions provided abundant resources for the conversational implicature analysis. Xie adopted the Conversational Implicature Theory to illustrate how to deduce the intended meaning of speakers by flouting the four maxims of the Cooperative Principle [4]. It indicates that the research of conversational implicature can not only manifest the real intention and mental states under certain conditions, but also achieves a vivid depiction of different characters.

When it comes to real life, this theory can find its application as well, for example, in criminal interrogation. Yang suggested that interrogators can employ the Cooperative Principle so as to guide suspects to make a confession in a cooperative manner and avoid unlawful interrogation [5].

In addition to above aspects, the Conversational Implicature Theory is utilized to instruct literary translation work. Ai and Bai probed into the translation field to discuss the specific use of Cooperative Principle in translating character dialogues [6]. They compared two translated versions of Amy Tan's fiction *The Joy Luck Club* in an attempt to find how translators constructed equivalence in translating dialogues between characters from the perspective of Cooperative Principle. They drew a conclusion that in the process of translation, complying with the CP can better restore the implicature of original text.

B. Previous Studies on *Before Sunrise*

As a classical but old movie, criticisms about *Before Sunrise* are not so universe in academic research. According to data base, the criticisms on this movie can be classified into three categories, which include film reviews, linguistic research and aesthetic research.

In film reviews, Lan concluded that *Before Sunrise* convinced her the magic produced by true love [7]. In spite of feeling after watching the movie, Liu chose to give a general introduction of the movie, including the massive dialogue, the changing occasions and the unique shooting style [8].

When it comes to linguistic research, the criticisms are concentrated on pragmatic research. Taking *Before Sunrise* as an example, Zhang discussed the function of the interpersonal metaphor in human communication [9]. From another degree, Jin explored the role played by the discourse markers in English Films and television works [10].

In relation to aesthetic research, Qiao chiefly probed into the aesthetic experience and the aesthetic value on the example of *Before Sunrise* [11]. As an artistic work, this movie provokes a deep emotional shock in its audience, by portraying their one-night visit to Vienna and their interaction of love, which testifies the view that the aesthetic value should be eventually estimated with the participation of audiences' aesthetic experience.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A. Conversational Implicature

The theory of Conversational Implicature was originally

proposed by Herbert Paul Grice. Generally, it refers to that a sentence used in actual situations may have some extra meaning, something which is not inherent in the words used. As Leech puts it, speakers often "mean more than what they say" [12]. Sometimes speakers can convey richer meaning on the basis of the literal words. So, there is a good question waiting to be solved that how can such phenomenon be established? To answer it, the theory of Conversational Implicature was put forward on the purpose of explaining how a hearer gets what is meant from what is said, from the level of expressed meaning to the level of implied meaning [13].

As Grice said in [1]: "a conversational implicature is something which is implied in conversation, that is, something which is left implicit in actual language use". "In everyday talk, we often convey propositions that are not explicit in our utterances but are merely implied by them. Sometimes we are able to draw such inferences only by referring what has been explicitly said to some conversational principle. In certain cases, we are dealing with 'conversational implicature'" [14].

Even if the study of conversational implicature belongs to pragmatic research, it in effect provides a new angle to study the meaning of a sentence instead of interpreting from the internal language system. The interpretation of the conversational meaning relates more to the context that is the implication of the utterances. Hence, the utterance usually can convey more communicative meaning than the mere literal meaning.

B. Cooperative Principle

The official definition of the Cooperative Principle given by Grice in [3]: "Make your contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged." He suggests that in conversational interaction people tacitly approve the assumption that speakers and hearers abide by the rules the Cooperative Principle defines in order to have a meaningful conversation, unless they receive the opposite indications. The principle has observed one regularity in conversation and is used to explain the generation and interpretation of conversational implicature [15].

1) The four maxims of the cooperative principle

Together with the general definition of the Cooperative Principle, Grice further put forth four maxims comprising that principle:

(a). The maxim of Quality:

Do not say what you believe to be false.

Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

(b). The maxim of Quantity:

Make your contribution as informative as is required for the current purpose of the exchange.

Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

(c). The maxim of Relation:

Be relevant.

(d). The maxim of Manner:

Avoid obscurity of expression.

Avoid ambiguity.

Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).

Be orderly.

In real conversations, speakers are supposed to comply with these maxims to establish a maximally efficient, authentic and informative interaction. Assuming all the maxims are followed by speakers, then there would be no extra implicature produced, and the real sense equals the literal meaning of the utterances. However, in most cases, people consciously or unconsciously disobey these maxims, so the conversational implicature occurs.

2) The violation of the cooperative principle

In most cases, the four maxims mentioned above are communication principles that people need to obey in daily conversations. However, dialogues that fully adhere to the cooperative principle may have a univocal meaning and cannot achieve changeable communicative purposes. In daily communication, some or all cooperative principles are violated, which makes the dialogue rich and the communication process more interesting and challenging.

Grice concluded four conditions under which speakers may fail to follow the Cooperative Principle:

(a). Speakers are unwilling to obey the Cooperative Principle.

(b). People may lie in their daily conversations.

(c). Faced with some conflict, speakers have to violate a maxim when they obey another maxim.

(d). Speakers blatantly fail to obey the Cooperative Principle, which they know they are violating one maxim or two and they want the listeners know their failure to do so.

Being cooperative in a conversation is an ideal behavior pattern, whereas in reality both the speaker and listener may choose to disobey the Cooperative Principle out of some purposes or factors, whether consciously or not. Simply assuming that participants will act up to the Cooperative Principle may engender misunderstanding of the true meaning.

IV. CASE ANALYSIS: CONVERSATIONAL IMPLICATURE IN *BEFORE SUNRISE*

In *Before Sunrise*, the flow of the emotional connection between Jesse and Celine runs through the entire movie, hiding in their dialogues and depicting romantic scenes. This part will take the four maxims of Cooperative as foundation on which writer will infer how those dialogues express the rich feeling of characters.

A. Conversational Implicature Produced by Violating the Quantity Maxims

1) Showing admiration

For people who fall in love, it is their instinct to have more contact with their lover, so does Jesse. When he and Celine together sat at the dining carriage, they started the first conversation during which they had an exchange about their background.

Dialogue 1

Celine: No, I'm joking. I knew you were American. And of course, you don't speak any other language, right?

Jesse: Yeah, yeah, I get it, I get it. So I'm the crude, dumb, vulgar American who doesn't speak any other languages, who has no culture, right? But I tried. I took French for four years in high school. When I first got to Paris, I stood in line

in Mecro Station, I was practicing. "Billet, s'il vous plait." "Un billet." Whatever. "Un, un." "Un billet s'il vous plait, un billet s'il vous plait." y'konw, and I get up there, and, uh, I look at this woman, and my mind goes completely blank, and I start saying: "Uh, listen, uh, I need a ticket to get to..." y'know, so anyway. So where are you headed?

In this dialogue, Jesse apparently violated the third sub-maxim of the quantity maxim: he revealed a mass of information to explain why he did not speak any other languages. As Celine frankly said she was joking to Jesse and asked whether he could be a multilingual, Jesse seized the opportunity to begin a new topic in relation to his incapability to speak foreign languages, and told her that he had failed to acquire French. In face of the girl adored, Jesse could not stop sharing his interesting experience to impress Celine and capture her attention. This dialogue faithfully manifests the behaviors of people newly in love.

Here Jesse was unwilling to obey the quantity maxim, because he could not hold back his desire to talk more with Celine. Moreover, if he responded to Celine with a sole "yes", their dialogues definitely would end with embarrassment.

B. Conversational Implicature Produced by Violating the Quality Maxims

1) Advancing relationship

It is normal for people to lie, no matter they lie out of goodwill or spite. Even for an intimate couple, for instance, the husband may keep something secret to his wife, so he will lie to maintain the harmony of family. As to people who just know each other, sometimes the appropriate lies can promote their relationship. Still in the dining carriage, Celine asked the reason why Jesse came to Europe.

Dialogue 2

Celine: Ah, ha, you're on holiday?

Jesse: Uh, I don't really know what I'm on. I've just been. I'm just travelling around. I've been riding the trains the past two, three weeks.

Celine: You are visiting friends, or just on your own?

Jesse: Uh, yeah. Y'know I have a friend in Madrid, but, umm...

Obviously, this dialogue violates the first sub-maxim of the quality maxim: Jesse said something mendacious. He lied to Celine that he went to Europe to visit his friend in Madrid, while his true intention was to meet his girlfriend and they parted on bad terms. Here Jesse hid this part of truth, on one hand, because he did not want to destroy the cheerful atmosphere between him and Celine; on the other hand, they were new acquaintance in fact, thus that kind of privacy is not easy to share. However, the most important is that, Jesse desired to further develop his relationship with Celine, so the truth that he had a girlfriend may become an obstacle.

In this clip, Jesse showed us the second condition which Grice had summarized: he lied in daily life. Lies not always play a negative role in our life, they rather can be beneficial to sustain a harmonious relationship under certain circumstances.

C. Conversational Implicature Produced by Violating the Relevance Maxims

1) Foreshadowing

When in communication with others, a relevant answer to

speaker's questions is a sort of politeness, whereas an irrelevant answer may foreshadow the upcoming information. As Jesse and Celine entered a bar, they played some table games, drank and asked each other whether they were in a relationship or not.

Dialogue 3

Celine: Are you with anyone?

Jesse: Umm, it's funny how we managed to avoid this subject for so long, isn't it?

This dialogue is a violation of the relevance maxim: Jesse gave a seemingly irrelevant answer to Celine's question. As mentioned above, he concealed his true purpose of this trip to Europe that he planned to meet his girlfriend, therefore, when Celine raised that question, what occurred to Jesse was a feeling of tension, because he knew it was inevitable to evade this topic. Under such circumstance, the irrelevant and indirect answer allowed him to relieve the tension. Besides, the fact that Jesse was dumped made it embarrassing for him to tell Celine. Actually, what immediately followed from Jesse was a long analysis and dissection of love, which served as a disguised explanation of his failure in last relationship.

It is not hard to find that Jesse blatantly disobeyed the CP with an irrelevant answer, and he reminded Celine of his violation by the rhetorical question "isn't it?". It in one way looks like an announcement that Jesse decided to make a clean breast of his relationships, including the occurrent one, in another way it heralds a small peak of their emotional interaction. Audience can predict that Jesse will tell Celine his present relationship and his confession would boost their intimacy.

D. Conversational Implicature Produced by Violating the Manner Maxims

1) Easing the atmosphere

In accordance with the manner maxim, a conversation needs to be precise and concise to guarantee the efficiency of communication, yet in real life the prolixity in conversations is frequent. When situation is that someone has to give his authentic ideas which may cause an unpleasant scene, proper prolixity is a good option to ease the atmosphere. The time flew to midnight at which Jesse and Celine already had a deeper insight into each other, and their date extended to a river bank.

Dialogue 4

Celine: If we were around each other all the time, what do you think about me that would drive you mad?

Jesse: No, uh, no, no, I'm not gonna ask this question, no.

Celine: Why?

Jesse: I just, I dated this girl once who used to ask me this question "what about me bugs you most?" y'know. And so finally I said, well, y'know, "I, uh, don't think you handle criticism too well. She flew into a rage, and broke up with me, alright. That's a true story. All she ever really wanted to do was to have an excuse to tell me what she thought what was really wrong with me. Is this what you want?"

Evidently this dialogue manifests the violation of the manner maxim: the answer is better to be brief and avoid prolixity. Celine wanted to hear Jesse's impression about her, but Jesse first refused to answer, and in turn he used a chunk of words to account for his refusal: when a woman required a man to answer "what do you think about me that would drive

you mad?", it is better not to point out those true shortcomings of her, or he would really drive her mad. Though it sounds needless to speak such a long paragraph, if he merely explained in one sentence, the atmosphere between he and Celine may deteriorate.

Jesse in this situation was faced with a conflict that he did not want to deceive Celine, while the truth is that everyone has shortcomings and Celine is no exception, so he first gave his rejection to Celine's question in a precise manner. But a simple "no" apparently could not satisfy Celine, in order not to incur displeasure, Jesse referred to his similar experience to ensure their communication will not be interrupted by this interlude.

V. CONCLUSION

A. Discussion

For human being, communication, particularly verbal one, is incessantly taking place. To perform a successful communication, participants need to hold a common goal so that they will cooperate in conversation, which is following the Cooperative Principle. But out of certain reasons, one participant may flout the CP under which engenders special implicature. Just as in the film, when the two characters first came across, Jesse deliberately held back his real intention of traveling to Europe because he wanted to be more intimate with Celine. Back to real life, being not cooperative in a conversation may help to achieve some communicative targets.

The theory of Conversational Implicature and Cooperative Principle have greatly enriched the research content of pragmatics. They can be utilized not only to analyze textual works, but also to interpret film and television clips. Taking the film *Before Sunrise* as a sample, this research analyzes the conversational implicature of the dialogues between hero and heroine on the basis of violating the Cooperative Principle, which can deepen readers' understanding of the theme of this film and further appreciate the rational design of lines.

B. Limitation and Advice

Language will change following the changes taking place in society. The movie *Before Sunrise* was first released in 1990s that has been nearly twenty years till now, and some of the social situations have already shifted, thus analyzing the conversations held in those changed situations may produce little guiding significance that fits for communication in 2020s.

If to analyze the text of film or drama from the pragmatics view, those newly released movies will be better choices, because their lines are likely to be closer to modern life. For example, in internet age, people tend to communicate on internet, the communication forms and the social context both experienced huge transformations, thereby studying newer texts in internet age will be more substantial and practical.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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