

An Analysis of Conversational Implicature in 'Tang Dynasty Strange Events: Westward Journey' from the Perspective of Cooperative Principle

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Abstract

The Cooperative Principle, proposed by the famous American linguist H.P. Grice, is an important theoretical framework in the field of linguistics. This paper takes the Cooperative Principle as the theoretical framework and uses the character dialogues in the TV series "Tang Dynasty Strange Events: Westward Journey" as corpus to analyze the conversational implicature, exploring how it generates deep conversational implicature by violating the four maxims of quantity, quality, relation, and manner, thereby analyzing its linguistic characteristics, interpreting its plot, and understanding its character images. The study found that the characters in the play often violate the four maxims of the Cooperative Principle during dialogues, so as to realize the emotional expression of the characters, depict different character images, deepen people's understanding of character personalities, and promote the development of the plot.

Keywords: cooperative principle, conversational implicature, Tang Dynasty Strange Events: Westward Journey

1. Introduction

Verbal communication, as an activity of information transmission between people, is indispensable in daily life. In the process of interpersonal communication, in order to achieve good communication effects and realize more effective information exchange and life, efficient and effective communication is particularly crucial, and efficient communication needs to follow certain communication guidelines. Grice [1] pointed out that in the process of communication, people often find that the other party intentionally violates the conversational principles. At this time, the receiver will use pragmatic reasoning to deduce the implied meaning beyond the literal meaning in the utterance.

This paper combines Grice's Cooperative Principle to analyze the character dialogues in the costume suspense drama "Tang Dynasty Strange Events: Westward Journey". The dialogues of the characters in different scenes may either follow the Cooperative Principle to achieve accurate information transmission, or violate any principle, thereby generating conversational implicature, producing various rich plots and showing the psychological changes of the characters. Through the analysis of their conversations, this paper explores the hidden meaning behind the surface discourse, deeply analyzes the character traits and image shaping, and helps the audience understand the communicative intention. The purpose is to explore the role of the implied meaning generated by the characters' violation of the Cooperative Principle in conversations in shaping the characters' images.

2. Cooperative Principle and Conversational Implicature

2.1 The Cooperative Principle

The Cooperative Principle was first proposed by the American linguist H.P. Grice in his 1976 academic lecture "Logic and Conversation" at Harvard University, and it is one of the core theories in linguistics. He [2] believes that in verbal communication activities, there exists a tacit agreement that both the speaker and the listener should abide by, namely the "Cooperative Principle". Its core requirement is that each participant in the conversation should speak in a way that conforms to the goal or direction of the current conversation throughout the communication process. It reveals how people achieve efficient communication through underlying invisible rules in daily interactions and explains the implied meaning behind language, namely "conversational implicature". The core content of the Cooperative Principle mainly includes four maxims[3]: the Maxim of Quantity, the Maxim of Quality, the Maxim of Relation, and the Maxim of Manner. The Maxim of Quantity requires that what we say should contain the information needed for the current conversational purpose, neither redundant nor insufficient.

The Maxim of Quality requires that the information provided should be true and credible, and we should not say something false or lacking evidence. The Maxim of Relation requires that the content of our speech should be relevant to the current topic, avoiding irrelevant responses. The Maxim of Manner requires that we express what we want to say clearly and understandably, concisely and logically, avoiding ambiguity or obscurity.

The Cooperative Principle proposed by Grice profoundly influences the formation and development of interpersonal relationships, and also plays a crucial role in the process of people deducing and understanding the speaker's conversational intentions. In Grice's view[4], the Cooperative Principle is like an invisible tacit mechanism that allows both parties in communication to follow a set of unspoken rules, thereby achieving effective communication. Ideally, both speakers and listeners should strictly abide by these rules to promote the smooth progress of the conversation and achieve the expected communication effect. However, in real life, people cannot always abide by the Cooperative Principle. In most cases, people may deviate from these maxims for various reasons, which will generate rich conversational implicatures. This not only enriches the expressive levels of language but also provides a unique perspective for discourse analysis, film and television studies, etc.

2.2 Conversational Implicature

Conversational implicature, also known as "pragmatic meaning", is the core content of pragmatics research and plays a very important role in verbal communication. In real language communication scenarios, people do not always follow the four maxims of the Cooperative Principle to express themselves. In fact, in many cases, people will deliberately violate these maxims. Such as intentionally fabricating false content, choosing to beat around the bush instead of expressing directly, or elaborating on originally concise and clear things in a cumbersome and complicated way. People who intentionally violate these maxims must have some purpose. This means that [5] beyond the literal meaning of the utterance, there must be a deeper implied meaning, which is often the "implied meaning" that needs to be comprehended by combining context and through pragmatic reasoning. This "implied meaning" is what Grice called "conversational implicature", which is also the real intention that the speaker wants to express. When this happens, both parties in the communication need to start from the surface meaning of each other's words to deeply infer their true intentions. Only in this way can language social activities be carried out smoothly and effective communication be achieved.

3. Analysis of Conversational Implicature in 'Tang Dynasty Strange Events: Westward Journey'

'Tang Dynasty Strange Events: Westward Journey' is a costume suspense unit detective drama adapted from Fenghua Wei's original novel of the same name, and it is the second installment in the 'Tang Dynasty Strange Events' series. Set in the Yanhe period of Emperor Ruizong of the Tang Dynasty (712 AD), the drama revolves around the westward journey of Lingfeng Lu, Wuming Su and their party, showcasing a series of bizarre and enigmatic case-solving processes. It allows the audience to experience the tacit cooperation, the confrontation between good and evil, and the growth and transformation among the characters, as well as the power struggles, team collaboration and adherence to justice under the prosperous Tang Dynasty, presenting a mysterious world integrating historical features and supernatural elements. The following will analyze the corpus phenomena of violating cooperation and conversational implicature in the drama, so that readers can better understand the characters' personalities and connotations.

3.1 Violation of the Quantity Maxim: Refers to Situations Where The Speaker Provides Insufficient or Excessive Information.

3.1.1 The Dialogue between the Old Ferryman and Wuming Su

Conversation:

Old Ferryman: During the reign of Emperor Yang of the Sui Dynasty, floods raged, and the river was at least three times wider than during the Six Dynasties, with unfathomable depth. Especially the river center vortex, many fishing boats from nearby villages or private boats secretly engaged in ferry business have sunk there. If you want to die, go find a civilian boat.

Wuming Su : Excuse me, what's the matter with the river center vortex?

Old Ferryman: The vortex is right in the center of the river. Some say it's caused by swift currents and strong winds, others say there's a fierce beast lurking below.

Wuming Su : Whether it's swift currents and strong winds or a fierce beast, I ask you, why are official boats safer?

Old Ferryman: Well, I don't know about that.

Analysis:

When Wuming Su and his party wanted to cross the river, the old ferryman not only deliberately described a lot of terrifying details irrelevant to crossing the river, but also intentionally concealed the key information that the river center vortex was caused by underwater rocks and that the fierce beast in the river center vortex was actually raised by himself. The old ferryman's act violated the Quantity Maxim of the Cooperative Principle: when explaining the cause of the river center vortex, he provided a lot of irrelevant information; while explaining why the official boat was safe, he concealed key information, leaving Wuming Su and his party completely unaware of the dangers of the river center vortex and the safety of the official boat. The old ferryman intentionally added many irrelevant terrifying details to deter the other party from daring to cross the river easily, thus forcing them to take his official boat, so as to achieve the purpose of buying Wuming Su and his party's horses, and at the same time shirk the responsibility for any boat accidents. In addition, he deliberately concealed the true situation at the thousand-layer crossing river center vortex to avoid exposing his identity as a bandit. Through this dialogue, the old ferryman's viciousness and suspicious identity are fully revealed, laying the groundwork for subsequent plots.

3.1.2 The Defense of County Clerk Song and County Magistrate Huangfu

Conversation:

County Magistrate Song: Up to now, there have been three hundred and six local ruffians, scoundrels, and gamblers who have died at Yunding Xianjie. I cannot say that Yunding County is completely free of corruption, but at least more than seventy percent of the evildoers have been eliminated, and more than ninety percent of those with criminal records have been cleared out."

County Magistrate Huangfu: When I took office, I made a judgment that most of those who go to that building to take a desperate gamble for quick wealth are not good people, so I supported it. Although there were a few good people among the dead, nothing can be completely perfect after all!

Analysis:

When Lingfeng Lu was investigating the missing persons case at Yunding Xianjie, County Magistrate Song and County Magistrate Huangfu elaborated on the number of deaths at Yunding Xianjie and the so - called proportion of "eliminating evildoers", attempting to justify their support for Yunding Xianjie, a den of evil. Their dialogue violated the Quantity Maxim of the Cooperative Principle. In order to cover up their inaction and desire for promotion, they provided excessive unnecessary information in the dialogue. They regarded the killing at Yunding Xianjie as a governance method, using the so - called proportion of "eliminating evildoers" to defend their inaction and connivance with evil forces. They tried to cover up the essence of Yunding Xianjie's disregard for human life by exaggerating the effect of eliminating evildoers, as well as their act of conniving at crimes for political achievements and interests. This reveals their image as officials who are neglectful of their duties and indifferent to the lives of others.

3.2 *Violation of the Quality Maxim: Refers to the Speaker Intentionally Saying Something False or Lacking Sufficient Evidence.*

3.2.1 Female Shopkeeper's Supply Lies

Conversation:

Lingfeng Lu: Shopkeeper, five of us want to stay at the inn.

Female Shopkeeper: This Mo Family Inn is not for ordinary people. To stay here, each of you must show your special skills.

Lingfeng Lu: What kind of rule is this?

Female Shopkeeper: I run this inn, so I make the rules.

Lingfeng Lu: Lao Fei, what special skill did you show just now?

Fei Jishi: There was no such rule just now?

Female Shopkeeper: He's right, the rule was just made.

Wuming Su : What, you won't even earn money when you have the chance?

Female Shopkeeper: There are already guests in my inn, and there are quite a few of you. If you all stay, and the heavy snow continues for a few more days, I'm afraid the food in my inn will not be enough. Then I'll have to go to the town dozens of miles away to buy supplies. It's so cold, I don't want to go through all that trouble.

Analysis:

When Lingfeng Lu and his party complained about staying at the inn, the female shopkeeper falsely claimed that there was not enough food and tried to drive them away. However, subsequent plot developments revealed that the inn had sufficient food reserves and multiple sets of bowls and chopsticks left in the cupboard, which were enough to last for several days. Here, the female shopkeeper told a lie that she knew was false, violating the Quality Maxim of the Cooperative Principle. Her purpose in saying this was to cover up the illegal activities of having other accomplices in the inn, hiding stolen goods, and colluding with bandits. She wanted to force the guests away through the pretense of insufficient supplies to avoid exposing the secret.

3.2.2 Lingfeng Lu Faked Wuming Su 's Death

Conversation:

Lingfeng Lu: I searched Shiyang thoroughly early this morning and found no hiding place for the assassin. I can only issue a notice.

County Magistrate Dugu: You want the people of the whole city to report suspicious individuals, right? I'll draft it right away.

Lingfeng Lu: Wait, say that a mysterious assassin raided Shiyang at night, causing the death of Su from Chang'an and another person. Ask the people of Shiyang County to provide clues and assist the government office in arresting the assassin.

County Magistrate Dugu: Death? But Mr. Su...

Lingfeng Lu: This is the only way!

County Magistrate Dugu: General Lu, you mean the assassin was targeting Mr. Su.

Analysis:

During the investigation into the death of the coroner, Wuming Su and others were assassinated. Wuming Su and Yingtao were seriously injured and unconscious. Lingfeng Lu investigated the assassin but found no trace, so he wanted to find clues through public reports from the people. However, when he asked County Magistrate Dugu to draft the notice, he wrote that Wuming Su and another person had died, which was obviously inconsistent with the known facts. Here, Lingfeng Lu fabricated a lie, violating the Quality Maxim of the Cooperative Principle by saying something he knew was false. But from the plot, we can see that Lingfeng Lu's purpose in doing this was to confuse the assassin, making the assassin think Wuming Su was dead and thus stop pursuing him, which could ensure Wuming Su 's safety. The dialogue enriches Lingfeng Lu's character image. From the plot, we know that there was a misunderstanding between Lingfeng Lu and Wuming Su , but even so, Lingfeng Lu still tried his best to protect Wuming Su , which shows the deep relationship between them. At the same time, Lingfeng Lu's use of a fake notice to protect Wuming Su also shows that he is a brave, resourceful, and thoughtful person, making his character image more three - dimensional.

3.3 Violation of the Relevance Maxim: Refers to Responding to Others' Questions With Irrelevant Remarks, That is, Answering Off- Topic.

3.3.1 Lingfeng Lu's Dialogue with Xiaobai Qin

Conversation:

Lingfeng Lu: Last night at this Xiaoyun Tower, did Xie Yulang Wang Sun have an argument with you?

Xiaobai Qin : It wasn't an argument. He was a rude person, so I ignored him.

Lingfeng Lu: He's dead.

Xiaobai Qin : What?

Lingfeng Lu: Witnesses say it was this person (taking out a painting based on witness descriptions) who killed Sun Wang with a sword in the street.

Xiaobai Qin : Who painted this picture? This painter is quite talented. With a little guidance, he could become as famous as me throughout the Tang Dynasty.

Analysis:

The background of this dialogue is that the princess invited Xiaobai Qin to paint murals in the temple. Because Xiaobai Qin had been unable to add the finishing touches to the murals for a long time, he was ridiculed by Sun Wang while drinking at Xiaoyun Tower. Unexpectedly, Sun Wang was brutally killed that night. Lingfeng Lu was

ordered to investigate the case. During the investigation, the portrait of the murderer made according to the witness's description was very similar to the murals painted by Xiaobai Qin in the temple. So Lingfeng Lu came to Xiaobai Qin to ask and showed him the portrait, intending to get an explanation from Xiaobai Qin. As a result, Xiaobai Qin was attracted by the portrait. Instead of answering Lingfeng Lu's question, he turned the topic to who painted this portrait. He thought the painter was very talented and wanted to give some guidance. This violates the Relevance Maxim of the Cooperative Principle, but it is precisely because of Xiaobai Qin's irrelevant answer that it highlights his love for painting, his confidence in his own ability, and his character traits of being good at discovering talents and willing to cultivate them.

3.3.2 Yun Li's Dialogue with Ping Shen

Conversation:

Ping Shen Don't be so attentive. I don't have money for you to gamble on cockfights here.

Yun Li: Don't be angry. I won't gamble on cockfights, okay?

Ping Shen Really?

Yun Li: I have something I want to discuss with you.

Ping Shen Is it about your cousin?

Yun Li: Darling, you really are understanding. He seems to be desperate. After all, he's a relative. He's going to Dunhuang to dig caves, which is hard work. The fact that he thought of making money to support himself this way makes me think there's still hope for him.

Analysis:

In the conversation between Yun Li and his wife Shen Ping, when Shen Ping asked Yun Li if he would really stop cockfighting, Yun Li did not answer directly but deliberately changed the topic, causing the conversation to deviate from its original theme and resulting in a lack of relevance in their communication. This behavior violates the Relevance Maxim of the Cooperative Principle. Yun Li's evasion of the question not only reveals that he did not actually intend to stop cockfighting but also reflects his guilt and deception towards Shen Ping, highlighting Yun Li's hypocritical character traits. At the same time, it also lays an important clue for the development of subsequent cases.

3.4 Violation of the Manner Maxim: Refers To Speaking Indirectly, Making The Listener Perceive That There Must Be A Reason, And Being Verbose and Ambiguous in Speech.

3.4.1 Wuming Su 's Dialogue with County Magistrate Song

Conversation:

County Magistrate Song: Steward, how long have you been following County Captain Lu?

Wuming Su : It has been quite a few years.

County Magistrate Song: I heard that when he served as the Commander of the Imperial Guard, he was deeply trusted by the then Crown Prince, who is now the Emperor!

Wuming Su : That is indeed the case.

County Magistrate Song: Then how did he get demoted?

Wuming Su : As for the specific details, I, a lowly steward, really don't know. However?

County Magistrate Song: However what?

Wuming Su : However, during this westward journey, County Captain Lu has been in a very good mood, often laughing heartily. When passing through Hanzhou, Governor Lu Si'an hosted a private banquet for him. I wasn't allowed to accompany him then, but when Governor Lu saw him off, he kept asking County Captain Lu to put in a good word for him in front of the Emperor after returning to the capital.

County Magistrate Song: I understand. This must be the Emperor sending him to Yunding for training. In the future... Thank you, Steward Su, for revealing so much to me.

Analysis:

When Lingfeng Lu, Wuming Su and others arrived at Yunding County to take up their posts, County Magistrate Song and County Magistrate Huangfu regarded Lingfeng Lu as a demoted official and thus did not take him seriously. When County Magistrate Song inquired Wuming Su about the reason for Lingfeng Lu's demotion,

Wuming Su deliberately spoke evasively, making people mistakenly think that Lingfeng Lu was apparently demoted but actually came here for training. This act obviously violated the Manner Maxim of the Cooperative Principle. Wuming Su 's purpose was to make County Magistrate Song and others dare not treat Lingfeng Lu with disrespect, thereby reducing the obstacles Lingfeng Lu might encounter when he first took office as county captain. This not only shows Wuming Su 's wisdom and the relationship between the two, but also subtly reveals the flattering mentality of County Magistrate Song and others, laying the groundwork for their subsequent actions.

3.4.2 County Magistrate Dugu's Dialogue with Chuntiao

Conversation:

County Magistrate Dugu: We have reported the case to the prefecture. These five silver ingots are the earnings from Dugu Yang's teaching of skills, and they are now returned to the family.

Chuntiao: Is this all?

County Magistrate Dugu: There were originally six, but Dugu Yang gave one to Chunshan before, so there are five left, all here.

Chuntiao: I'm not talking about the silver ingots. Didn't she leave me anything else, even a word?

Analysis:

When County Magistrate Dugu returned the silver ingots to Chuntiao, Chuntiao asked, "Is this all?" County Magistrate Dugu mistakenly thought Chuntiao was inquiring about the quantity of silver ingots and explained why one ingot was missing. However, what Chuntiao really wanted to ask about was not the silver ingots, but whether there were any other things left for her, even a word. In this dialogue, Chuntiao violated the Manner Maxim of the Cooperative Principle. When County Magistrate Dugu handed over the silver ingots, she vaguely asked "Is this all?" without clearly indicating what "this" referred to, resulting in unclear expression and ambiguity, which led to County Magistrate Dugu's misunderstanding. However, it was precisely because Chuntiao violated the Manner Maxim that the audience gained a new understanding of her image. Previously, people generally thought that Chuntiao was greedy for money and unfaithful to her husband, but through this dialogue, it can be seen that Chuntiao is not a greedy person, and her feelings for her husband are not as unbearable as rumored by the outside world. Most of the previous rumors were untrue, which gives us a new understanding of Chuntiao's character image and makes her image more three-dimensional.

4. Conclusion

From the perspective of the Cooperative Principle, this paper analyzes the character dialogues in the TV series "Tang Dynasty Strange Events: Westward Journey". Through the dialogues between various characters in the play[6], we find that violating the Cooperative Principle to a certain extent can produce unexpected dialogue effects, thereby vividly portraying the personality traits and images of different characters, helping the audience sort out the plot, deeply appreciate the unique charm of literary and artistic works, and better grasp the theme of the film and television drama. In daily life, people also often intentionally violate certain maxims of the Cooperative Principle in order to achieve better communication effects. It can be seen that the reasonable application of the four maxims in the Cooperative Principle can not only enrich the connotation of discourse, but also improve the expression effect and communication ability, which plays a positive role in promoting people's smooth achievement of communication purposes in daily communication.

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