

Original Paper

An Analysis of Conversational Implicature in *Besieged City* from the Perspective of Cooperative Principle and Politeness Principle

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Abstract

*The theory of conversational implicature proposed by H.P. Grice in 1967 has always been regarded as the focus of pragmatics. Its basic theory includes the four principles of verbal communication. The cooperative principle is the specific requirement of the theory of conversational implicature. Geoffrey Leech put forward the politeness principle to complement the cooperative principle. The cooperative principle and the politeness principle play an important role in people's communication. In the process of generating and understanding discourse, both parties in the conversation need to use them flexibly. This study selects the classic dialogues in the novel *Besieged City* as the text, and tries to analyse the conversational implicature arising from the violation of the principles of cooperation and politeness. It is found that conversational implicature can produce certain literary effects in literary works, and the successful achievement of conversational effect needs the comprehensive support of context, cooperation between both parties in the conversation, and social and cultural environment.*

Keywords

*Conversational Implicature, Cooperative Principle, Politeness Principle, *Besieged City**

1. Introduction

Pragmatics is the study of the relationship between linguistic signs and their users (Morris, 1938). In many Chinese and foreign literary works, the authors often use dialogue to show the characters' personalities, creating a specific atmosphere to obtain unexpected results. Qian used a large number of dialogues in his novel *Besieged City* to depict intellectuals who returned to China from abroad in the early years of the war. These dialogues are closely related to the life of the character.

Conversation is conditioned, and the reason why people do not utter a series of disconnected words is that the interlocutors cooperate with each other to follow a common purpose or set of purposes.

Besieged City, the only novel written by Qian, a famous contemporary writer, is a masterpiece of critical realism in the new literature after the May Fourth Movement. It not only has distinct artistic characteristics, but also its linguistic achievements are very prominent. Centered on Fang Hung-chien, a young man who returned to China after studying in Germany, the novel depicts the contradictions and entanglements encountered by a group of overseas students and university professors in their life, work, marriage and love. Qian (2017) ridicules the spiritual plight of intellectuals with exaggerated caricatures, revealing the typical social psychology that life is like “a besieging castle”, “those outside the city want to rush in, and those in the city want to escape”.

The language of this novel is profound, witty and interesting, and part of the plot is presented in the form of daily dialogue, which provides relatively rich text materials for the conversation analysis of this paper. By interpreting the dialogues of the characters in *Besieged City*, this paper not only helps people to understand the conversational implicature and real intentions of the characters, but also helps people to explore the reasons behind the phenomenon and linguistic features from the perspective of pragmatics.

The core story of *Besieged City* revolves around the rise and fall of its main character, Fang Hung-chien, an intellectual who has studied abroad and finds himself in a dilemma after his return. At the beginning of the novel, he returns to Shanghai with the embarrassing secret of a fake academic degree, and then he is torn between the multiple sieges of work, friendship and love. He has emotional entanglements with female Doctor Su Wenwan and pure love girl Tang Xiaofu, but fails to gain the ideal love. Then, Fang Hung-chien and Zhao Hinmei go to Sanlu University together to teach, but they fall into a personnel dispute. The relationship between Mr. Fang and Sun Rou Chia forms the main thread of the second half of the novel.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Research on Cooperative Principle and Politeness Principle at Home and Abroad

The theory of conversational implicature is the second major theory in pragmatics, which was proposed by Herbert Paul Grice. It is true that H.P. Grice began to formulate his ideas of this theory in the fifties of the last century, but it was delivered by William James lectures at Harvard in 1967. Since then, this theory has become known to the public (Hu, 2017).

LINGUISTICS: A COURSE BOOK (Hu, 2017) pointed out that H. P. Grice briefly mentioned some characteristics of conversational implicature, which include calculability, cancellability, non-detachability, non-conventionality. From the above, we may summarize conversational implicature as a type of implied meaning.

Lei (2023) analyzed conversational implicature in *The Great Gatsby* from the perspective of cooperative principles. Pierre (2020) explored the conversational implicature from the perspective of

conversational strategy. Zhu (2016) constructed illocutionary meaning from a narrative analysis of a Chinese woman's conversation. Geng (2023) analyzed the conversational implicature in the *Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* by using cooperative principle and politeness principle. Yang and Jia (2019) analyzed euphemisms used by foreign teachers in oral English class.

Grice (1989) explained the cooperative principle in Harvard University.

LINGUISTICS: A COURSE BOOK (Hu, 2017) points that H.P. Grice noticed that in daily conversations people do not usually say things directly but tend to imply them. In order to avoid the logical use of implication, which we touched on in the section of logical semantics, H.P. Grice coined the term implicature. And he explored the question of how people manage to convey implicature, which is not explicitly expressed. His answer is that there is some regularity in conversation. In that book, the Cooperative Principle (CP) means the following, "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" .

H. P. Grice introduced four categories of maxims to specify the CP further, which are quantity, quality, relation and manner. The maxim of quantity means that people should make the contribution as informative as is required, but do not make more than that; the maxim of quality does not allows you to say what you believe to be false or something you lack adequate evidence; the relation maxim requires the content to be relevant; the maxim of manner means being perspicuous. The emergence of conversational implicature is based on the fact that people do not strictly abide by the cooperative principle and its guidelines in the process of communication.

The politeness principle focuses on the politeness of the speaker during communication. Leech (1983) pointed out that people sometimes violate the principle of cooperation in order to show respect and courtesy to each other during communication. Since the cooperative principle proposed by H. P. Grice did not contain such indirect meaning, Leech proposed the politeness principle. Politeness principle is divided into six criteria, which include tact maxim, generosity maxim, approbation maxim, modesty maxim, agreement maxim and sympathy maxim.

The core of the politeness principle is the occasion, the relationship and the manner. Following the politeness principle in conversation can deduce the meaning of agreement, sympathy, praise, etc.

2.2 Research on the Novel *Besieged City*

In CNKI, with the theme "the Novel *Besieged City*" as the search item, more than 200 matching articles were obtained, most of which were investigated from the perspective of translation and literary appreciation. Among them, Feng (2008) and Cui (2009) have sorted out the development of Grice's cooperative principle and conversational implicature respectively. Moreover, Lv (2022) and Xu (2009) have analyzed Chinese and foreign literary works from the perspective of pragmatics as well.

2.3 Summary

On the one hand, it is found that studies abroad are more inclined to analyze dialogues in real life, such as the conversation between teachers and students in face-to-face classes. On the other hand, when

analyzing literary works from the perspective of pragmatics, they not only pay attention to rhetoric, but also concern the impact of violating the above two principles on the development of story plots and shaping of the characters.

However, there are still some gaps in the study of conversational implicature in the novel *Besieged City* from the perspectives of cooperative principle and politeness principle. In the analysis of conversational implicature of literary works, most studies research the translation of English works, rather than original content.

3. The Conversational Implicature in the Novel *Besieged City*

3.1 Analysis with the Cooperative Principle

In the novel *Besieged City*, Qian Zhongshu's returnee intellectuals in the 1930s and 40s of the 20th century, together with the background of the integration of Chinese and Western culture during the war, show their unique language style. At some specific times and occasions, they often abide or violate the cooperation principle in dialogue to achieve their communicative purposes.

3.1.1 The Maxim of Quality

The following are conversations in the novel *Besieged City*, which will briefly analyze some communication phenomena that comply or violate the principle of quality.

Dialogue (1)

Original Text:

“方先生在国外学的是什​​么呀？”

鸿渐没好气道：“没学什​​么。”

“fāng xiān shēng zài guó wài xué de shì shén me yā?”

hóng jiàn méi hǎo qì dào: “méi xué shén me.”

(Qian, 2017, p. 053)

Translation:

“What did you study abroad, Mr. Fang?”

“I didn’t study anything,” said Hung-chien crossly.

This passage is a conversation between Zhao Hsin-mei and Mr. Fang. Zhao is the suitor of Miss Su. This dialogue violates the quality principle. Because Fang Hung-chien hated Zhao’s behavior and did not want to continue the conversation, he did not give a real answer, which means that he did not want to continue this conversation. Mr. Zhao had long known that Mr. Fang had obtained a doctor of philosophy degree, and when he heard him answer this way, he also felt Mr. Fang’s hostility.

Dialogue (2)

Original Text:

鸿渐道：“早晨出去还是个人，这时候怎么变成刺猬了！”

柔嘉道：“我就是刺猬，你不要跟刺猬说话。”

hóng jiàn dào: “zǎo chén chū qù huán shì gè rén, zhè shí hòu zěn me biàn chéng cì wèi le!”

róu jiā dào: “wǒ jiù shì cì wèi, nǐ bù yào gēn cì wèi shuō huà.”

(Qian, 2017, p. 338)

Translation:

“You were still human when you went out this morning,” said Hung-chien. “How did you manage to turn into a porcupine?”

“I’m a porcupine. Don’t talk to the porcupine.”

Roujia is Mr. Fang's wife. The conversation took place after Hung-chien had a big fight with her, and they had calmed down, but Roujia's attitude was becoming impatient again, so Hung-chien compared her to a hedgehog. Not to be outdone, she said in anger that she was a hedgehog. It is clear that both sides of the conversation are presenting false statements, and therefore violate the quality criteria. The conversation somehow soured their relationship and hinted at the endless squabbling that will follow.

3.1.2 The Maxim of Quantity

Dialogue (3)

Original Text:

苏小姐道：“我要找家剃头店洗头发去，你肯陪么？”

鸿渐道：“妙极了！我正要去理发。咱们理完发，摆渡到香港上山瞧瞧，下了山我请你吃饭，饭后到浅水湾喝茶，晚上看电影，好不好？”

sū xiǎo jiě dào: “wǒ yào zhǎo jiǎ tì tóu diàn xǐ tóu fā qù, nǐ kěn péi me?”

hóng jiàn dào: “miào jí le! wǒ zhèng yào qù lǐ fā. zá mén lǐ wán fā, bǎi dù dào xiāng gǎng shàng shān qiáo qiáo, xià le shān wǒ qǐng nǐ chī fàn, fàn hòu dào qiǎn shuǐ wān hē chá, wǎn shàng kàn diàn yǐng, hǎo bù hǎo?”

(Qian, 2017, p. 023)

Translation:

“I want to find a hairdresser to have my hair washed. Would you like to go with me?” she said.

“Splendid!” he said. “I was just about to go get a haircut. When that’s taken care of, we can take a ferry to Hong Kong and go up to the Peak to have some fun. When we come down, I’ll take you to lunch. After lunch we can have tea at Repulse Bay and in the evening see a movie. How’s that?”

This paragraph obviously violates the maxim of quantity. Mr. Fang only needs to answer to go to the barber shop, but then goes on to describe some miscellaneous things. Obviously, Mr. Fang is very much looking forward to the date with Miss Su, and has planned entertainment activities after getting off the ship in advance, which also reflects Mr. Fang's cherish and joy for this opportunity.

3.1.3 The Maxim of Relation

Dialogue (4)

Original Text:

“我今天身体不舒服，晚上峨眉春不能去了，抱歉得很！你不要骂我。”

“唐小姐去不去呢？”鸿渐话出口就反悔。

“wǒ jīn tiān shēn tǐ bù shū fú, wǎn shàng é méi chūn bù néng qù le, bào qiàn dé hěn! nǐ bù yào mà

wǒ。 ”

“ táng xiǎo jiě qù bù qù ní? ” hóng jiàn huà chū kǒu jiù fān huǐ。

(Qian, 2017, p. 065)

Translation:

“I’m not feeling well today, so I won’t be going to the O Mei-chun this evening. I’m very sorry. You mustn’t get mad at me.”

“Is Miss T’ang going?” As soon as the words came out of his mouth, he regretted having said them.

As he spoke, Hung-chien backtracked. Miss Tang is Miss Su's cousin, lively and charming, very liked by Mr. Fang. In this conversation, Hung-chien nominally invites Miss Su to dinner and lets Miss Tang keep his company, but in fact he actually means to have a date with Miss Tang. Miss Su found out that she was a little jealous and said she couldn't come. Normally, the listener's response to the speaker needs to be relevant to the topic. In this conversation, Miss Su says that she is ill, and Mr. Fang, as a friend, does not immediately express his concern about his illness, but opens up an unrelated topic, which makes Miss Su feel uncomfortable, and also exposes the fact that Hung-chien only has Miss Tang in mind. As a result, the conversation ended badly to some extent.

3.1.4 The Maxim of Manner

The code of manner calls for speaking clearly, avoiding ambiguous language and an ambiguous attitude, and should be direct, concise and forceful. But for people during the ambiguous period, there is often a party in order to create a unique mood to say that triggers unlimited reverie.

Dialogue (5)

Original Text:

鸿渐惶恐道：“你对我太好了！”

苏小姐瞥他一眼低下头道：“有时候我真不应该对你那样好。”

hóng jiàn huáng kǒng dào: “ nǐ duì wǒ tài hǎo le! ”

sū xiǎo jiě piē tā yī yǎn dī xià tóu dào: “ yǒu shí hòu wǒ zhēn bù yīng gāi duì nǐ nà yàng hǎo. ”

(Qian, 2017, p. 057)

Translation:

Hung-chien said nervously, “You’re too kind to me.”

Miss Su glanced at him; then lowering her head she said, “Sometimes I really shouldn’t be so kind to you.”

What Miss Su liked most was watching Mr.Fang and Zhao Hsin-mei fight over themselves, sometimes deliberately provoking each other. For example, seeing that Mr Fang was losing momentum, Miss Su called him Hung-chien in front of Zhao Hsin-mei, which made Zhao very jealous. And these are the moments Miss Su enjoys the most. Miss Su said this sentence at the time when the two were getting along closely and harmoniously, and did not explain the reason, which made the semantics very vague and difficult for the listener to understand. This expression also brings ambivalence to the extreme. So Miss Su's words violate the maxim of manner of the cooperative principle.

3.2 Analysis with the Politeness Principle

Leech criticized the speech act theory a lot. The key point is that it is difficult to determine the behavior in discourse, and the speech act theory is of little use for pragmatic analysis. According to Leech, it is unreliable to divide speech acts on the basis of action verbs in language. Like other linguistic units, action verbs are arbitrary divisions of natural and social phenomena (Liu, 1987). By using dialogues in the novel *Besieged City*, we will get a feel for how the principle of politeness works in actual communication.

3.2.1 Sarcasm in Conversation

Sometimes people tend to elevate each other's status and increase each other's position by self-deprecating ways to show their politeness and compliments.

Dialogue (6)

Original Text:

她眼皮有些抬不起似地说：“我们没有那么大的面子呀！”

鸿渐摊手道：“我原说，人家不肯赏脸呀！”

tā yǎn pí yǒu xiē tái bù qǐ sì dì shuō: “wǒ mén méi yǒu nà me dà de miàn zi yā!”

hóng jiàn tān shǒu dào: “wǒ yuán shuō, rén jiā bù kěn shǎng liǎn yā!”

(Qian, 2017, p. 023)

Translation:

As if barely able to raise her eyelids, she said, “Who, me? I don’t think I’m important enough!”

Spreading out his hands, he said, “Just as I said, you wouldn’t give me the honor.”

This paragraph is Miss Su and Mr. Fang deliberately belittle themselves to elevate each other's status. By speaking in this way, Mr.Fang made Miss Su feel very welcome. Mr. Fang was also happy under Miss Su's boasting, so, under the premise that both sides gladly accepted, the invitation was successful. The invitation fully followed the principles of modesty and generosity in the politeness principle. The dialogue was humorous, and the relationship between the two parties was further closer.

Despite its use of opposing expressions, sarcasm is often used to communicate a speaker's viewpoint. The current analysis explores whether and when sarcasm increases the recipients' understanding. A model proposes that sarcasm can provide cognitive readiness and the motivational drive that enables recipients to see the world from the speaker's viewpoint. Building off findings in psychology and sociology, we hypothesize that sarcasm activates two precursors to perspective-taking: deliberate processing and open-mindedness (Huang & Galinsky, 2023).

3.2.2 The Art of Accost

The purpose of “accost” is to build a bridge of communication and connect the two sides. Through the analysis of the conversational meaning of the pick-up line between the opposite sex in the novel *Besieged city*, we can find that such pick-up line behavior usually follows the principle of politeness, because the speaker wants to leave a good impression on the listener, and the listener usually has an artistic “refusal” in order to show their self-restraint. On the one hand, it connects the "chat up" made to

it semantically. On the other hand, it cuts off the communicative contact that the other party attempts to establish (Liang, 2007).

Dialogue (13)

Original Text:

范小姐问曹禺如何。辛楣瞎猜道：“我认为他是最——呃——最伟大的戏剧家。

fàn xiǎo jiě wèn cáo yú rú hé。xīn méi xiā cāi dào: “wǒ rèn wéi tā shì zuì —— è —— zuì wěi dà de xì jù jiā。”

(Qian, 2017, p. 239)

Translation:

Miss Fan asked him about Ts'ao Yü.

“I consider him the—uh—the greatest playwright,” said Hsin-mei, taking a wild guess

The conversation took place at a blind date party between Mr. Chao and Miss Fan. Miss Fan, a colleague of Mr. Chao and a lecturer at the university, likes to make mischief, is a drama fan, and has an idealized attitude toward marriage. Eager to show herself in front of her blind date Zhao Hsin-mei, she tries her best to initiate topics, especially when it comes to drama. In this dialogue, Miss Fan begins by probing Mr. Chao's attitude towards dramatists, with the intention of promoting a more in-depth dialogue. That is to say, Miss Fan is hoping to become Mr. Chao's girlfriend. Even though Mr. Chao has no interest in Miss Fan, he still follows the propriety rules of the politeness principle and does not explicitly express his reluctance to talk to her.

It can be seen that following the principle of politeness in the dialogue can to some extent avoid the awkward situation of both sides of the conversation, and it can also euphemistically express their psychological activities while the dialogue is going on, so as to achieve appropriate speech.

4. Major Findings

4.1 The Context Under Which Conversational Implicature Occurs

As we all know, language comes from life. People accomplish all kinds of purposes through language that is very diverse and wonderful in life. In life, people always put implied meanings beyond their superficial meaning in order to get what they want, which is a very common phenomenon in our complex culture. The hearer tends to pay more attention to the implicature on which the cooperative principle and the politeness principle are to focus than to the literal meaning of what the speaker is saying (Du & Li, 2022).

There are numerous similar examples in the novel, and the Western language and cultural atmosphere behind it has a profound impact on the speaker's thinking mode. Neither the violation of the principle of cooperation and the principle of courtesy nor the observance of the above two principles happen for no reason. When one of the parties to the dialogue does not want to continue the dialogue, there is a deliberate breach of principle. Combined with the above analysis of the siege in the novel, there are usually subtext in the following scenes, including jealousy, ambiguity, and quarrels. On the contrary,

when the two speakers get along well, or have a conversation for some purpose, the above two principles are followed to ensure that the conversation goes smoothly to achieve the purpose.

The performance of both parties in a conversation is also affected by certain social environment and status. The novel *Besieged City* shows the way of speech of the overseas intellectual group in a certain era.

4.2 The Role of Conversational Implicature in Promoting Plot

Conversational meaning not only shows the character, but also promotes the development of the plot and implies the fate of the character. For instance, Fang Hung-chien and Zhao Hsin-mei are the two male protagonists in the novel. Fang Homgjian is weak, honest, humorous and clever, while Zhao is shrewd, open-minded and fond of loyalty. The relationship between Fang Hung-chien and Sun Roujia falls into a cycle of quarreling, reconciling and quarreling again. Sun Roujia often makes sarcastic remarks to Hung-chien, arguing with him because of small things, and the failure of communication between them makes the marriage full of complexity and challenge.

5. Conclusion

Through the analysis, it can be clearly concluded that characters sometimes have to violate the Cooperative Principle in the dialogue in order to save face and avoid embarrassment (Zhang & Zhou, 2023).

The conversational implications of following or breaking the principle of cooperation and politeness have a huge influence on literature, which can drive the development of the storyline, hint at the character fate of the protagonist, and at the same time enlighten us with reality. In daily life, the flexible use of the principle of cooperation and politeness can improve the efficiency of dialogue, accurately express ideas, avoid many unnecessary conflicts, and solve difficult problems with practical significance.

The correct use of language cannot be separated from the constraints of language standards. In order to carry out successful rules in discourse, language standards have been formed into many criteria and are widely consolidated. In other words, the key pragmatic principles for determining appropriate speech include politeness, cooperation, relation, and so on. If the speakers don't follow these rules, that can lead to pragmatic bias and misunderstand (Muhammad & Nu, 2024).

Although this paper makes a detailed analysis and research on the conversational implicature in the novel *Besieged City*, the research is limited to the background of the early 20th century, and the analysis results are limited to the dialogue mode of intellectuals in the early 20th century, which may be biased. In order to have a more accurate understanding of the functions of the cooperative principle and the politeness principle in different contexts, we can choose to analyze more corpus and draw more comprehensive conclusions.

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