

# Analyzing the Violation of Cooperative Principles in Chinese Culture

Zixuan Huang <sup>1,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Pennsylvania State University, State College, Pennsylvania, 16802, United States*

<sup>\*</sup> *Email: 20200130@stu.nun.edu*

## ABSTRACT

The Cooperative Principle, the most influential work of H.P. Grice, assumes that interlocutors are making efforts to construct meaningful conversation when interlocutors speak. Cooperative principles are assumed to play an essential role in language use. Any violation or flouting of the Cooperative principle will result in "implicature". However, Chinese language speakers do not strictly conform to the principles. Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism have vastly influenced Chinese Culture and communication in history. Under the influence of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, the Chinese possess a high context culture, and the Chinese sometimes prefer the expression of implicature or metaphor. This paper aims to explore the basic idea in the Cooperative principles and the violation in ancient Chinese books and records, which will provide further implications to communication study.

**Keywords:** *Cooperative Principle, Pragmatics, Implicature, Violation, Chinese Culture, Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Language is the exchange of information in social interaction, including speakers' feelings, emotions, ideas, and intentions. Interlocutors cooperate to convey the explicit or implicit intentions of their utterances. A successful exchange of information required the cooperation of each interlocutor. Grice proposed the Cooperative Principle, including four maxims to help speakers keep a successful interaction. However, due to the personal purpose, speakers sometimes choose the uncooperative strategy. Grice argues that speakers break the maxims in some conversational interaction to express the implied meaning or other reasons [1].

When language users communicate, they are affected by the society bearing and Culture influence. In China, speakers prefer indirect and implicit utterances to express their feeling and implied meaning. He (2012) argues that the natural rules of society and morality governed Chinese language use [2]. When tracing back to the source of China's natural rules and Culture China, Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism are the three main Chinese culture origins. The three philosophies or religions significantly influenced the mode of communication in the Chinese language community. This article is trying to discuss the violation and the

implicature in Chinese Culture, especially in Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism records.

## 2. GRICE' MAXIMS

Grice proposed the Cooperative Principle that guides speakers to observe to communicate successfully, as Grice pointed out that, "make your conversational contribution such as is required, at a stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged.", Grice is focused on the logic and relation which are hidden under the conversation. He tries to reveal the operation of logic in the process of communications.

The principle consists of four maxims: quantity, quality, manner, and relation, avoiding people giving invalid information. As Thomas argues, "people who are involved in a conversation are working on the assumption that certain rules control their operation" [3]. The Cooperative Principle is mainly about the language users cooperate to make the effective exchange, and the four maxims are as follows:

### 2.1 Maxim of Quantity

There are two essential points of quantity: the first one is "make your contribution as informative as is

required." The second is "Do not make your contribution more informative than is required."

As Yule (1996) points out, the maxim of quantity needs the participants to work to provide information as enough as required [4]. The maxim of quantity is a rule that restricts. Also, it helps the listener to find the information they require quickly.

*For example:*

*A: Do you have any siblings?*

*B: Yes, I have a sister.*

Here A naturally assumed that B has precisely one sister and doesn't have any brothers. Then, B thoroughly answered the question and provided enough information that was not overwhelming.

## **2.2 Maxim of Quality**

The maxim of quality focuses on two principles: "Do not say what you believe to be false." and "Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence."

The maxim of quality is about truth, in which the speaker does not provide the information that he or she believes to be false or lacks evidence to support. Leech (1983) argues that this maxim outweighs other cooperative maxims since people avoid receiving untruth messages [5].

*For example:*

*A: Do you know where Times Square is?*

*B: It's in New York City.*

This example is about conveying information to the listener. B does not provide any unsubstantiated or false information; the maxim of quality is obeyed.

## **2.3 Maxim of Relation**

There is only one rule about the maxim: "be relevant."

The maxim of relation is about making a conversational contribution relevant to the topic or focusing on the main point of conversation and related clearly to the purpose of the exchange in a dialogue [6]. The maxim reveals that people should not introduce irrelevant topics. Instead, people should stick to the topic of conversation

*For example:*

*A: Are you coming to the party this weekend?*

*B: No, I must finish my paper on Sunday.*

B directly answers the question and only provides information that is stuck to the current situation.

## **2.4 Maxim of Manner**

Their maxim of manner asks people to speak clear, briefly, and orderly. It includes four main points: avoiding obscurity of expression, avoiding ambiguity, being orderly, and being brief.

This maxim is concerned with avoiding obscurity, ambiguity, disorder, and chaos in communication. As Grice stated, his maxim is "relating not... to what is said. Instead, "How to speak" is the core concept.

*For example:*

*A: What did you do when you heard the boat had arrived?*

*B: I ran to the pier and jumped into the boat.*

Here is an example of speaking orderly in the presentation of information in conversations. The Maxim of Manner can take many forms, such as the order of presentation of information, the choice of words, and the attitude.

## **3. VIOLATION AND IMPLICATURE**

According to Grice, speakers are expected to follow the Cooperative Principle in conversation. However, people sometimes choose to violate the maxims, which leads to "a speaker blatantly failing to observe a maxim". This situation is considered flouting and violating the maxims, not to mislead the audience but to express an implicit meaning. Grice provides an example, "He's an Englishman; therefore, he is brave.". This sentence implied the braveness of that man is from Englishman quality. Al-Zubair points out there is another situation that, the speaker deliberately misleads and deceives the listener for different purposes, such as to elicit laughter and amusement [7].

The term "implicature" accounts for the implicit and implying meaning rather than the semantic meaning conveyed by the speaker. Grice differentiated implicature and conversational implicature, and conventional implicature. Conversational implicature is directly from the literal meaning in the conversations, and conventional implicature is from the obedience or the violation to the maxims. Yule provides an example to explain the conventional implicature:

*A: Does your dog bite?*

*B: No.*

*A reach down to pat the dog, and the dog bites A's hand*

*A: Quach! Hey! You said your dog doesn't bite.*

*B: He doesn't. But that's not my dog.*

This example illustrates the violation of maxims since B does not give enough information to A. The

implicature can be deduced as B is unwilling to talk with A. Speakers convey the implicature by breaking the Cooperative Principle, and each implicature has its purposes behind it. There are four main traits of conversational implicature [8]:

1.The conversational implicature depends on the recognition of the cooperative principle.

2.Not a part of the explicit meaning, the explanation depends on the prior understanding of the sentence.

3.The implication is more than one explanation, and the speaker may express various meanings.

4.The implication is cancelable, which means the interpretation of the conversational meaning of an utterance can be ignored without contradiction [9].

### ***3.1 Violation and Implicature of Maxim of Quantity***

Below is the example of the violation and implication in terms of the maxim of quantity:

Teacher: By the way, do you read my handout tonight?

Students: We don't understand yet, sir.

(Labobar, 2014)

In this case, the teacher only wants the Yes/No question to ensure that his/her student has prepared class at home. However, the student feedback the unrequired informative contribution. Therefore, the maxim of quantity is violated.

### ***3.2 Violation and Implicature of Maxim of Quality***

People may violate the maxim of quality to deliver a sarcastic tone:

(A student comes 10 minutes later in class.)

Teacher: Wow! You're such a punctual fellow! Welcome to the class.

Student: Sorry, sir! It won't happen again.

[10]

The purpose of a teacher is to satire the student instead of praising. The teacher deliberately flouts the maxim of quality to warn the student who should notice the true meaning hidden in the utterance. In this situation, people actively flout the maxims to express an implicitly sarcastic meaning.

### ***3.3 Violation and Implicature of Maxim of Relation***

People may flout the maxim of relation to shading the truth:

Teacher: Why don't you join your group discussion?

Student: May I wash my hand? I am sleepy [11].

Thomas noted that irrelevant feedbacks might lead to changing the subject and ending the topic. The student's answer seems to be irrelevant to the teacher's question; the implication is that the student does not want to talk about why he or she quits the group discussion. The maxim of relation is violated.

### ***3.4 Violation and Implicature of Maxim of Manner***

Here is an example of the violation of the maxim of manner:

A: "Let's get the kids something."

B: "Okay, but I veto I-C-E-C-R-E-A-M."

As He pointed out, "The breaking of the Maxim of Manner often includes euphemism, allusion, metonymy, synecdoche, antonomasia, and so on." In this example, Bviolates the maxim of manner to express the willingness to refuse to buy ice cream with inappropriate volume, pace, and words.

## **4. HIGH CONTEXT CULTURE AND CHINESE CULTURE**

According to Hadi, Grice neglected communication in a complex social environment and the situations where the goal of interlocutors is to miscommunicate [12]. As Khosarvzadeh and Sadehvandi state, for achieving another purpose, the speaker intends to break the maxims to create misunderstanding [13]. In some cases, speakers use a non-cooperation strategy or flout the maxims to seek personal purpose, which happens more often in a high context communication culture such as China. China has a complex culture that has thousands of years of history, and the way of daily communication is somehow different from western society. He points out that "Chinese possesses a high context culture.". High context communication or message is that the central part of the message is already in the person, while the minor part is coded and explicit. A low context communication is a reverse; most of the message is contained in the explicit code [14].

In high context communication culture, affluent information permits people to convey the message by non-verbal communication. In different Cultures, the interpretation of non-verbal metaphors differs. In the research of Callow and Schiffman, they argue images

evoke more implicit meanings in high-context cultures than in low-context cultures [15]. About this result, Chinese parents sometimes ask their child to “kan wo yan se”, which means “Look at my facial expression to get the hint”. In high context culture, people prefer non-verbal metaphors to deliver important messages. China has had more than 2,000 years of feudalism and is heavily impacted by Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. He points out that the Chinese do not necessarily follow the CP due to the impact of cultural features.

Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism are the main three philosophies or religions in Chinese Culture, which are “three pillars” in Chinese Culture. Confucianism is focused on the moral doctrine regarding social structures, daily behavior, and work ethics. As Pye states, Confucianism is undisputedly the most influential thought, which forms the foundation of the Chinese cultural tradition and still provides the basis for the norms of Chinese interpersonal behavior [16]. Confucianism is one of the most significant parts of Chinese Culture and has governed the rules of morality and the traditional conventions in China for more than two thousand years.

Taoism is the oldest Chinese indigenous religion. According to the research of Yip, Taoism has exerted significant impacts on the behaviors and meaning of life of the Chinese. Taoism continuously affects many Chinese cultural fields, such as literature, art, and the manner of life [17]. Taoism cannot be ignored in the way of life and cultural composition of the Chinese people.

Buddhism is the only 'foreign' religion to embed itself into the hearts and minds of the Chinese masses; Buddhism has gained unprecedented success compared to the numerous other religions [18]. Buddhism impacts a profound influence on Chinese Culture, especially in the aspect of philosophy and literature. According to Zhang, in the Northern and Southern dynasties, Buddhism has become the most powerful religion. Buddhism has influenced folk literature concerning the way of expression and topic [19]. As Buddhism is rooted in Chinese Culture, the way of Chinese daily communication is affected.

## **5. THE VIOLATION OF COOPERATIVE PRINCIPLE IN CHINESE CULTURE**

Keenan pointed out that the maxims of the CP are not universal since there are linguistic communities to which not all of them apply [20]. Under the overlap and conflict of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, China frames its special natural rules of culture and communication language use. Chinese people highly value indirect and ambiguous expressions due to cultural differences. The modesty, listener's feelings, face considerations, and cultural elements occupy a weighty position in Chinese communication. According to Ladegaard, interpersonal interaction may be irrational and illogical, resistance and

non-cooperation may be adopted as the first discourse strategy [21]. Due to the societal bearings and the influence of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, Chinese has many underlying meanings under the utterance in daily communication. In the way of Chinese communication, people prefer implicit and indirect expressions.

### **5.1 Violation and Implicature in Confucianism**

Below is an example about the violation in Confucianism, which is from *The Commentary of Zuo, Duke Zhuang of Lu: 32nd Year*:

*Duke Zhuang of Lu (King of Lu) was seriously ill and asked Shu Ya (the brother of Duke Zhuang of Lu) about the chosen heir. Shu Ya replied: "Qing Fu (the elder brother of Duke Zhuang of Lu) has talent." Duke Zhuang of Lu asked Ji You (the brother of Duke Zhuang of Lu), Ji You replied: "I will serve Zi Ban (the son of Duke Zhuang of Lu) until death." Duke Zhuang of Lu said: "Shu Ya said 'Qing Fu has the talent'." Then Ji You just poison Shu Ya by the name of King.*

#### **5.1.1 The Breach of the Maxim of Quantity**

When Duke Zhuang of Lu asked Ji You about the chosen heir, the answer of Ji You violated the maxim of quantity. Ji You expressed much more information than needed. Ji You showed the properly chosen heir as the son of Duke Zhuang of Lu and declared that he will always be honest to Duke Zhuang of Lu. However, this feedback is the satisfying answer of Duke Zhuang of Lu.

#### **5.1.2 The Breach of the Maxim of Relation**

Then Duke Zhuang of Lu tells Ji you an irrelevant message: Shu Ya said Qing Fu is talent. Here, the maxim of relation is violated since the opinion towards the chosen heir is not related to the topic of the conversation here. As Sperber and Wilson prove, the maxim involving relevance subsumes all the other maxims, and relevance is more important than the other maxims [22]. Whatever maxim is initially broken, the relevance maxim is always used in inferring the consequent conversational implicature.

#### **5.1.3 The Implicature**

Unlike the violation of maxims, which takes place to cause misunderstanding on the part of the listener, the flouting of maxims takes place when individuals deliberately cease to apply the maxims to persuade their listeners to infer the hidden meaning behind the utterances; that is, the speakers employ implicature [23]. The Duke Zhuang of Lu intends to flout the maxims for expressing the hidden meaning, that is Shu Ya supported Qing Fu instead of my son. Shua Ya caught the implicature and poisoned Shua Ya then.

## 5.2 Violation and Implicature in Taoism

One of the founders of Taoism, Zhuang Zi, prefers to use a subtle fable to respond to the question. One of the three essential features in the language philosophy of Zhuang Zi is that “using the irrelevant and evasive answer” [24]. In *the Book of Zhuangzi*, an example of the violation of cooperative principle shows as follow:

*Zhuangzi was fishing by the river when the King of Chu sent two great officers to him, with the message, 'I wish to trouble you with the charge of all within my territories.' Zhuangzi kept holding his rod without looking around and said, 'I have heard that in the Chu there is a spirit-like tortoise-shell, the wearer of which died 3000 years ago, and which the King keeps, in his ancestral temple, in a hamper covered with a cloth. Was it better for the tortoise to die and leave its shell to be thus honored? Or would it have been better for it to live and keep on dragging its tail through the mud?'*

### 5.2.1 The Breach of the Maxim of Relation

The conversation shows the maxim of relation was violated in the first. To refuse the two great officers directly, Zhuangzi told an irrelevant story about the tortoise. Chen states that “what and/or how speakers say things is motivated by a desire to avoid the negative consequences of what they say.” [25]. Zhuangzi implies that he refused to accept the invitation of the King of Chu. However, Zhuangzi is not willing to offend a king.

### 5.2.2 The Breach of the Maxim of Quantity

The long story violated the maxim of quantity. The information of Zhuangzi’s answer far exceeded the requirement. In the above conversation, Zhuangzi can simply tell the officers that he wants freedom instead of officers.

## 5.3 Violation and Implicature in Buddhism

In Buddhism, people use the profoundly connotative communication method, which focuses on using implicit and metaphorical language to express ideas.

*Once two boys were diving in a river and found a bunch of feathers at the bottom of the river. One boy said it was the beard of an immortal, while the other insisted that it was bear's fur. An immortal happened to be by the river's shores, so the two boys went to him asking for a settlement of their debate. The immortal took some rice and sesame seeds into his mouth and chewed them for a while, then he spat them into his hand and told the boys, "What I have here seems to be peacock droppings."*

(The Hundred Parables Sutra, Two Young Boys’ Argument over Feathers)

### 5.3.1 The Breach of the Maxim of Relation

The example above shows an immortal how to interpret two boys' debates. The maxim of relation asks people to avoid ambiguity. The immortal intentionally breaks the maxim of relation and creates a self-created personal topic. The answer of the immortal seems purposeless.

However, in some cultures, ambiguity is often linked to a presumption that people conceal facts. Ma argues, “A major linguistic difference between Americans and Chinese lies in the use of direct and indirect language.” Chinese sometimes prefer ambiguous expressions for personal purposes [26]. In China, the higher position one possesses, the less information one expresses in communication.

### 5.3.2 The Breach of the Maxim of Quality

Kempson states that the speaker intends the hearer to recognize that a maxim was broken by deliberately and flagrantly breaking the norms of conversation. The immortal might want to make some metaphors by flouting the maxim of quality [9]. According to Grice, when people violate the maxim, people make an implicature. In Chinese religious tradition, people prefer to make spiritual and philosophical implicatures in writing records and speaking [1].

## 6. CONCLUSION

According to Tupan and Natalia, people disobeyed the maxims deliberately as the strategies [27]. The cooperative principle sometimes cannot effectively demonstrate the way of communication in the Chinese language community. Due to the high context culture and the influence of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, the Chinese sometimes break the Cooperative Principle to express the implicature or metaphor. Chinese has its remarkable cultural and historical impression. Therefore, it would be challenging for Chinese people to conform to the cooperative principle.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Grice, H. Paul. (1975). Logic and conversation. In Peter Cole and Jerry Morgan (ed.) *Syntax and Semantics. Volume 3: Speech Acts*. New York: Academic Press, 41-102.
- [2] He, Y. (2012). *Cooperative Principle in English and Chinese Cultures. Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 2, 132-137.
- [3] Thomas, J. (1995). *Meaning in interaction: An introduction to pragmatics*. Essex, England: Longman.

- [4] Yule, G. (1996). *Pragmatics*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- [5] Leech, G. (1983). *Principles of Pragmatics*. London: Longman.
- [6] Rahardi, R.K. (2020). *Pragmatic Meanings Of Javanese Phatic Marker 'Sampun': Culture-Specific Pragmatic Perspective*.
- [7] AL-ZUBEIRY, H.Y. (2020). Violation of Grice's maxims and humorous implicatures in the Arabic comedy Madrasat Al-Mushaghbeen. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 16, 1043-1057.
- [8] Tsojon, I.Y., & Jonah, P.K. (2016). An Analysis of the Pragmatic Implicatures of Selected Advert Billboards around Jos Metropolis in Terms of Grice (1975) Maxims of Cooperative Principle. *Journal on English Language Teaching*, 3, 42.
- [9] Kempson, R. (1977). *Semantic Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [10] Agung, W.K. (2016). The Violation of Cooperative Principles on Students' Responses Toward Teacher Questions in Tefl Class.
- [11] Labobar, M.F. (2018). The Violation of Cooperative Principles in The Dialogue Among the Characters of David Baldacci's The Escape (2014). *English Education Journal*, 8, 370-377.
- [12] Hadi, A. (2013). A Critical Appraisal of Grice's Cooperative Principle. *Open Journal of Modern Linguistics*, 03, 69-72.
- [13] Khosravizadeh, P. (2011). Some Instances of Violation and Flouting of the Maxim of Quantity by the Main Characters (Barry & Tim) in Dinner for Schmucks.
- [14] Hall, E.T., & Hall, M.R. (1990). *Understanding Cultural Differences: Germans, French, and Americans*.
- [15] Callow, M.A., & Schiffman, L.G. (2002). Implicit meaning in visual print advertisements: a cross-cultural examination of the contextual communication effect. *International Journal of Advertising*, 21, 259 - 277.
- [16] Pye, L. W. (1972). *China: An introduction*, Boston: Little Brown
- [17] Yip, K. (2004). Taoism and Its Impact on Mental Health of the Chinese Communities. *International Journal of Social Psychiatry*, 50, 25 - 42.
- [18] Ou, X. (2012). The Successful Integration of Buddhism with Chinese Culture: A Summary.
- [19] Zhang, Z.X. (2011). *Buddhism and Chinese Culture*.
- [20] Shopen, T. (2021). *Language Typology and Syntactic Description: Volume 1, Clause Structure (Language Typology & Syntactic Description) (2007–10-22)*. Cambridge University Press.
- [21] Ladegaard, H. J. (2009). Pragmatic cooperation revisited: Resistance and non-cooperation as a discursive strategy in asymmetrical discourses. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 41(4), 649–666. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2008.09.021>
- [22] Sperber, D., & Wilson, D. (1996). *Relevance: Communication and Cognition (2nd ed.)*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- [23] Levinson, S. C. (1983). *Pragmatics* (Cambridge Textbooks in Linguistics). Cambridge University Press.
- [24] Li Z. (2006). The art of questions and answers in the Zhuangzi. *Journal of Adult Education of Gansu Political Science and Law Institute*, 63, 34 -35.
- [25] Chen, R. (1993). Conversational implicature and poetic metaphor. *Language and Literature*, 18, 53-74.
- [26] Ma, R. (1996). Saying "yes" for "no" and "no" for "yes": A Chinese rule. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 25(2), 257–266. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0378-2166\(94\)00098-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/0378-2166(94)00098-0)
- [27] Tupan, A., & Natalia, H. (2008). The Multiple Violations of Conversational Maxims in Lying Done by The Characters in Some Episodes of Desperate Housewives. *K@Ta*, 10(1). <https://doi.org/10.9744/kata.10.1.63-78>