

Analysis of the Violation of Cooperative Principle in *Pride and Prejudice*

Wenshu Zheng, Chenglin Wang

College of Foreign Languages, Naval Aviation University, Yantai 264000, China

ABSTRACT. *Based on the cooperative principle put forward by American linguistic philosopher Grice, with exemplification and explanation of the violation of four maxims, this research discusses the implications behind the literal meaning and conducts a further analysis of the semantic properties of true meaning. It is ubiquitous that large quantities of examples of conversational implicature are applied to conversations in *Pride and Prejudice*. Through a deep explanation and analysis of *Pride and Prejudice*, this research can gain an explicit understanding of characters' personality, emotional expression and plot development. This research can provide readers with new techniques and methods to appreciate this novel through the analysis of the violation of the cooperative principle.*

KEYWORDS: *cooperative principle, violation, conversation implicature*

1. Introduction

Cooperative principle was a linguistic theory proposed by American linguist Grice. It tries to illustrate the novel from the pragmatic perspective. By violating maxims, the implicature can lead to a smooth process of communication. Jane Austen's works are saturated with witty conversations, bright personality, relaxing style and special plot. In the respect of portraying characters, Jane Austen is inclined to employ dialogues which frequently violate cooperative principle. In the process of interaction, the counterparts are complying with a certain maxim called cooperative principle unconsciously. Nevertheless, in modern society, people do not abide by this theory in daily conversations actually. Under most circumstances, listeners get accustomed to understanding speakers' intentional conversational implicature. The research is aimed at using theoretical pragmatics to provide an illuminating insight into the profound meaning and tenet of literary works.

2. Literature Review

Cooperative principle plays an indispensable role in pragmatics. Grice believes that in the process of human communication, the two sides seem to follow a certain

principle inadvertently in order to effectively cooperate and complete the communicative tasks (George, 2000). The cooperative principle runs as follows: make your conversational 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 (Alan Cruse, 2014). When people talk with each other, they try to communicate smoothly and successfully. Cooperation is the basis of successful conversations. However, people in the actual verbal communication will deliberately violate the cooperative principle by necessity.

The application of cooperative principle can receive unexpected results. If it is utilized in literature, climax and conflicts will add more interest. When violating the cooperative principle, rhetorical effect such as irony, hyperbole, metaphor will arise.

3. The violation of cooperative principle in *Pride and Prejudice*

Grice proposed the four maxims of cooperative principle including the maxim of quantity, quality, relevance and manner (He Zhaoxiong, 2000).

3.1 The violation of the maxim of quantity

3.1.1 Conversational implicature and humorous effect

The maxim of quantity stipulates that speakers should provide appropriate amount of information in utterance.

In Volume 1 Chapter 2, After Mr.Bennet paid the visit to Mr.Bingley, Mrs.Bennet had no knowledge of it. It was then disclosed in the following manner.

E.g. (1) Observing his second daughter employed in trimming a hat, he suddenly addressed her with, "I hope Mr.Bingley will like it, Lizzy."

"We are not in a way to know what Mr.Bingley likes," said her mother resentfully, "since we are not to visit,"

"Impossible, Mr.Bennet, impossible, when I am not acquainted with him myself; how can you be so teasing?"

"What can be the meaning of that emphatic exclamation?"(Jane Austen,2000)

Mr.Bennet thinks that Mr.Bingley will like Lizzy's hat. Due to lack of knowledge of the visit, Mrs.Bennet firstly feels confused at his words (2) then she deems it impossible and ridiculous. (3) (4) Finally Mrs Bennet feels bored. It was not until Mr Bennet confessed the truth that all the daughters showed surprise. Intended violation of the maxim of quantity corresponds with Mr.Bennet's eccentric personality. Mr.Bennet likes keeping listeners in suspense. From this conversation, we make sense of the subtle relationship of Mr Bennet and Mrs Bennet.

3.1.2 Image of Mr Bennet and Mrs Bennet

Mr Bennet's character is full of contradictions and conflicts. He likes to make impromptu comic gestures and remarks and use bitter sarcasm. But he is not

frivolous in talking and joking. Mr. Bennet was so odd a mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humor, reserve and caprice that the experience of three and twenty years had been insufficient to make his wife understand his character.

3.2 The violation of the maxim of quality

3.2.1 Conversational implicature and humorous effect

The maxim of quality stipulates that our utterance is true and does not lack adequate evidence. But individuals are intended to violate the maxim of quality and say some groundless words by the figure of speech like hyperbole and irony.

E.g. When Darcy and Elizabeth met each other for the first time, Bingley was attracted by Jane's beauty. Bingley gives a high evaluation of Jane, he says that "Oh, she is the most beautiful creature I ever beheld." (Jane Austen, 2000)

This sentence violates the maxim of quality and the maxim of quantity, which exactly demonstrates that Bingley loves Jane. Conversely, Darcy's appraisal of Elizabeth belittles her appearance on purpose. Darcy and Bingley utilize different ways of evaluate girl's beauty, but in effect, they have a good feeling for them at first sight.

3.2.2 Image of Darcy

From the example, it is apparent that Darcy is very proud and show contempt for strangers in the ball in public. It can be implied that Darcy compares the people in the ball to 'savage', looking down upon ordinary people. Darcy ironically speaks of Jane by violating the maxim of quality. Darcy's style of speaking shows that he looks grumpy, proud, and grotesque and is so concerned about his social status. Even when Darcy communicates with others, he is inclined to take control of the topic and the content of the conversations. He prefers to provide less information rather than lie to hearers. But as a matter of fact, he is righteous, plain and his cold exterior conceals a passionate heart. He is spoken highly of the persons who have known him well. He only shows his true personality and feeling when staying with Elizabeth. In his subsequent devotion to Elizabeth, Darcy proves himself (Yang Lu,2012).

3.3 The violation of the maxim of relevance

3.3.1 Conversational implicature and humorous effect

E.g. (Two students meet each other before class outside of the classroom.)

(Elizabeth)A: What time is it?

(Wickham)B: The bell has not rung yet.(Jane Austen, 2000)

For the above dialogue, it seems that the answer is not connected with the question. But as a matter of fact, A understands that what B means. Both A and B knows the bell rings at the beginning, and the end of class .A asks the question to make sure that he is in time for the lesson. And the utterance "the bell has not rung

yet” produced by B means that the lesson has not begun yet. In her violation of the maxim of relevance ,her clever and wise way to change topics can be seen in example (4).On some occasions, due to her unwillingness to continue talking about the topics, she will mostly change the topics instead of keeping silent. For instance, in example (4), though Wickham disgusts her, she still initiates another topic to avoid embarrassment. In this way, she also gives hint to him that she dislikes talking with him.

3.3.2 Image of Elizabeth

Elizabeth is a typical and prominent protagonist in *Pride and Prejudice*. She is the second daughter in the Bennet family. With more quickness of observation and less pliancy of temper than her sister, she was very little disposed to approve them.

According to the degree and the frequency of her conversations which violate the four maxims, readers can make a sound and rational judgment of her personality. Elizabeth is an outgoing, smart, beautiful woman who is full of wisdom and many interesting thoughts. She also holds the view that her understanding of marriage and love is distinguishable from most people. Her relationship with Darcy has gone through so many obstacles and insurmountable setbacks. She has a clear-cut viewpoint on what to love and what to hate. She shows gentle sympathy for the vulnerable groups in the society. In the meantime, she holds deep enmity for the wealthy and arrogant people from the upper social status. She is prudent and clever in coping with all kinds of problems.

3.4 *The violation of the maxim of manner*

3.4.1 Conversational implicature and humorous effect

The maxim of manner is closely associated with how what is said to be said. There also exists a super-maxim” Be perspicuous”. On most occasions, people prefer to be orderly and brief and try to avoid obscurity and ambiguity. The maxim of manner stipulates that speakers should use concise words to convey sufficient and orderly message (Yang Zhong, 2011).

E.g. Dear Miss Elizabeth, My attentions have been too marked to be mistaken. Almost as soon as I entered the house, I singled you out as the companion of my future life. But before I am run away with my feelings, perhaps I may state my reasons for marrying. Firstly, that is the duty of a clergyman to set the example of matrimony in his parish. Secondly, I am convinced it will add greatly to my happiness. And thirdly, that it is at the urging of my esteemed patroness, Lady Catherine, that I select a wife (Jane Austen, 2000).

Collins is a negative character beneath the writer’s hand. When Collins makes a proposal to Elizabeth, he explains the three reasons, none of which is the immediate cause of his proposal, violating the maxim of the manner to a degree. It is hard to imagine that when someone is making an offer of proposal, he is beating about the bush without coming to the point. It is obvious that he have a tendency to bow and scrape as a slave. Collins is cynical and does not show respect for Elizabeth. Firstly, Collins makes several insinuations about her social status. Secondly, Collins throw

out innuendoes that he regards his proposal as a charity to Elizabeth. During the process of making a proposal, he keeps putting on airs and talking down to Elizabeth. Collins ignores tact maxim, modesty maxim and approbation maxim. But he abuses sympathy maxim. Moreover, he elevates himself inappropriately and overly. On the other hand, Elizabeth has treated him with contempt.

3.4.2 Image of Collins

For the first reason, his marriage is to set a good example to parish, intended to raise his occupation and put a higher value on him, which conversely proves that he is mediocre, overconfident and conceited. For the second reason, on the surface, it appears that Collins would like to multiply happiness but actually his true self is revealed. Seamlessly from inheriting the legacy of the Bennets to getting married with Elizabeth, Collins's ambition and avarice start to emerge. For the last reason, he had thought to flaunt the relationship between himself and Lady Catherine. However, exposure of servility rises to the surface. It is undeniable that Collins violates the maxim of manner (Yang Lu, 2012).

4. Conclusion

The violation of the cooperative principle is playing a pivotal role in the interpretation and exposition of the content. This research discusses how the humorous effect and conversational implicature are realized from the perspective of pragmatics. *Pride and Prejudice* is the earliest masterpiece of Jane Austen, in which the conversations are vividly reflecting unique and distinct personality. Grice thinks that normal language communication does not include a sequence of unassociated words. The basic prerequisite for conversations is cooperation and mutual interaction. Conversations are required by a certain precondition and successful communication is the consequence of joint efforts of both sides. In order to achieve a common target in communication, the both sides will understand each other, obeying the cooperative principle. This novel unfolds with the trivial life of the Bennets, describes different ways of handling the daughters' marriage, reflects different attitude to marriage, and mirrors the author's own perspective. The anecdotes in the conservative and blocked states are all perfectly displayed by the novel. Heroes in the cooperative principle intentionally violate the cooperative principle, which reveals discrepant and unequal social power relations. This writing technique provides readers with more accurate rationale to interpret the characters.

References

- [1] Alan Cruse, *Meaning in Language: An Introduction to Semantics and Pragmatics* [M], Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 2014.
- [2] George, *the Study of Language* [M]. Foreign Language Education and Research Press, 2000.
- [3] He Zhaoxiong, *New Version of Pragmatics* [M], Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 2000.
- [4] Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* [M], Yi Lin Publishing House, 2000.

- [5] Yang Lu, A Pragmatic Analysis of Characters Conversations in Pride and Prejudice [J], World Literature Criticism, 2012.
- [6] Yang Zhong, An Introduction to English linguistics [M]. Renmin University of China Press, 2011.