

# On the Teaching of Conversational Analysis Based on Quentin Tarantino's Films

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## Abstract

The teaching of conversational analysis is an integral part of the both intensive reading and textual linguistics courses. As language samples excerpted from films can be of potential proximity to the diversity and complexity of conversational analysis, this article looks at the lines selected from some works written and directed by Quentin Tarantino. We found that characters in Tarantino's films frequently employ indirect speech to generate what is called conversational implicature in Grice's theory by violating four CP maxims. Through exploring the conversational implicature from line analysis, the author hopes to provide students and learners with an insight and inspiration to seek what underlies and lies behind conversations so as to come up with precise and convincing analyses.

## Keywords

Teaching of conversational analysis Quentin Tarantino; conversational implicature; cooperative principle.

## 1. Introduction

The teaching of conversational analysis is considered one of the most challenging tasks in both intensive reading and textual linguistics for at least two reasons. Firstly, any teaching of analysis is by nature dubious as every intellectual individual is supposed to be able to make whatever analysis that fits his talent without any previous experience of being taught to do so. Secondly, the materials used for analysis, more often than not, seem somewhat aloof from how conversations are truly conducted, resulting in the artificiality in what is being analyzed and proposed accordingly. To address these concerns, we argue that language samples from films, TV shows and other media of art and amusement can be of a desirable solution. For one thing, our analysis will occur in the scenarios that resemble the ones in the real world; and for another, the analytical process itself will be well grounded in the usual cognition of both the teachers and students. In this sense, we place our focus on Quentin Tarantino's films with a view of the alleged profundity and confusion associated with the conversations that are involved, in a bid to clarify what is supposed to be done, expected and profiled in a reasonable conversational analysis. Ultimately, such an endeavor is expected to add to the existing paranormal exploration as to how conversational analysis should be taught as it is intrinsically demanded.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

In *Logic and Conversation* (1967), Grice noted that in normal situations, conversation does not consist of a bunch of inconsistent and disordered words, because people who tend to get involved in one talk or dialogue, to some extent, have same goals, or at least have the same acceptable orientation. Such goal or orientation might be clear at first place, or be obscure, or be made clear gradually in the process of talking. When speech act continues, those words which are unsuitable for the goal or orientation will be deleted by speakers in order to make their talk more smoothly. In this case, speakers will subconsciously or unintentionally obey

what Grice called cooperative principle, that is, “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”. He illustrates four maxims for his cooperative principle:

#### QUANTITY

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

#### QUALITY

Try to make your contribution one that is true.

1. Do not say what you believe to be false.
2. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

#### RELATION

Be relevant.

#### MANNER

Be perspicuous.

1. Avoid obscurity of expression.
2. Avoid ambiguity.
3. Be brief (avoid prolixity).

Grice noted that there are some occasions in which speakers are supposed to “break the law”. Likewise, speakers may intentionally disobey one or more principles so as to mislead hearers. Meanwhile, speakers may choose to disobey one principle to avoid violating other principles. Thus, both hearers and speakers sometimes intend to flout the conversational principles above in order to transmit a kind of new information. The information produced via the process of violating the maxims is conversational implicature. Therefore, our analysis should cover both the principles and implicature if it is expected to be reliable. But in this article, we will confine our discussion to the maxim of quantity alone, with further analyses coming along step by step.

### 3. Case Studies

Flouting the maxim of quantity----make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange)----is often happened in Tarantino’s film. Here are examples picked out in those five films so as to show its implicature and see through the screenwriter’s purpose.

#### 3.1. Inadequate Information

By Violating the first subordinate maxim of quantity, make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange), speakers try to convey some implicit meaning. Here are examples:

Ex 1:

Mr. Orange: Am I hurt? I’m hurt bad Larry.

Mr. White: It’s not good no.

(Reservoir Dogs)

The conversation happened when Mr. Orange was laid down by Mr. White in a plank and bleeding severely. Mr. White uses understatement to reply Mr. Orange’s question, but the truth is Mr. Orange is badly wounded by gun shot and the bullet wound in his stomach is very likely to sentence him to death. First, Mr. White said that implies his sympathy and comfort to Mr. Orange. He doesn't want Mr Orange despair of ever having chance to be alive. More importantly,

he cares about Mr Orange not because of profits but benevolence. Further, Mr white's respond represents what Tarantino's unique film theme and style. Although Reservoir Dogs simply depicts a common bank robbery scene which frequently appeared in Hollywood gang's movie, he fills his roles with humanity and morality, which are barely connected with gangsters who are showed in commercial movie. That is a huge difference in Tarantino's movie and Hollywood commercial movie. In Reservoir Dogs, Mr White is selected as a representative for Tarantinesque "gangsters always have their paths" value. Unlike Hollywood type, Mr white is not a coldblooded and indifferent gangster stereotype which is accustomed to by audience in a rather long time, instead, he breaks the long-live shrewed image of gangsters, playing the role of preserving justice and righteousness in the "evil and cruel" illegal group. In his line "It's not good no", audience are able to see through Tarantino's rethinking towards gangster roles in the film. For Tarantino, gangster is not a simple evil devil, but full of complicated personality, involving what has later been recognized as Tarantino's gangster morality.

Ex 2:

Speck Brothers: Who's that stumbling around in the dark? State your business or prepare to get winged!

Dr Schultz: Calm yourselves, gentlemen. I mean you no harm. I'm simply a fellow weary traveler. Whoa, boy. Good cold evening gentlemen. I'm looking for a pair of slave traders that go by the name of the Speck Brothers. Might that be you?

Speck Brothers: Who wants to know?

Dr Schultz: Well, I do. I'm Dr. King Schultz. This is my horse, Fritz.

Speck Brothers: What kinda doctor?

Dr Schultz: Dentist.

(Django Unchained)

This dialogue happened when Dr Schultz encounters with Black Slave dealers, Speck Brothers in a foggy and dark forest. When Speck Brothers shout at him and questioned his identity, he firstly declares he is just a weary traveller to express his friendliness, then gave Speck brothers his partial identity—a dentist, which leads us to build a innocent and kind image of Dr Schultz. That dialogue gives us an opportunity to assume Dr Schultz as a person with no harm, but the assumption collapses as soon as Dr Schultz kills Speck brothers with his exquisite shot. Tarantino arranges various lines for Dr Schultz with deliberate courtesy in order to emphasize the paradox existed within his characteristics. On the one hand, he must be indifferent for death, because he is a bounty hunter at present. On the other hand, he is a man with compassionate and sensitive. Also, he has strong sense of justice and self-esteem. That is a classic individual hero image in western spaghetti. It is the contradictory personality Dr Shultz showed in small conversations that successfully leads the story to an unexpected ending for audience. Dr Schultz kills Candie and is killed by Candie's subordinate because he is not actually armed so well with his bounty-hunter principle but is so influenced by his own pride and value.

Ex 3:

Marvin Nash: Freddy. How do I look?

Mr. Orange: I don't know what to tell.

(Reservoir Dogs)

This conversation occurs after Nash's ear is cut off by Mr. Blonde using a small knife. Nash is eager to know whether he is deformed or not, but Mr. Orange simply said he doesn't know what to say. That understatement infers that the appearance of Marvin Nash is too pathetic that Mr. Orange doesn't know how to tell him the tragic truth. Instead, Mr. Orange just lies in blood and laugh. That illustrates Mr. Orange's compassion and kindness in his heart, and on the other hand, reveals the reversion of the universal value that audience may possess: evil thing can be

destroyed by divine power, like policeman. Hidden in a group of gangsters, even a policeman is vulnerable and helpless. Tarantino doesn't shoot the scene when Mr Blonde cuts off Nash's ear, but presents it in lines.

### 3.2. Excessive Information

Ex4:

Mr. Orange: What happened if the manager won't give you the diamond?

Mr. White: When you dealing the store like this, they insured up their ass. They're not supposed to give you any resistance whatsoever. If you get a customer or an employee who thinks he's Charles Bronson. Take a bullet in your gun and smash their nose with it. Drop him right to the floor. Everyone jumps. He falls down screaming blood squirts out of his nose. Freaks everybody out. Nobody says fucking shit after that. You might get some bitch talk shit to you. Give her a look like you're gonna smash on her face next. Watch her shut the fuck up. Now if it's the manager, that's different story. The manager know better not to fuck around, so if he's giving you static, he probably thinks he's a real cowboy. If you wanna knows something he won't tell you, cut off one of his fingers. The little one. Then tell him his thumb's next. After that he'll tell you if he wears ladies underwear.

(Reservoir Dogs)

The dialogue happens when Mr. Orange and Mr. White are chatting in a car before they start to rob a bank. Mr. Orange only asked about what to do if the manager doesn't give them the diamond. Normally, Mr. White just need to tell Mr. Orange cut off one of the manager's finger and that's enough information for Mr. Orange, but in this scene, Tarantino design for Mr. White a long piece of words to say, in which all sorts of details involved in bank robbery are shown directly and vividly to the audience. That implies Mr. White knows everything of it but gives not the faintest guilty about it. It's just like doing other business in his eyes other than an illegitimate act. For Mr. White, giving Mr. Orange more information than he is requested to simply means that they may work more efficiently without moral condemn. Actually, in this film, Tarantino doesn't present for us any real crime scenes, but audience can still see the bloody scene and cruel massacre in Mr. White dialogues and feel uncomfortable because the inference beneath the literal meaning strongly offends some moral standards that ordinary people hold.

Ex 5:

O-ren: I'm going to say this in English so you know how serious I am. As your leader, I encourage you to – from time to time and always in respectful manner, and with the complete knowledge that my decision is final -- to question my logic. If you're unconvinced a particular plan of action I've decided is the wisest, tell me so. But allow me to convince you. And I will promise you, right here and now, no subject will be taboo...except the subject that was just under discussion. The price you pay for bringing up either my Chinese or my American heritage as a negative is, I collect your fucking head. Just like this fucker here. Now if any of you sons of bitches got anything else to say, now's the fucking time. I didn't think so. Meeting adjourned.

(Kill Bill Vol1)

These lines occur when assassin O-ren cut Boss Tanaka's hand off with her samurai sword in the party which celebrates her succession to the leadership of Japanese gangsters. Tanaka is dissatisfied with a woman being gangsters' leader and said to others it's a kind of perversion but that's obviously his trick to get the leadership back to his hand. This implies her permission and tolerance towards Boss Tanaka's irreverence. After the death of Tanaka, O-ren says the similar words like "As your leader, I encourage you to question my logic. If you're unconvinced a particular plan of action I've decided is the wisest, tell me so." It indicates she is a kind and rational person, who is willing to accept any advice that others would have give her. However, her act and speech cannot be matched. Her polite and respectful behaviors are just a fake mask

for her to cover her tyranny and ruthlessness. The great contrast between her former words and latter one shapes a rather horrified image in audience mind.

Ex: 6

Jule: The path of the righteous man is beset on all sides by the inequities of the selfish and the tyranny of evil men. Blessed is he who in the name of charity and goodwill shepherds the weak through the valley of darkness, for he is truly his brother's keeper and a finder of lost children. And I will strike down upon thee with great vengeance and furious anger those who attempt to poison and destroy my brothers. And you will know my name is the Lord when I lay my vengeance upon thee.(Ezekiel 25:17)

(Pulp Fiction)

These lines appear twice in Pulp Fiction. Jules said these lines for the first time when he kills Brett at the beginning of the film and when he frees pumpkin and honey bunny at the fourth chapter of the movie. Jules cites same words from the Bible but makes totally reverse decisions when he needs to choose whether to kill or not. According to his action, the author finds these lines interpreted by Jules with different inference. At first, Jules considers himself as a "brother's keeper with great vengeance and furious anger" who is there to take revenge to man who doesn't follow his justice and morality. Before he kills Brett who disobey his agreement with Marsellus Wallace, his brother, he said these lines like he is a adjudicator who comes there to sentence Brett's guilt. However, when he said these lines to pumpkin, the lines conveys rather different meaning, which, like Jules Winfield told to pumpkin, he is in a process of transition. These quotations does not mean anything devil at all, but rebirth and redemption. Thus, audience can also find clues in these lines why Jules and Vincent end up in two different ways. For Jules, he has his faith and he believes he doesn't be shot by Brett's friend because of divine intervention. Nevertheless, Vincent doesn't believe in what Jules believe is a prodigy but "a piece of shit". In this case, What seems like a simply dead announcement appears to be the tool for Tarantino to deepen his story and illustrate his role in various facets. Jules is no longer like a royal subordinate of Marsellus, but is arranged like a preacher to stand on the top of morality to educate his peer and also to save himself.

### 3.3. Tautologies

Ex 7:

Marvin: That sick fuck! That fucking bastard!

Mr. Orange: Marvin I need you to hold on. There's cops waiting to move a block away.

Marvin: What the fuck are they waiting for? This fucking guy slashes my face and cuts my fucking ear off! I'm fucking deformed!

Mr. Orange: Fuck you! Fuck you! I'm fucking dying here! I'm fucking dying!

(Reservoir Dogs)

These lines are said by Marvin Nash and police spy Mr. Orange when Marvin Nash is aware of his being deformed by Mr. Blonde. The repeated lines imply the fury of Marvin and Mr. Orange. Marvin cannot understand the policemen don't bail them out immediately after he was cut one ear off and so miserable. "That sick fuck! That fucking bastard!" and "This fucking guy slashes my face and cuts my fucking ear off! I'm fucking deformed!" implies Marvin feel wronged and indignant to suffer so much pain and insult, which increasing audience's physical sensations about what Marvin Nash has been through. If Marvin Nash's resentment already enhances audience feeling towards his bitter experience, the sudden emotional outburst of Mr. Orange deepens audience understanding of the despair Tarantino tries to convey by depicting the two policemen's dialogues. The lines of Mr. Orange are said by the dying police spy, in which contains too much emotion, fear of death, anxiety, hopelessness. The simple tautologies restate his dying state and also imply his angry towards Marvin: how can you be pissed off simply

because of your ear loss? I'm the one who will face the death! I'm the one who should have been despairing!

#### 4. Conclusion

In this article, we try to elaborate on how conversations should be effectively analyzed by using cooperative principle theory and conversational implicature theory. After analyzing different cases of these lines, we find that by violating certain maxims of conversational principles, dialogues between diverse characters created by Tarantino may carry implicit meaning so as to reflect their true characteristics and to help shape extreme violence that Tarantino always tries to present to his audience. This way, we propose a teaching endeavor featuring the in-depth understanding of the implied meaning of conversations empowered by the Gricean framework, as an approach to the enhancement of both the clarification of what is taught and the crystallization of what is learned.

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