

The Conventional Implicature of Dialogues in *Emma*

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Abstract—Criticisms and reviews on *Emma* have been numerous in number and various in approaches. This study, as a qualitative case study, attempts to analyze the conventional implicature of dialogues in *Emma* by employing cooperative principle in order to explore the way of analyzing literature works from perspective of pragmatics. By doing so, this paper hopes the present study may contribute to a better and fuller understanding of this world classic, help shed some light on the usefulness of the pragmatic approach to the interpretation of fictions, and enrich the conventional criticism on Jane Austen.

Keywords—conventional implicature; cooperative principle; *Emma*

I. INTRODUCTION

Pragmatics, as an area of linguistics, has received considerable attention from linguists. Abundant efforts are made to study pragmatic phenomena and different theories are established. Human communication is a basic and common phenomenon in people's life. In *Logic and Conversation*, Grice, H. P. proposes the Cooperative Principle (hereafter CP), which illustrates the rules people should abide by in communication in order to make the conversation go smoothly and meaningfully. However, more often than not, people violate the CP and therefore produce conversational implicature. That is, what they really mean is different from what they actually say.

A conversational implicature is an inference from the semantic content depending on context, the speaker's intention, the hearer's attitude and the mutual assumption. To put it easier, a conversational implicature is the meaning which is different from, or in addition to the expressed meaning. The term "implicature" is used by Grice to account for what a speaker can imply, suggest, or mean, as distinguished from what the speaker literally says. A conversational implicature is something which is implied in conversation, that is, something which is left implicit in actual language usage.

Written by Jane Austen, like all the true literary classics, *Emma* has never diminished its sparkle since its creation. *Emma* is the climax of Jane Austen's genius and the Parthenon of fiction. Its success with the general reading public was immediate and long lasting, and critics seized upon its reality, sound and original thoughts, and freshness of style. Jane Austen excels in employing dialogue in her fiction. She is one of the greatest, one of the most accurate writers of dialogue of her own or any age. These dialogues in

current criticisms are employed to, either study the characterization, analyze the social background, explore the narrative technique or manifest the Feminism. They are perceived from the approaches of stylistics, rhetoric, history or philosophy. However, very few are known in the literature about approaching and analyzing politeness strategies and conversational implicature in *Emma* from perspective of pragmatics. In view of this gap, the author attempts to gain some insights into how pragmatic theories like CP can be possibly applied in Jane Austen's master piece, with the purpose of gaining a better understanding of this novel.

II. THE FOUR MAXIMS OF CP

A. The Introduction of the Four Maxims

First, Grice's cooperative principle is expected to be observed by participants in conversations and there are some sub-principles called conversational maxims that underlie the cooperative principle. Grice's maxims for conversation are such principles neither of speech as the maxim of quantity that states a speaker should be as informative as is required and neither more nor less. The maxim of quality states that a speaker should not lie or make any unsupported claims. The maxim of relation essentially states a speaker should stay on the topic. The fourth maxim, the maxim of manner, states the speaker should be brief and orderly, and avoid ambiguity.

- Quantity:

Make your contribution as informative as is required for the current purposes of the exchange.

Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

- Quality: try to make your contribution one that is true:
Do not say what you believe to be false.
Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.
Relation: be relevant.
Manner: be perspicuous.
Avoid obscurity of expression.
Avoid ambiguity:
Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity)
Be orderly.

(Grice, 1975)

People are supposed to obey these maxims to converse in a maximally efficient, rational and cooperative way: they should speak sincerely, relevantly and clearly, while providing sufficient information. If all the maxims are observed, the conversation will generate no implicature. But actually, people often blatantly fail to obey a maxim and implicature occurs. A general pattern to generate conversational implicature involves a three-step process. First, a speaker says something that seems to involve a maxim violation, or at least it requires a little effort to understand how what was said conforms to the CP. Second, the speaker expects, nevertheless, to be interpreted as being cooperative and the hearer actually does assume he or she is being cooperative. Third, the speaker thinks and expects the hearer to think the speaker thinks that the hearer can work out what additional suppositions are necessary in order for the speakers' contribution to actually be cooperative.

B. Flouting the Maxim

According to Grice, there are five ways of failing to observe a maxim: flouting the maxim; violating the maxim; infringing a maxim; opting out of a maxim; suspending a maxim. The situations which chiefly interested Grice are those in which speaker blatantly disobeys a maxim at the level of expressed meaning without the intention to mislead or deceive, he deliberately wants to generate a conversational implicature and he terms the process "flouting a maxim".

III. ANALYSIS OF CONVERSATIONAL IMPLICATURE IN *EMMA*

The conversations in *Emma* constitute the whole story which is full of witty irony and abundant implicature. To really appreciate the conversations, one has to apply pragmatics as a tool to gain insight into the implied meaning. The following discussions will analyze the conversational implicature from the approach of the CP. The analysis focuses on what strategies they use to convey their implicit meaning. Conversations are classified into 4 categories in accordance with violation of different CP Maxims.

A. Conversational Implicature Produced by Violation of the Quality Maxim

There are many conversational implicatures in *Emma* generated by violating the Quality maxim of Grice's CP. The

following example is the analysis of conversational implicature generated by flouting the Quality Maxim.

Example:

"...and as a friend I shall just hint to you that if Elton is the man, I think it will be all labor in vain..."

"I am very much obliged to you," said Emma, laughing again. "If I had set my heart on Mr. Elton's marrying Harriet, it would have been very kind to open my eyes; but at present I only want to keep Harriet to myself. I have done with match-making indeed. I could never hope to equal my own doings at Randall's. I shall leave off while I am well."

"Good morning to you," — said he, rising and walking off abruptly.

(P76)

This dialogue occurs between Emma and Mr. Knightley. After knowing Harriet refuses Mr. Martin's proposal, Knightley takes it for granted that Emma has persuaded Harriet to make this decision. Actually, as soon as Emma sees Harriet, she has decided to marry her off to Mr. Elton. However, when Mr. Knightley criticizes her, she makes a reply of insincerities instead of accepting it modestly. In order to realize her fancy, she persuades Harriet to turn down the proposal of Robert Martin. Instead of disapproving Mr. Knightley's suggestion, Emma ever uses a speech act of "thanking" to be against him. What she says follows are out of any sincerity, which are the opposite of what she means. Her utterance reveals the ironic implication that she will do what she like which is none of his business. By violating the Maxim of Quality, Emma implies her sarcasm on Knightley's guessing. Her seemingly polite reply manages to esteem Knightley's positive face, but also expresses her dissatisfaction by means of implicature. This speaking device can avoid direct conflict and counter-argument and is therefore of great avail in social occasion. On the other hand, Mr. Knightley's abruptly saying "Good morning to you" is another irony. His real intention is unveiling the shortage of sincerity in Emma's utterance because he knows what Emma says is a lie. His implication is that he doesn't want to argue with Emma anymore because she has such an impenetrable mind.

B. Conversational Implicature Produced by Violation of the Quantity Maxim

When a speaker says more or less than is necessary, his speech flouts the Quantity Maxim and generates an implicature. The following example is the analysis of conversational implicature generated by flouting the Quantity Maxim of CP.

Example:

"Only think of our happening to meet him! — How very odd! ... Well, Miss Woodhouse, is he like what you expected? What do you think of him? Do you think him so very plain?"

"He is very plain, undoubtedly--remarkably plain: — but that is nothing compared with his entire want of gentility. I had no right to expect much, and I did not expect much; but I

had no idea that he could be so very clownish, so totally without air. I had imagined him, I confess, a degree or two nearer gentility.”

(P34)

The conversation happens after Emma and Harriet meet Robert Martin, a farmer with good sense, who is in love with Harriet. Harriet is “not clever, but she had a sweet, docile, grateful disposition” and “totally free from conceit; and only desiring to be guided by anyone she looked up to.” (Austen: 22) These characteristics meet Emma’s flavor, and Emma see Harriet as a young woman, who lacked only a little education and refinement. With Emma’s instructing and help, she should be able to make Harriet the perfect wife for a gentleman. However, Guessing Harriet might have an interest in Robert Martin, Emma endeavors to show Martin’s shortcomings. The utterance “He is very plain, undoubtedly — remarkably plain” is an overstatement which conveys her extremely contempt to Martin at the expense of Quantity maxim as well as Quality maxim because Martin is not so bad as her words. This implies that she wants to make Harriet know that Mr. Martin is too far below her socially so that Martin isn’t a suitable man for her, although Harriet herself was an illegitimate girl. This utterance made by Emma actually is a bold-on-record politeness strategy without redress. She directly damages Martin’s positive face and aims to influence Harriet’s original opinions about Mr. Martin.

C. Conversational Implicature Produced by Violation of the Relation Maxim

The violation of the relation maxim means that the utterance of the speaker is irrelevant to the context for some reasons and some purposes. The speaker deliberately wants to mean something different. Some conversational implicatures are produced by violation of the relation maxim. The speaker may not say something, which is explicitly related to the topic of the conversation and invites the hearer to seek for an interpretation of possible relevance.

Example:

“Your father will not be easy; why do not you go?”

“I am ready, if the others are.”

“Shall I ring the bell?”

“Yes, do.”

(P153)

This dialog happens between Emma and Mr. Knightley when they all have dinner at Mr. Weston’s. After knowing the snow falls heavily outside, Emma’s father, Mr. Woodhouse is very upset. So Knightley ask Emma why she not go, instead of directly saying “I’m waiting for your decision”, she gives some hints to ask Knightley for leaving. This strategy avoids threatening Mr. Knightley’s negative face and preserves the politeness by violating the Maxim of Relevance. However the implicature is obviously on record in this case. So Knightley understand Emma’s deeper meaning and gives an appropriate offer. The utterance “Shall

I ring the bell?” indirectly tells Emma that he is ready to leave, too.

D. Conversational Implicature produced by violation of the Manner Maxim

Example:

“So much the better — or so much the worse:--I do not know which. But be it sweetness or be it stupidity in her — quickness of friendship or dullness of feeling--there was one person, I think, who must have felt it: Miss Fairfax herself. She must have felt the improper and dangerous distinction.”

“As to that — I do not —”

(P240)

This conversation is between Emma and Frank Churchill about Miss Fairfax. Emma thinks the reason for Miss Fairfax’s return to Highbury instead of going with the Campbells to Ireland is that she is sensible of the inappropriate affairs with Mr. Dixon which will destroy the friendship between Miss Campbell and her. Frank Churchill is Miss Fairfax’s secrete fiancé, who is the very person knows why Miss Fairfax suddenly come back to Highbury, this is because nothing but him. But he can’t tell Emma the truth because he and Miss Fairfax’s engagement is secrete. Frank Churchill’s incomplete utterance actually is a disagreement with Emma. By means of ellipsis, Frank tries to make sentence unfinished and withhold the implicature at the expense of the Manner Maxim. Therefore, the maxim of Agreement is maintained.

IV. CONCLUSION

Analyzing literary works from pragmatic perspective has become a new trend. The above analysis shows us how the conversational implicature is derived and interpreted in fictional utterance. The reason for the use of indirect speech is that speakers want to avoid direct conflicts, hurt others’ feelings, and so on.

Although the present study offers a new perspective of appreciating *Emma*, it is not without limitations. For one thing, even though CP is powerful and instructive to analyze the conversational implicatures in fictions, we still need to consider our research into other factors, which influence communications, such as social factors and the human cognitive ability. For another, this study just restricted to the CP alone, which leave room for further study. Pragmatic analysis based on theoretical framework such as deixis, relevance and register may be carried out to complement the present study. Being an everlasting literary classic, *Emma* provides sufficient materials for further study from the perspective of pragmatics.

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