

Flouting of Cooperative Principle in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*¹

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Abstract

The present paper investigates the theory of implicatures and how H. P. Grice developed it. It sets out Grice's Cooperative Principle and describes the four conversational maxims that he believed were necessary for efficient communication. It also looks at implicature triggers and the deviation from the Cooperative Principle with reference to the 'flouting' of Quantity maxim by the various characters in the novel *Pride and Prejudice*. Examples of flouting the maxim of Quantity have also been put under spotlight and analysis.

Keywords: Flouting Maxim; Cooperative Principle; Implicature; *Pride and Prejudice*.

1. Introduction

The cooperative principle goes both ways: speakers (generally) observe the cooperative principle, and listeners (generally) assume that speakers are observing it. This allows for the possibility of implicatures, which are meanings that are not explicitly conveyed in what is said, but that can be inferred. For example, if Selma points out that Ali is not present, and Mona replies that Ali has a cold, then there is an implicature that the cold is the reason, or at least a possible reason, for Ali's absence; this is because Mona's comment is not cooperative, i.e., does not contribute to the conversation, unless her point is that Ali's cold is or might be the reason for his absence. (This is covered specifically by the Maxim of Relevance)

Implicatures can be defined as "the difference between what the words in an utterance mean according to the rules of semantics and grammar, and what the speaker's intended meaning is" (Wenting, 2017). Paul Grice, in his theory of conversational implicature, suggests that communication is a human interaction which is goal orientated, in which both a speaker and a listener interact as rational agents to achieve that goal, and that it is not possible to deviate this principle, naming it the Cooperative Principle. Grice, who coins the term "implicature," and classifies the phenomenon, develops a theory to explain and predict conversational implicatures, and describes how they arise and are understood. Graszdar (1979) states

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that "An implicature is anything that is inferred from an utterance but that is not a condition for the truth or falsity of the utterance."

Specifically, Paul Grice is mostly concerned with the distinction between what is being said and the deviation of the maxims in the utterance in order to make communication more appropriate. His aim was to discover the mechanism behind this process. Grice posits the cooperative principle and its four maxims as a way of explaining this implication process (Wenting, 2007).

2. The Cooperative Principle

In order to examine the Cooperative Principle (henceforth CP), I will first outline briefly the basic concepts behind the CP and its Maxims.

Previous works by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) had largely concerned with the relationship between direct and indirect speech acts, and the concept that one could 'do' things with words: language is as much of an action as opening a door or closing a window. These proponents of the Use theory had moved away from the truth values approach, and the reliance on sense and reference as the source of meaning (Davies, 2000). There was also a growing interest in the meaning of utterances rather than just sentences. It had been noted that at the discourse level there is no one-to-one mapping between linguistic form and utterance meaning.

A particular intended meaning (which could be produced via a direct speech act) can in fact be conveyed by any number of indirect speech acts. Grice is concerned with this distinction between saying and meaning. How do speakers know how to generate these implicit meanings, and how can they assume that their addressees will reliably understand their intended meaning? (Grundy, 2000).

Moreover, The Cooperative Principle describes how people interact with each other. Grice says "make your contribution such as required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged" (Grice, 1975). It analyses the behavior and the patterns people use while making utterances. When a person contributes meaningfully in a conversation, he or she follows this principle to make the conversation effectively meets its purpose.

Grice believes that when people communicate they act rationally and follow a cooperative principle (CP). He does not think that this CP is specific to communicate, but that it could be applied to other cooperative activities, for example baking a cake, or mending a car (Green, 1989). Supporting the CP, Grice sets out four conversational maxims that he asserts people generally follow when communicating efficiently (Grice, 1975):

1) Quantity

- a) Make your contribution as informative as required (for the current purposes of the exchange).
- b) Do not make your contribution more informative than required.

2) Quality

Super maxim: Try to make your contribution one that is true.

- a) Do not say what you believe to be false.
- b) Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

3) Relation

Be relevant.

4) Manner

Super maxim: Be perspicuous

- 1) Avoid obscurity of expression.
- 2) Avoid ambiguity.
- 3) Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).
- 4) Be orderly.

People who obey the cooperative principle in their language use will make sure that what they say in a conversation furthers the purpose of that conversation. Obviously, the requirements of different types of conversations will be different.

Grice believes that speakers obeying the CP should be truthful, informative, relevant, and clear. He does not claim that speakers are always cooperative; nor does he claim that speakers always follow the maxims. Speakers may deliberately or accidentally deviate one or more of these maxims for a number of effects, including lying — a covert violation of the maxim of quality (1), or metaphor— an overt flouting of the maxim of quality (1). Speakers may also flout a maxim when they are unable to conform to all of the maxims at once (Green, 1989).

Grice's belief was that hearers assume that speakers are conforming to the CP, and interpret utterances under this assumption. If a speaker's utterance appears to fail to satisfy the CP, then the hearer will look for another interpretation, one that does satisfy the CP. The difference between what the words in an utterance mean according to the rules of semantics and grammar, and what the speaker's intending meaning was, which Grice labels implicatures.

1) A: Did you get me any newspapers?

B: The bookstore was closed.

In dialogue 1, B's response to A's question would seem to flout the maxim of relation. However, if A assumes that B is abiding by the CP, then A assumes that B's response is relevant (as well as truthful, informative and clear), and will search for an interpretation of the response that follows these assumptions. A will interpret the sentence to mean that since the bookstore was closed, B was unable to buy any newspapers for A. B has not explicitly stated whether or not she has bought newspapers, but has implied (or implicated) that she has not. The extra information is implicature—in this case conversational implicature.

2) Flouting the Quantity Maxim

The Quantity category expects the speaker to abide by the following maxims:

- 1) Make your contribution as informative as required (for the current purpose of the exchange)
- 2) Do not make your contribution more informative than required.

The Quantity maxims are related to the amount of information to be provided during a conversation by a speaker. It means that the speaker is not expected to be cooperative during the conversation by providing the adequate amount of information, less or more, which would be sufficient for the hearer to draw the intended meaning from the utterances. But speakers do not observe these maxims strictly every time. For various purposes or intentions speakers flout these maxims. When the speaker intentionally provides less or more information than required, he/she violates the maxim of Quantity and is not cooperative at the surface level of the talk. But, the hearer assumes that the speaker is cooperative and tries to draw various inferences and reaches the implied meaning. Therefore, the flouting of the maxim of Quantity leads to the flouting of the Cooperative Principle of conversation.

The following examples illustrate the flouting of the maxim of Quantity by various characters in the novel *Pride and Prejudice*.

Example 1: "Do not you want to know who has taken it?" Cried his wife impatiently (Mrs. Bennet).

"You want to tell me, and I have no objection to hearing it" (Mr. Bennet).

This was invitation enough.

"Why, my dear, you must know, Mrs. Long says that Netherfield is taken by a young man of large fortune from the north of England; that he came down on Monday in a chaise and four to see the place, and was so much delighted with it that he agreed with Mr. Morris immediately; that he is to take possession before Michaelmas, and some of his servants are to be in the house by the end of next week" (Mrs. Bennet). (Chapter 1, p.1).

Mr. Bennet knew that his wife was impatient to tell the name of the person who had taken Netherfield without bothering whether he wanted to know it or not. So, Mr. Bennet says he has no objection to know who had bought Netherfield. According to the maxim of Quantity Mrs. Bennet was expected to give the required amount of information only by telling the name of the person who had bought Netherfield. But, instead of telling the name of Mr. Bingley, she goes on giving peripheral information which is not required and therefore flouts the maxim of Quantity.

Mrs. Bennet's motive behind this extra information is to impress her husband with the large fortune of Mr. Bingley and arouse his interest in Mr. Bingley in relation to their daughters' marriage.

Example 2: "What is his name?" (Mr. Bennet says).

"Bingley". (Mrs. Bennet says).

"Is he married or single?" (Mr. Bennet says).

"Oh! Single, my dear, to be sure! A single man of large fortune; four or five thousand a year. What a fine thing for our girls!" (Mrs. Bennet says). (Chapter 1, p.1).

This conversation takes place at the very beginning of the novel between the husband and the wife – Mr. Bennet and Mrs. Bennet. Mrs. Bennet has recently come to know that Netherfield Park has been sold. She is very enthusiastic about it because it has been bought by a young and rich man- Mr. Bingley. Mr. Bingley's being single or married is a thing of great importance and makes a big difference to her. Being a mother of five daughters, she is worried about their marriage and is desperately looking out for suitable, rich and young men for her daughters. And hence, the sole aim in her life is to see her daughters married off and that too, in as rich families as possible.

The above conversation between Mr. Bennet and Mrs. Bennet appears in question and answer sequence. The flouting of the maxim of Quantity is seen in Mrs. Bennet's response:

"Is he married or single?" (Mr. Bennet says).

"Oh! Single, my dear, to be sure! A single man of large fortune; four or five thousand a year. What a fine thing for our girls!" (Mrs. Bennet says).

Here, Mrs. Bennet flouts the maxim of Quantity as she provides more information than is required. Mr. Bennet asks his wife whether Mr. Bingley is married or single. Mrs. Bennet knew that Mr. Bingley was single and was expected to provide that information and stop. But, Mrs. Bennet after informing her husband that Mr. Bingley was single, proceeds further and provides extra information about Bingley's fortune, his yearly income of four or five thousand pounds and this fact being a fine thing for their daughters.

The intention behind flouting the maxim of Quantity is that Mrs. Bennet wants her husband to recognize Mr. Bingley as a prospective son-in-law. The additional information given by Mrs. Bennet conveys more than said. Thus, Mrs. Bennet conveys more than she actually says via Conversational Implicature embedded in her response.

Example 3: "Can I have the carriage?" (says Jane).

"No, my dear, you had better go on horseback, because it seems likely to rain; and then you must stay all night" (Mrs. Bennet says). (Chapter 7, p.18).

In the above exchange, one can notice the flouting of the maxim of Quantity by Mrs. Bennet as she provides more information than required for the current purpose of talk. Sometimes, the purpose of talking more than required is to make clear one's own plan, intention or aim. This is exemplified in the above-mentioned conversation between Jane and Mrs. Bennet.

Jane had received a letter from Caroline Bingley inviting her for dinner. As the distance was of more than a mile, Jane asked for a carriage. In this context Jane is expecting a yes/ no reply to take the carriage. But, Mrs. Bennet flatly refuses Jane's request to go in the carriage and insists that Jane goes on horseback. Mrs. Bennet does not stop here but continues further and tells Jane why she should go on horseback. Jane is not expecting this additional information. Therefore, we find Mrs. Bennet flouting the Cooperative Principle of conversation. The intention behind this flouting is that Mrs. Bennet wants Jane to understand her plan of making her (Jane) stay overnight at Netherfield Park (Mr. Bingley's house).

The additional information given by Mrs. Bennet conveys more than said via Conversational Implicature. Once again, the sole aim and obsession of Mrs. Bennet to get her daughters married off by hook or crook is reflected. The intentional flouting of the maxim of Quantity implies that Mrs. Bennet does not suffer from any scruples while adopting any means to achieve the end.

Example 4:

Elizabeth, for the sake of saying something that might turn her mother's thoughts, now asked her if Charlotte Lucas had been at Longbourn since her coming away.

Mrs. Bennet says "Yes, she called yesterday with her father. What an agreeable man Sir William is, Mr. Bingley is not he? So much the man of fashion! So genteel and so easy! - He has always something to say to everybody- That is my idea of good breeding; and those persons who fancy themselves very important and never open their mouths, quite mistake the matter" (Chapter9, p.26).

In the above exchange, Mrs. Bennet flouts the maxim of Quantity as she gives more information than required.

This conversation takes place at Netherfield (the house of Mr. Bingley) when Mrs. Bennet had come along with her youngest daughters (Kitty and Lydia) to see Jane who had fallen sick. Mrs. Bennet feels offended by the manner in which Darcy mentions a country neighbourhood. She takes Darcy's remark as belittling because she and her family are staying in a small village. So, she starts taunting him indirectly by saying that what is the use of a variety of characters to people who do not converse at all (Darcy is reserved by nature). This attack on Darcy makes Elizabeth restless as it breaks the decorum. So, to change the topic, Elizabeth asks her mother if her friend Charlotte Lucas had come to their house in her absence. Mrs. Bennet flouts the maxim of Quantity here. Instead of answering with positive 'yes', she goes on informing that

she had come with her father, Sir William Lucas. Then, she starts describing Sir William Lucas and through the description, again returns to her original point of attack on Darcy.

People flout the Cooperative Principle with a particular intention or to achieve a specific conversational goal. Here, Mrs. Bennet's conversational goal is to criticize and humiliate Darcy and she achieves this by praising Sir William Lucas. Elizabeth had asked her mother (Mrs. Bennet) if Charlotte Lucas had visited Longbourn (house of Bennet family) in her absence. According to the purpose or direction of the talk Mrs. Bennet was expected only to confirm whether Charlotte had visited their house or not. But, Mrs. Bennet after confirming that Charlotte had visited their house diverts the topic and starts praising Sir. William Lucas, his manners, his fashion and his breeding. Thus, Mrs. Bennet flouts the maxim of Quantity as her conversational contribution is more informative than required at the stage at which it occurs and shows considerable deviation from the accepted purpose or direction of the exchange between Mrs. Bennet and Elizabeth.

According to Grice, when a conversational maxim is flouted, it gives rise to a Conversational Implicature. Here, Mrs. Bennet, through the praise of Sir William Lucas, criticizes and humiliates Darcy indirectly. The implicature is that Darcy is not an agreeable, gentle and easy man. He is proud and unnecessarily reserved. Mrs. Bennet implies that Darcy fancies himself to be important and does not speak freely with everyone. Thus, Darcy does not possess qualities which are signs of good breeding. In this way Mrs. Bennet conveys more than she actually says via Conversational Implicature.

Example 5: 'Did Charlotte dine with you?' (says Elizabeth)

'No, she would go home. I fancy she was wanted about the mince pies. For my part, Mr. Bingley, I always keep servants that can do their own work; my daughters are brought up differently. But, everybody is to judge for themselves, and the Lucas's are very good sort of girls, I assure you. It is a pity they are not handsome! Not that I think Charlotte so very plain- but then she is our particular friend'. (Says Mrs. Bennet).

This conversation is in continuation of the above-mentioned conversation in example four. Hence, it has the same background of farewell to Mrs. Bennet after her visit to Jane. In spite of the efforts of Elizabeth to divert the topic of conversation, Mrs. Bennet continues gaining satisfaction through her verbal attacks on Darcy. So again, Elizabeth makes her last effort to change the topic of conversation by asking Mrs. Bennet if Charlotte dined with them.

Here again, instead of answering in 'yes' or 'no', Mrs. Bennet starts talking about her servants and her daughters' upbringing. Here, the maxim of Quantity is intentionally flouted to highlight the upbringing and beauty of her own daughters, especially that of Jane. Mrs. Bennet's intention is to impress her host with her daughters' upbringing and beauty.

By making her conversational contribution more informative, Mrs. Bennet has conveyed more than she actually says via Conversational Implicature. The unstated meaning or implicature which Mrs. Bennet conveys is that her daughters, especially Jane, are superior in terms of upbringing and beauty as compared to Lucas' girls or other girls in the neighborhood.

Example 6: 'She seems a very pleasant young woman', (says Bingley).

'Oh! Dear, yes; - but you must own she is very plain. Lady Lucas herself has often said so, and envied me Jane's beauty. I do not like to boast of my own child, but to be sure; Jane- one does not often see anybody better looking. It is what everybody says. I do not trust my own partiality. When she was only fifteen, there was a gentleman at my brother Gardiner's in town, so much in love with her, that my sister-in-law was sure he would make her an offer before we came away. But however, he did not. Perhaps he thought her too young. However, he wrote some verses on her, and very pretty they were.' (says Mrs. Bennet). (Chapter 9, p.26).

This dialogue takes place between Mr. Bingley and Mrs. Bennet. Bingley compliments Charlotte Lucas by saying that she is a pleasant young woman. When Mrs. Bennet takes her turn, she makes her talk more informative than required by giving unnecessary information and hence flouts the maxim of Quantity. The best suitable reply would have been, 'Oh! Dear yes, yes.' But, Mrs. Bennet provides unnecessary information.

The motive behind providing this extra or unnecessary information is to highlight the beauty of Jane in order to impress Bingley. Mrs. Bennet wants Bingley to be attracted by Jane's beauty and look at Jane as a prospective bride and influence his decision to marry Jane.

The implicature arising out by the flouting of the Quantity maxim is that Mrs. Bennet is indirectly trying to tell Bingley that Jane is the perfect match for him as a wife. Mrs. Bennet's obsession about her daughters' marriage is also reflected. Thus, Mrs. Bennet conveys more than she says by flouting the Quantity maxim.

Notes

3. Results

With the help of the analysis and strong supporting evidence in section two, the following findings and conclusions are arrived at:

- 1) The Cooperative Principle is flouted in the novel *Pride and Prejudice* as various characters flout the maxim of Quantity.
- 2) The various characters in the novel flout the cooperative maxim of Quantity with a particular motive, purpose, intention or to achieve their conversational goals.

3) By flouting the maxim of Quantity, the various characters convey more than said via Conversational Implicature.

It can be concluded that whenever a Conversational Implicature is generated then a maxim is non-observed.

- 1) The above findings and conclusions related to the flouting of Cooperative Principle are mentioned in particular with reference to the maxim of Quantity in the novel *Pride and Prejudice* as follows. The Cooperative Principle is deviated by Mrs. Bennet several times as she flouts the maxim of Quantity by making her conversational contribution more informative than required. In all the examples cited under the category of Quantity maxim in section 2, Mrs. Bennet gives unwanted and additional information which is not expected at that point of conversation.
- 2) Every time Mrs. Bennet flouts the maxim of Quantity there is a specific purpose or conversational goal behind it. The various purposes or intentions behind the flouting of the maxim of Quantity are as follows:
 - a) In example one, Mrs. Bennet's motive behind giving the extra information is to impress her husband with the large fortune of Mr. Bingley and arouse the interest of her husband in Mr. Bingley in relation to her daughters' marriage.
 - b) In example two, the intention behind flouting the maxim of Quantity is that Mrs. Bennet wants her husband to recognize Mr. Bingley as a prospective son-in-law.
 - c) Sometimes, the purpose of talking more than required is to make clear one's own plan, intention or aim and this is exemplified in example three. Mrs. Bennet's intention behind the flouting is that she wants Jane to understand her plan of making her to stay overnight at Mr. Bingley's house.
 - d) People also flout the maxim of Quantity to criticize a particular person or tarnish his/her image. In example four, Mrs. Bennet's conversational goal is to criticize and humiliate Darcy and she achieves this by praising Sir William Lucas.
 - e) Interlocutors sometimes flout the maxim of Quantity to impress other people. In example five, Mrs. Bennet flouts the maxim of Quantity with an intention to impress her hosts with her daughters' upbringing and beauty.
 - f) In example six, the motive behind the flouting of the maxim of Quantity is also to highlight the beauty of Jane in order to impress Bingley.

It can be concluded that interlocutors intentionally flout the maxim of Quantity for various purposes or to achieve a specific conversational goal.

- 3) By flouting the maxim of Quantity, the various characters in the novel convey more than said via Conversational Implicature. The analysis of the flouting of the maxim of Quantity in section 2 shows a definite connection between the maxim of Quantity and Conversational Implicature because when a Conversational Implicature is generated the maxim of Quantity is flouted intentionally, but not for lying or deceiving. The various characters convey more than said via Conversational Implicature which is generated by flouting the maxim of Quantity.

4. Conclusion

The analysis of the flouting of the Cooperative Principle with reference to its maxims of Quantity has brought to the fore certain findings related to the way interlocutors use language. These findings will be stated in this section to arrive at specific conclusions. The findings and conclusions of the paper are based on the evidence and analysis done in section two.

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