

A Study of Conversational Implicature in the *Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* from the Perspective of Cooperative Principle and Politeness Principle

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Abstract: Pragmatic strategies are often utilized to create different conversational implicature in the dialogue of TV series. From the perspective of Cooperative Principle and Politeness Principle, the paper aims to analyze the conversational implicature created by violating the maxims of Cooperative Principle and Politeness Principle in the first season of American TV series *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*. The qualitative approach is mainly used as the methodology of this paper. Analyses of the dialogue reveals the major findings: (1) verbal humor can be created by violating the Cooperative Principle and Politeness Principle; (2) the acceptance of the violation of Politeness Principle should depends on the situation and relationship between the two parties of the communication; (3) good dialogues in TV series are of benefit to mold the characters.

Keywords: Conversational Implicature; Cooperative Principle; Politeness Principle; *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*

1. Introduction

Maintaining a friendly relationship is the important goal that most of the people is pursuing in their social life. From the previous study of many scholars, good conversation strategies can make such goals come true. While in oral conversation, the real meaning of the participants is always hidden behind the literal meaning. Thus, how to dig out the implied meaning behind the conversation and find why people tend to hide their real meaning is very important for all the speakers. Based on that, scholars like Grice and Leech proposed their principles to solve those problems, named Cooperative Principle and Politeness Principle, which made brilliant contributions to Pragmatics. Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle aims to guide people to make a successful and smoothly conversation^[1]. As a modified and supplemented theory, Politeness Principle has been proposed by Leech (1983), aiming to explain why people choose to implicitly express their real intention^[2].

Nowadays, the internet, science and technology are increasingly developed and the whole world is looking for spreading their culture, history, custom, and even political ideology. TV series are the most common way to achieve it. *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*, an American TV series, is about a history of female growth, telling the story about a housewife in 1950s America who awakens her self-awareness and struggles to become a rare female talk show comedian after her divorce, premiered in the United States in 2017. Since it was first released, it has received unanimous praise from domestic and overseas. A lot of talk show clips exist in this TV series, which allows the author find the corpus both in real life and the stage which brings people happiness. This paper will analyze the dialogues chosen from the first season of *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*, and focus on digging out the conversational implicature created by violating the maxims of Cooperative Principle and Politeness Principle of the dialogue in *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Relevant researches abroad

After the Cooperative Principle and the theory of conversational implicature proposed by Grice in 1967^[3], many foreign scholars have made great efforts to expand this area. Levinson (1983) revised the shortcomings of the Cooperative Principle and its four maxims, and distinguished the conventional

implicature and non-conventional implicature, and pointed out that the violation of the cooperative principle can not only explain conversational implicature, but also some rhetorical devices, such as metaphor and irony [4]. Among Grice's theory, Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson (1987) proposed the Relevance Theory which argued that there is overlap in Grice's Cooperative Principle and they reduced and modified all Gricean maxims into a single principle of relevance [5].

But scholars gradually found that cannot fully explain the conversational implicature. In order to supplement Cooperative Principle, Leech (1983) proposed the Politeness Principle for it can successfully explain what the cooperative cannot explain, that is, why people choose to speak indirectly in daily conversation [2]. As Leech (1983) suggested, "the PP is a rescue of the CP, so the conversational implicatures will be better interpreted with the two principles' combination" [2].

And with the development of the theory of conversational implicature, Cooperative Principle and Politeness Principle, many research have been done in various areas. Rundquist (1992) aimed to get the supporting evidence that women's speech is more indirect than men's speech, by analyzing the dialogue data, he found that men tend to violate the maxim of Cooperative Principle than women in real daily conversation [6]. Through employing the maxims in the dialogue of Pinter's play, Khan (2014) aimed to proof that Grice's maxims are enough to regulate the conversation effectively without any major change [7].

2.2 Relevant researches at home

In China, Grice's Cooperative Principle and the theory of conversational implicature was first introduced by Hu Zhuanglin (1980) [8]. And Liu Runqing (1987) introduced Leech's Politeness Principle and made his comment on it [9]. After the increasingly development of Pragmatics in China, many research have been done in analyzing the dialogue in novel, movie and TV series. Qu Zhongxian (2014) explored how to achieve the entertaining function by violating the cooperative principle and following the conversational implicature [10]. Yuan Ting (2016) took Grice's cooperation principle and related theories as the framework, and analyzed the conversational implicature generated by deliberately violating the maxims of the cooperation principle based on the context [11]. Under the guidance of Cooperative Principle and Politeness Principle, Li Shuo (2018) took the Chinese and American sitcoms as subject and made a comparative analysis of the humor in Chinese and American sitcoms, and drew a conclusion that the differences between American and Chinese sitcoms mainly lie in the violation of the maxims of Politeness Principle [12]. Cui Ruoyan (2021) analyzed the conversational implicature of the dialogue of the novel *The Great Gatsby* based on Cooperative Principle and Politeness Principle [13].

2.3 Previous Studies on *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*

Since the American TV series *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* was first released, it has received high audience rating. Ge Jingyi (2018) interpreted *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* from a feminist perspective and found how the hero achieves the transformation from the "other" to the "subject" [14]. Through the analysis of the subtitle of *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*, Xiao Liuyi and Song Hongbo (2021) explored the strategy of subtitle translation under the guidance of Skopostheorie [15]. There is almost no research has been done on the pragmatical area, so this study may provide new material to the study of Pragmatics.

3. Conversational Implicature Created by Violations of CP and PP in *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*

The theory of conversational implicature is the core of pragmatics and it plays a very important role in verbal communication. The main purpose of this concept is to study the meaning that cannot be explained by traditional semantics. It does not study the meaning expressed by language itself from the inside of the language system, but uses the meaning generated in the actual communication of language to analyze its deep meaning and interpret the illocutionary meaning according to the specific context. It is not concerned with what the speaker says, but with what the speaker might mean by saying it. While speakers, for certain reasons, often deliberately violate certain maxim of the Cooperative Principle and Politeness Principle in order to produce a particular conversational implicature. It's very common in TV series and the movies.

3.1 Violations of CP in the Dialogue of The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel

3.1.1 Violating the Maxim of Quantity

By the maxim of quantity, it means that the quantity of the information the speaker provides. If a person does not provide enough information in a conversation, then he may be regarded as incompetent or ignorant. The first maxim of quantity requires that the information contained in the speaker's utterance can fully meet the minimum amount required for the current communication, that is, the information provided by the speaker cannot be less than the amount required for the current conversation. Conversational implicature occurs if the speaker does not provide sufficient information for the current conversation.

Example 1

M: It's ridiculous. That whole getting arrested thing. So I said some bad words.

S: Well, and you flashed the room.

M: What?

In this case, Midge can't figure out why she is arrested after she performed a talk show. And she does not get enough information from Susie, thus she still feels confused about the reason of being arrested. It certainly violates the first maxim of quantity for Susie's words are less informative than Midge needed.

The second maxim of quantity asks the speaker not to be more informative than is required, otherwise, conversational implicature will occur.

Example 2

Augur: How's Abe taking all this?

R: Abe got up this morning and went to work. The world could be ending, and he'd get up and go to work. And if Columbia University fell into the ocean, he'd work from home.

In this case, Rose and Augur are talking about Midge's fragile marriage and Augur asks Rose about Abe's attitude towards it. But Rose tells the answer by saying those words cited above, which not only tells Augur that Abe would never stop working no matter what happened but also conveys the information that Abe does not care too much about Midge's dilemma. Clearly, Rose provides too much information, thus she violates the second maxim of quantity of being too informative. The conversational implicature of Rose is that Abe does not take this thing as a big deal.

3.1.2 Violating the Maxim of Quality

The maxim of quality suggests that the speaker should try to provide the authentic information. If the speaker tells lies or something lack of sufficient evidence, this maxim will be violated.

Example 3

M: Good morning, Papa.

A: Hmmm...

M: Good morning, Ethan. Morning, Ethan. Ethan, Ethan...E...Never mind.

R: Did you get coffee?

M: yes, and a great welcome from my son.

R: Men.

In this conversation, Midge is greeting to her little son Ethan who replies nothing, but when Rose, Midge's mother, asked if Midge get her coffee or not, Midge's words are far more than the information needed for communication, and are obvious fake information. And "great welcome from my son" is an irony which shows Ethan's impolite character, and creates humor for this conversation. Thus, she violates the second maxim of quantity and the maxim of quality in this conversation and the corresponding implicature of Midge is that she does not receive a great welcome from her son and she wants to complain Ethan's behavior.

Example 4

M: I'm going back to school!

J: What?

A: School?

R: Everybody, please, just calm down, calm down. All this anger and emotion is pointless. The leaves said that the separation will not happen.

This conversation takes place in Midge's family meals and the family has a serious quarrel about Midge's marriage. Rose proposes that "the leave" said that Midge and Joel will not divorce, which is absolutely untrue because "the leave" can not say a word or even predict the tendency. Therefore, she breaks the maxim of quality and tries to stop the quarrel to save face for both her families and herself. Thus, the violation of quality helps speaker observe the Politeness Principle.

3.1.3 Violating the Maxim of Relation

The maxim of relation requires that the information provided by the speaker should have something to do with the conversation. If it is violated, the speaker must not want to continue their topic.

Example 5

R: Whom is he performing for?

M: Anyone who shows up.

R: Will they pay you?

M: They pass around a basket at the end of your seat, and whatever's in it you get to take home.

This conversation takes place in the house of Midge's parents where Rose is talking with Midge about Joel's talk show. Midge doesn't answer Rose's question directly with a simple "yes" or "no". Instead, she replies Rose with an irrelevant sentence, which literally means Joel will get a basket. Therefore, Midge certainly violates the maxim of relation, and the conversational implicature generated is that the performer does not have regular payment, and audiences will give Joel money or other stuffs which depends on the popularity of the show.

Example 6

Moishe: So ill, the holiest of holy days cannot happen.

J: If it's so holy, why do you keep the factory open?

Moishe: You want a smack in the face?

J: I'm just saying.

In this case, Moishe is complaining Joel's mother-in-law to Joel about her decision of canceling the breakfast. Moishe answers Joel with an irrelevant information about why he still keeps the factory open, and obviously he violates the maxim of relation and his implied meaning would be "you should be serious about our topic". Although the Cooperative Principle has been violated, the conversation generates a sense of humor which is very successful in mold the characters. From this conversation, we can tell that Moishe has an aggressively character.

3.1.4 Violating the Maxim of Manner

The maxim of manner suggests the speaker speaking clearly and briefly. When there is a violation, it means the speaker have a clear intention.

Example 7

M: So, what are you doing here?

R: I have a proposition.

M: Blesses day. The ring department's on the third floor. Remember the four "C" s.

R: A business proposition. But not here. You have time later today?

In this conversation, Randall answers Midge with the words "a proposition" when Midge confuses about his appearance. The word "proposition" has two meanings, and it's also a pun. One of the meanings is an idea or a plan of action that is suggested, and another is asking others to marry the speaker. Thus, Midge misunderstands Randall's meaning. And Randall's words violate the maxim of

manner for being ambiguity. In TV series, the utilization of ambiguity aims to create the humor effect.

Example 8

M: People will find out, eventually. I should just come out with it and tell everyone and get it over with.

I: All right, let's think this through. If you do tell people, then at least you could control the narrative.

M: Maybe.

I: Unless you think Joel is coming back. 'Cause if you think he's coming back, then it's better you don't tell anybody, because then he'll be back, and no one will have known he left. But if you tell them he left, and then he comes back, you'll still be the person that he left, only now he's back. But they know you were left, even though you aren't left now. And I don't know what corner of the room you stand in to be that person.

This conversation takes place after Midge finding her husband has an affair with his secretary. Imogene gives Midge suggestion whether she should tell people that her husband has cheated on her. In this case, Imogene literally violates the third maxim of manner, that is, she breaks the brief rule for she can just use few brief words to express her thought. And the corresponding implicature would be Midge should not tell others that her husband has left her for a secretary. The reason why Imogene violates the brief rule is that Imogene wants to emphasize her implied meaning—Don't tell anyone else.

3.2 Conversational Implicature and Violations of Politeness Principle in the Dialogue of The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel

Indirect speech act, proposed by John Searle (Leech, 2005), explains the generation of conversational implicature in some extent^[16]. In order to be polite, people sometimes tend not to speak their thoughts directly, but implicitly express their real intention. And it can be explained as face issue. Thus, we should figure out its indirect meaning through the literal meaning which is the deep level of conversational implicature. According to Leech (1983), in order to obey Politeness Principle, speaker should "Minimize the expression of impolite beliefs", and "Maximize the expression of polite beliefs"^[2].

3.2.1 Violating the Maxim of Tact and Generosity

Tact maxim requires speaker to be polite in expression when talks with others. It has two categories: minimize cost to hearer, and maximize benefit to hearer. And the generosity maxim lies in the opposite side, which asks speaker to minimize the benefit and put hearer in the first place. It also has two categories: minimize benefit to speaker, and maximize cost to speaker. The violation of these two maxims can be analyzed comparatively because they are the cost-benefit scale.

Example 9

R: I talked to Mr. Zuckerman. He's agreed to store all of your furniture for the next two months.

M: So, it worked.

R: Of course it worked.

A: What worked?

R: Nothing, Abe.

A: It worked, nothing worked...

In this conversation, Rose is talking about the placement of furniture with Midge, but when Abe asks "what worked", she answers with "nothing" which implies that she does not want to tell him. Rose's words not only violate the tact maxim which is because it brings cost to the hearer and benefit to the speaker, but also it breaks the first maxim of quantity for being less informative. However, the conversation is still acceptable because it adds verbal humor to the TV series.

Example 10

J: So, maybe tomorrow? You can drop him by the office. He was likes emptying the staplers. Drives everyone crazy the next day, but...

M: I have no interest in stopping by your office.

This conversation happens between Midge and Joel after they broke-up. When Joel suggests Midge bringing Ethan to his office, Midge directly refuses him. It violates the generosity maxim for she put herself in the first place. And the conversational implicature of Midge should be “I don’t want to see you again. And I will not drop him by your office”. Midge’s words express her meaning directly and observe the requirement of Cooperative Principle based on the violation of Politeness Principle. And this proves the complementary relationship of Cooperative Principle and Politeness Principle. In order to achieve the goal of communication, the purpose of the violation of Politeness Principle is made to observe Cooperative Principle.

3.2.2 *Violating the Maxim of Approbation and Modesty*

The violation of maxim of approbation and modesty can also be discussed comparatively because they are concerned with the praise-dispraise scale. The former suggests speaker praising the hearer as much as possible. That is, minimize dispraise of hearer, and maximize praise of hearer. While the later requires speaker to show modesty in expression to the others. With two categories, Modesty Maxim holds that minimize praise of speaker, and maximize dispraise of speaker.

Example 11

H: Hello, Susie.

S: Harry.

H: You’re a giant pain in the ass.

S: Your ear hair is turning gray.

H: I’ll take it from here, guys. If she touched you, wash.

This conversation happens between Susie and her friend Harry when they meet each other. Their greetings to each other are full of dispraise, in which Susie expresses that Harry is old and Harry says that Susie is a trouble. In this case, the maxim of approbation is violated. However, it is still acceptable in the view of Cooperative Principle. Although praise can maintain a friendly relationship in social life, it is still acceptable to say words which are not polite when the speakers are close friends or families.

Example 12

H: What the hell are you doing here?

S: Well, I’m thinking about getting into management, like you.

H: Well, there’s no one like me.

In this case, Susie expresses her willing to be a management like Harry. But Harry’s words flatter himself and imply that there’s no one that does a great job in management like him, which violates the modesty maxim. Also, the maxim of quality is broken, too. Usually, the violation of Modesty maxim takes place between friends.

3.2.3 *Violating the Maxim of Agreement and Sympathy*

Agreement and sympathy maxim should be analyzed separately for they are not the opposite sides of the same problem. Agreement maxim requires speaker to show different opinion with others in a tactful way. It has two categories: minimize disagreement between speaker and hearer, and maximize agreement between speaker and hearer. Sympathy maxim requires speak to express their sympathy to the hearer. Same as other maxims, it also has two categories: minimize antipathy between speaker and hearer, and maximize sympathy between speaker and hearer.

Example 13

M: I’m sorry I was late, but...

A: But what?

M: You do know I’m not 16 anymore, don’t you?

A: We thought we did, but then you act like this. Sneaking out...

M: I did not sneak out.

A: Sneaking in.

M: I did not sneak in.

A: ...

M: Can we just lighten the mood a little?

A: No, we can't. you know the rules of this house.

This conversation takes place between Midge and her father Abe. Midge comes home very late and Abe is very angry with that. Midge holds that she's an adult and Abe should not limit her life, while Abe directly says that Midge should follow the family rules because of her bad behavior. The answer of Abe violates the maxim of agreement and implies that Midge should go back earlier.

Example 14

M: My husband left me. Do you understand that? He left me, left my children. You've met my children.

S: I did. One of 'em gave me bubonic plague.

In this case, when Midge mentions that her husband left her and their children, Susie replies that Midge's kids give her a disease, which is very impolite and rude. The maxim of relation is broken in this conversation and the answer of Susie violates the sympathy maxim for she does not take Midge's feeling into consideration so that hurts Midge. The violation is not that acceptable for Midge because they are not close friends at that time, but it still increases the humor effect.

4. Conclusion

From the perspective of Cooperative Principle and Politeness Principle, the study analyzes the conversational implicature created by the violation of maxims of Cooperative Principle and Politeness Principle in the first season of American TV series *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*. According to the analysis, several findings can be concluded as followings.

Verbal humor can be created by violating the Cooperative Principle and Politeness Principle. In some conversations, if the speaker says something he believes to be false, and deliberately lets the hearer know that he is saying something that is obviously untrue, then the violation of this case can create a sense of humor. And the generation of humorous effect lies on the violation of Cooperative Principle and Politeness Principle. It's worth mentioning that, the acceptance of the violation of Politeness Principle should depends on the situation and relationship between the two parties of the communication. Form the analysis, the author finds that impolite words would not be accepted especially in some formal occasions in real conversation. However, in some situations like talking to friends and families, speaker can maintain the close relationship by violating some maxims of Politeness Principle. What's more, good dialogues in TV series are of benefit to mold the characters. The success of *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* relies on how the play writer depicts the personalities of the characters. TV series deliberately violate the Cooperative Principle to show the dramatic conflicts and inner activities of characters. From the analysis, we can easily tell that Midge, the hero, is a strong woman full of wit who struggles for her career as a comedian.

Among these findings, the study still has some limitations for the author fails to present enough data that violates Cooperative Principle and Politeness Principle in *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*, so the conclusion can only be used to explain some representative conversation. Secondly, this study only adopts the qualitative approach which is not enough to show the best conclusion. A mix method will be used in the further study.

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