The Importance of Cooperative Principle and Conversational Implicature: A Case Analysis of Short Sketch in Spring Festival Gala

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Abstract
Grice’s theory of Cooperative Principle summarizes the four maxims of cooperation that both parties in communication must follow in order to obtain the accurate conversational implicature, namely the quality maxim, the quantity maxim, the relation maxim and the manner maxim. However, in most cases, the speaker may violate one or more of these maxims in Cooperative Principle for some reason or purpose. In this case, the listener must use a serious of skills and methods to infer the implied meaning of the words. This paper analyzes how the dialogues in the Spring Festival gala sketch violates the principles of Cooperative Principle so as to produce humor and proves that the theory of Cooperative Principle is very important in making the communication smooth.

Keywords
Cooperative Principle; Conversational Implicature; Importance; Short Sketch; Spring Festival Gala.

1. Introduction
Since the 1980s, the sketch as a new style of drama begin to emerge in the Spring Festival gala and various shows. With the actors’ superb performance and funny language, the sketch constantly wins the audience’s laughter and applause. The dialogue can make the audience better understand the plot of the story, characters and grasp the development of the story, so as to let the audience deeply understand the theme of the sketch.

It is well known that Grice’s Conversational Principle has been widely applied in various aspects. For example, some scholars have used Cooperative Principle to analyze the language of movies, some have used it to analyze the language of TV dramas, such as The Big bang Theory, and some daily dialogues. What is novel in my thesis is that it makes a linguistic analysis of the sketch in Spring Festival gala using Cooperative Principle.

The dialogue of the sketch is close to real life, and full of metaphors, personification, rhyme and other techniques. To achieve humorous effect, utterances in sketched are often not consistent with the maxims in Cooperative Principle.[5] Based on Cooperative Principle and Conversational Implicature, this paper expounds the principles of the theory of Cooperative Principle and its principles, and concludes that violation of the Cooperative Principle not only will not affect the normal conduct of dialogue, it may actually increase the effect of the dialogue, making the dialogue more vivid, interesting and intriguing. Grice’s Cooperative Principle and conversational implicature play a very important role in dialogue, film, television works, books and newspapers. The paper selects example of short sketches from 2019 Spring Festival gala, and analyzes the role of Cooperative Principle and conversational implicature in achieving the communicative effect.

This paper is divided into four parts. The first part serves as a brief introduction to the overall content of this paper. The second part of the paper gives a brief overview. It includes the importance of research and reviewed a number of relevant studies. It also discussed the
concept of Conversational Implicature. The third part analyzes the violation of the maxims in Cooperative Principle in sketches of the 2019 Spring Festival gala. The last part is the conclusion of this paper.

2. Cooperative Principle and Conversational Implicature

Conversation as one of the most common forms of verbal expression in everyday life, is used to convey information and express thoughts and feelings. Dialogues in people’s daily life are not scattered and arbitrary. On the contrary, both sides of the conversation are restricted by an “invisible hand”, that is, both sides enjoy and follow a set of invisible but effective rules – “Cooperative principle” in Grice’s terms.

2.1. Cooperative Principle

In order to study the operation mechanism of conversation, many scholars researched the principles in various fields and made some achievements, one of the most significant principle is the Cooperative Principle, which was put forward by American linguistian Herbert Paul Grice in 1967. He formulates the principle as follows:

Make your conversational contribution 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.

In Grice’s article Logic and Conversation, Grice held that Cooperative Principle observed by people in Conversation includes four maxims: the maxim of quantity, the maxim of quality, the maxim of relation and the maxim of manner.

2.1.1. The Maxim of Quantity

This maxim requires speakers to follow the following two sub-clauses:

a) Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purpose of the exchange).

b) Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

In other words, the maxim of quantity needs the speakers to provide the right amount of information in a dialogue. The information which shows in the conversation should not be more, or less than that is needed.

For example:

(A is a shop assistant and B wants to buy a T-shirt from A’s shop)

A: What kind of clothes do you want?
B: A blue T-shirt, please.

In this conversation, speaker B’s answer is just what is needed by speaker A. He answers the speaker A’s question directly and the amount of information he provides is very appropriate. Thus, speaker A has no problem in understanding speaker B at all. So, speaker B abides by the maxim of quantity in this conversation.

2.1.2. The Maxim of Quality

This maxim requires speakers to follow the following two sub-clauses:

a) Do not say what you believe to be false.

b) Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

This means that the participants should handle their conversation in a true way. In other words, this maxim requires participants in a conversation to say things that are true or things that they have enough evidence for.

For example:

A: Yao Ming is tall.
This utterance produced by speaker A shows how the maxim of quality can be followed. As we all know, Yao Ming, who is a famous basketball player in China, is very tall. Therefore, speaker A is telling a true thing by uttering this conversation. He has abided by the maxim of quality.

2.1.3. The Maxim of Relation

This maxim requires participants in a conversation to:

a) Be relevant

That is to say, participants engaged in a conversation should provide information that is closely related to the current topic.

For example:
A: Has anyone been injured?
B: Yes.

In this conversation, speaker A is asking speaker B whether anyone was hurt, and speaker B gives the appropriate answer, which was highly relevant to A’s question. By doing so, speaker B abides by the maxim of relation.

2.1.4. The Maxim of Manner

This maxim requires speakers have the ability of plain speaking, and this maxim has the following four sub-clauses:

a) Avoid obscurity of expression;
b) Avoid ambiguity;
c) Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity)
d) Be orderly.

For example:
Speaker A: Your child is very polite.

In this sentence, the speaker obeys the maxim of manner, and produced a sentence which is clear and unambiguous, thus making it easy for the hearer to understand the meaning of this utterance.

2.2. Conversational Implicature

According to Grice, there is a clear difference between natural meaning and unnatural meaning. Natural meaning is usually the literal meaning or the direct meaning of the utterance. However, unnatural meaning is used to refer to the speaker’s intention. Based on this unnatural meaning, Grice proposed the concept of conversational implicature.

Conversational implicature refers to the conversational meaning that can be deduced from the form of discourse based on some Cooperative Principles that are valid and acceptable for allocation, namely the real meaning of the speaker implied in the literal meaning. This kind of implication is not explained by the general semantic theory, but by the common sense, common knowledge and reasoning ability of the speaker.

Grice’s basic idea is that in communication, speakers aim to follow the Cooperative Principle and its maxims, and that hearers interpret utterances with the maxims in mind.[10] According to Grice, utterance interpretation is not a matter of decoding messages, but rather involves (i) taking the meaning of the sentences together with contextual information, (ii) using inference rules, and (iii) working out what the speaker means on the basis of the assumption that the utterance conforms to the maxims. The main advantage of this approach from Grice’s point of view is that it provides a pragmatic explanation for a wide range of phenomena, especially for conversational implicatures—a kind of extra meaning that is not literally contained in the utterance.
According to Grice, conversational implicatures can arise from either strictly and directly observing or deliberately and openly flouting the maxims, that is, speakers can produce implicatures in two ways: observance and non-observance of the maxim.

### 2.3. Violation of Cooperative Principle

In actual communication, people do not strictly abide by the four maxims, because language is both concrete and abstract, and it is a very flexible and changeable phenomenon, and the conclusion drawn cannot include all its changes. In many cases, the speaker may deliberately not adhere to a rule for considerations such as politeness or context. [11] When one participant perceives that the other participant’s words do not comply with Cooperative Principle, he will force himself to bypass the superficial meaning of the other participant’s words to try to understand the deep meaning of the latter’s words.

That is to say, in actual communication, it is more common for participants to violate the four maxims of the Cooperative Principle. The violation of one or more of the maxims by both parties in communication does not mean non-cooperation but reflects Cooperative Principle in another level or another aspect, thus expressing another meaning.

There are many reasons for violating maxims in communication. It can be seen that verbal humor in conversation could be realized by violating maxims.

Out of necessity, people will violate one or more of the maxims on purpose. Grice refers to this kind of implicit meaning, which comes from a seemingly intentional violation of the Cooperative Principle, as special conversational implicature. Special conversational implicature explains how the listener can understand the hidden meaning of the speaker’s words through the surface meaning of his words, so as to express another meaning. Humor is often generated at this time.

The following examples illustrate how the above-mentioned four maxims can be violated in conversation.

**Example (1):**

If it is green, we reject it. If it is too ripe, we reject it. If it is bruised, we reject it. If it is diseased, we reject it. If it is dirty, we reject it. If it is just right, we squash it.

-- the ad. for a ketchup jam [13]

This example shows the violation of the quantity maxim. This advertisement contains a lot of unnecessary information exemplified by the use of “if it is...” for six times, which is a clear violation of the quantity maxim in that it provides information more than is needed. Actually, the ketchup company only wants to shows that they are picky about the selection of tomatoes.

**Example (2):**

He is a kangaroo.

This example shows the violation of the quality maxim. This sentence is literally wrong, clearly against the maxim of quality, for no human is a kangaroo. But the hearer still assumes that the speaker is being cooperative. Then, the hearer could get some information like that: "he has some characters of a kangaroo"

**Example (3):**

My wife and I were stopped by a state policeman. He started to write up a speeding ticket. My wife, who is a hair stylist, said, “If you let us off with a warning, I’ll give you a free haircut for a year.”

The policeman removed his hat and he was completely bald. [14]

The police officer in the joke violated the Maxim of Relation, because he took off his hat without answering the woman’s question, a gesture that seems completely unrelated to the question but actually implies that he cannot be bribed.
Example (4):
A: Shall we get something for kids?
B: Yes, but I veto C- A- N-D-A-Y.
This example shows the violation of the manner maxim: That sentence can only be said when it is known to both A and B that B has no difficulty in pronouncing the word candy. In that case, A will know that B spells the word out in order not to prompt the kids.

“Verbal humor means the expressing of humor with the help of a language, in verbal humor, language acts as a medium, and are used in particular context, with light humorous tone, by innuendo, pun, exaggeration, irony and criticism to cause people thinking and produce meaningful artistic effect” [15]. The expression of humor is of extremally importance in the short sketch. Without humor, the dual functions of entertainment and enlightenment of sketches cannot be realized. Most of the humor in the sketch is expressed by words, and some of them are generated by deliberately violating the relevant rules of the Cooperative Principle.

3. Analysis of Short Sketches in Spring Festival Gala

The Cooperative Principle proposed by Grice is just an ideal state of conversation. However, many people sometimes break some of these principles in daily conversation. To avoid offending each other's feelings, people always implicitly express their meaning or intention, in a euphemistic and indirect way. Unintentional violation of these guidelines will lead to misunderstanding or jokes. However, when these maxims are intentionally violated, sometimes it is to create humor, or to convey what the speaker is getting at. In the following sections, I analyze the violation of these four maxims through the dialogue of sketches to reveal its conversational implicature.

3.1. Violation of Quantity Maxim

The maxim of quantity means that the participants should provide some information without exaggeration or qualification. In actual conversation, the size of quantity is only relative and conditioned by the context. That is, the application of the principle of quantity depends on the dialogue environment.

According to the maxim of quantity, speakers should be given abundant information to ensure a smooth communication. However, it is often the case that speaker fails to, or intentionally fail to provide enough information, thus resulting in a special conversational implicational implicature.

For example:
(In the following conversation, A is a male customer who asks for a cleaning service. B is a female who is providing the cleaning service for the customer.)
A: Come on, look at this coupon. It says that 100 yuan off if it’s full of 200 yuan. That is to say, I just need to give you 100 yuan, right?
B: To be honest, I am afraid I can’t.
A: What? You’d better tell me why? You see, it clearly says: 100yuan discount.
B: Yes, but...
A: 200 yuan for a service, right?
B: Yes, but...
A: Then the coupon is very clear. How could it not be used?
B: Because it’s not the coupon of our company.

From Make me on the Spot of 2019 Spring Festival gala
This sketch is about a man who wants his cleaner to give him a discount by giving the latter a coupon issued by another company. The cleaner of the company wants to clarify the truth several times, but has been interrupted by the customer, and cannot provide the actual and exact information. Instead, all she did is to show agreement to employer’s ideas and give vague answer. In this way, she fails to provide enough information, which causes misunderstanding. Although the coupon is valid, it is not issued by her company. The cleaner don’t have the opportunity to provide detailed and accurate information, which causes the misunderstanding of the employer and led to the light and humorous effect of the sketch.

For example:
(In the following conversation, A is a hostess, B is a host, they are discussed the C’ life, C is a man named Joe.)
A: Joe is a silly boy. He is quite a fool. Why doesn’t he have good luck? (There is an idiom in Chinese goes like: Fortune fools have fortune.)
B: No, no, no, that kid is not stupid.
A: “Who is it?” (At the same time, the doorbell rang, )
C: “Hi, aunt, this is Joe. Guess who I am?”
A: little depressed, “And you call this ‘not silly’?”
From The “son” is Here of 2019 Spring Festival gala
From this conversation, we can see that Joe’s answer violates the quantity maxim: in that he makes his contribution more informative than is required. In fact, Joe only has to answer the questioner’s question about who he is, but he is giving him more information than is needed. In this dialogue, Joe intends to let the hostess guess who he was, but he was too specific by providing extra information of his true identity.

3.2. Violation of Quality Maxim
According to the maxim of quantity, participants should give the real information. However, in actual communication, speakers usually provide false information on purpose. To be specific, speakers may say things that is not consistent with the facts. Thus, the listener can only deduce the actual meaning of the utterance from the speaker’s violation of the maxim. The utterance expressed by rhetorical means such as irony, satire, metaphor and exaggeration often fall into this category.

For example:
(In the following conversation, A is a village leader who is extremely selfish, he wants everyone obey him unconditionally. B is a villager, he is timid.)
A: I am the boss here. Now look, what is the animal over there?
The villager looked at it for a while, and answered:
B: It was a donkey.
A: Donkey? If I say it’s a horse, who dare says it’s a donkey? Dare you?
B: Sorry, I am afraid not. Even if you say it is you, I dare not show disagreement.
From Put on a Play of 2019 Spring Festival gala
We know from the conversation that the village leader is calling a donkey a horse. Thus, he is providing information that is not true, which again shows a clear violation of the quality maxim. Villagers are living in the countryside, and surely have the ability to tell a donkey from a horse. But the villager in this conversation knew that the leader is in a higher social status than him, so he has to show agreement to what the leader said and say that the donkey is a house. Therefore, the villager also violated the quality maxim in that he has provided information which is wrong.
In addition, the second violation of the qualitative maxim is that the speaker A deliberately says something illogical, unreasonable and without enough evidence. Usually, the communicators should tell the real thing rather than lie. People sometimes lie intentionally and want other participants know that what you say is a lie, because they want the listener know the deep meaning of what they want to express.

For example:

(In the following conversation, A is a father who wants to choose a “good” seat for B’s child, and B is a father whose child is short.)

A: Do you know why your child grow slowly? There must be a lack of calcium in the child’s body. How to increase the calcium in a short time? The answer is exposure to the sun. Come on, buddy, sit here and feel the warmth of the sun. If your child sits in this position, he will soon grow taller, right?

B: You are right. You see, I sat here for a while and my pants become short. I can’t sit here anymore, or my pants will become shorts.

From Forcibly Occupy 2019 of Spring Festival gala

Speakers in this dialogue uses exaggeration and say thing that are inconsistent with the reality, which can be seen as a violation of the quality maxim. Parent B sat in that seat for only a few minutes before thinking his pants were getting shorter, which meant he was taller. This is obviously irrational. One cannot grow taller in such a short time. Therefore, such a dialogue can be understood as a violation of the quality maxim, and a humorous effect is achieved in this way.

It can be seen that in the case of violation of the quality maxim, people usually use metaphors, irony, exaggeration and other rhetorical devices to let the listener deduce his implied meaning, so as to achieve special pragmatic effects.

3.3. Violation of Relation Maxim

According to the description of the relation maxim in the Cooperative Principle, the question and answer between the speaker and the listener should reflect mutual Cooperation, and the questionee should answer what the questioner asks directly, instead of providing the irrelevant answer. The violation of relation maxim is common in skits, which leads to humor.

For example:

(In the following conversation, A is a man who spent money for something slinkingly, and he needs someone to help him, B is the man who can give a help.)

A: Joe, we had eight thousand yuan, but I spent it. Now my wife wants me to send the money back, I can only say that I lent the money to you. Can you help me cheat my wife, do not tell her about it, please?

B: What? Sorry sir, I afraid I cannot solve this matter, maybe you can choose another one to help you.

A: Oh my god, look at your shoes, your shoes are very fabulous.

B: Ok, Sir, don’t worry about it, I’ll handle it.

From The “son” is Here of 2019 Spring Festival gala

Obviously, there’s an irrelevant sentence in this conversation. The host knew that Joe was eager to be praised for his shoes, so he did not answer his question and changed the topic to praise Joe’s shoes. Joe was in a good mood at this compliment, and consented to the original request. Apparently, this dialogue is not smooth. It is violating the relation maxim. But it is just in this way that the sketch has a humorous, jocular effect.

The relation maxim requires that the information conveyed by the discourse should be related to the topic of communication and not be irrelevant. Although relevant rules are generally
observed in discourse communication, expressions that violate relevant rules in order to convey special meanings often occur.

Here is another example:
(In this scenario, A is a person who accidentally missed the high-speed rail, and B is a staff.)

B: You call your wife with my phone. So what is your wife's phone number?
A: I didn't remember.
B: So how about yours?
A: My phone is in my bag. and my bag is in the high-speed rail, the high-speed rail had already gone.
B: No, buddy, I mean what is your phone number?
(From Train Station of 2019 Spring Festival gala)

This dialogue also violates the relation maxim. The staff wanted to know the man's mobile phone number so that his wife could be contacted. However, the man did not understand the staff member's meaning. He thought that the staff member asked where his mobile phone was and said irrelevant words, which caused misunderstanding and made a joke.

3.4. Violation of Manner Maxim

People violate the manner maxim by not using the generally accepted manner in speaker. To be specific, this maxim can be violated by people talking in a roundabout, implicit way intentionally.

The above three maxims focus too much on what people should say in the conversation, but do not cover how people should say what they want to say. The manner maxim requires that people say things in a way that is clear and free of ambiguity and fuzziness. However, people always consciously or unconsciously violate this maxim.

For example:
(In the following conversation, A is a woman who wants B to pay back the money, because she thinks B borrowed money from her husband. B doesn't know anything about it, so he doesn't know what A means.)

A: You see, Joe, your uncle has no ability. He has only a small pension a month. We have a hard life...
B: Auntie, I understand when you say that. You want to divorce your husband, right?
(From The "son" is Here of 2019 Spring Festival gala)

As we know, avoiding equivocality is one of the most important requirements in the manner maxim. In this conversation, Joe misunderstands his hostess and thinks she wanted to divorce with her husband, but this is not the case. The hostess just wanted Joe to give back the money. This leads to ambiguity, because it violates manner maxim. However, this violation can lead to verbal humor in Spring Festival Gala sketches.

Ambiguity, as we all know, creates two possibilities in understanding, but in the context of the time only one of the possibilities is possible. In other words, a sentence. That is, the meaning of the text is not clear with two or several possible interpretations.

Here is another example:
(In the following conversation, A is the student’s father, and doesn’t know B is the teacher of his child.)

A: What's your job?
B: I am very proud to say that I am a gardener.
A: A gardener? so why not water the flowers.
(From True and false teachers of 2019 Spring Festival gala in Hunan Province)
Here, A asks about the identity of the teacher who suddenly appears. The teacher describes himself as a gardener in order to show his identity as a teacher. But the word “gardener” itself is ambiguous. It can also refer to workers engaged in the actual gardening of trees and flowers. That is to say, speaker B violates the manner maxim because he tells the ambiguous words. This explains who speaker A responded speaker B in this way. Through the use of ambiguous word, this sketch achieves a humorous effect.

4. Conclusion

From the above analysis of examples of the sketches that deliberately violate Grice’s four maxims under Cooperative Principle, we can conclude that the violation of the maxims by the speaker is only a superficial phenomenon. That is, we can only say that the speaker has violated the maxims in Cooperative Principle, we cannot say that the speaker is not being cooperative. He/she is still being cooperative in the sense that he/she wants to convey certain implied meaning by the violation of maxims.

In daily communication, violating the four maxims under Cooperative Principle is not only not uncommon, but also a communicative tacit in language using. If people follow strictly the maxims under Cooperative Principle, the language will be boring and lack of energy and vitality. Moreover, it is very necessary that people violate these maxims, for politeness concern and other factors. When these maxims are violated, conversational implicatures occur. In the case of the sketches in Spring Festival gala, the violation of maxims seem to be more necessary because the humorous effect of these sketches often rely on the violation of these maxims. If participants in the dialogue follow the maxims, then the conversation will be no different than everyday talk. Therefore, Grice’s Conversational Implicature is of great significance in guiding us to correctly analyze and understand Conversational Implicature, which may lead to the eventual improvement of conversational competence.

In short, through the above analysis of the violation of maxims in the sketches of Spring Festival gala, it is found that Grice’s Cooperative Principle is of great help to understand the humorous effect in the language. However, due to the limited time and space and my lack of sufficient knowledge, I failed to discuss the sketches in depth and detail.

References

