

# *Analysis of the Violation of Cooperative Principle in Liu Xiaomin's Family by Help of Discourse Markers*

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**Abstract:** As we all know, language comes from life. People accomplish all kinds of things through language that is very diverse and wonderful in life. In life, people always put an alternate meaning beyond their superficial meaning in order to get what they want, which is a very common phenomenon in our high-context culture. The hearer tends to pay more attention to the implicature on which the Cooperative Principle proposed by Grice is to focus than to the literal meaning of what the speaker is saying. In addition, just as the Cooperative Principle is universal in our daily communication, discourse markers also have the same characteristic. Therefore, based on the Cooperative Principle and taking a family TV drama --- *Liu Xiaomin's Family* as the research corpus, this thesis is written to explore the implied conversational meaning characters in this drama want to express by analyzing maxims violated by them, and at the same time by making use of discourse markers to assist the process of the characters' conversational implicature arising from their violation of the cooperative principle, which can help us better master certain communication skills and accomplish our conversational goals successfully.

## 1. Introduction

As a hit TV series at the end of 2021, *Liu Xiaomin's Family* is different from previous urban TV series in that the language closest to life is used to describe people's family life in it. Just because of this difference, there are many phenomena of characters violating the Cooperative Principle and many discourse markers in this TV series. Discourse marker is a common language phenomenon found frequently in verbal communication. According to Xie Shijian, discourse markers refer to expressions that mark utterances, which are derived from interjections, conjunctions, adverbs, demonstrative pronouns, verbs, phrases and clauses<sup>[1]</sup>. Although discourse markers are not related to the expression of propositions, they contribute to the organization of utterance and express the speaker's tone, attitude and emotion, etc<sup>[1]</sup>. However, Yin Shulin believes that "discourse markers refer to expressions with independent intonation and programming information to regulate and monitor verbal communication"<sup>[2]</sup>. These two definitions proposed by the two scholars, although not similar on the face of it, contain much of the same information. First of all, discourse markers are expressions, which means that they exist in various forms, such as a word, a phrase or a clause. Secondly, "discourse markers encode program information, that is to say, they do not contain propositional meaning but only procedural meaning, that is, they have no influence on the propositional authenticity of discourse"<sup>[3]</sup>. Yin believes that "the essence of procedural meaning is the guidance of the interpretation of utterance"<sup>[2]</sup>. Just because discourse markers contain procedural

meaning, they play a role of "beacon" in the conversation, which is conducive to the organization of utterance. Finally, discourse markers have a certain influence on verbal communication. "From the perspective of cognition, discourse markers play a guiding or marking function for utterance interpretation on the surface or deep level of language, so as to help communicators identify various pragmatic relations in utterances and to restrict the scope and direction of utterance interpretation"<sup>[3]</sup>.

Therefore, due to the guidance function in conversation and the fact that they do not affect the authenticity of conversation, discourse markers not only help speakers to organize and give some information more effectively, but also guide hearers to understand better the content of the conversation speakers produce and to master the implicature of the conversation, which will facilitate the achievement of the conversational goals. In a sense, the discourse markers in *Liu Xiaomin's Family* play a certain supporting role in the process that people convey implicature to achieve the conversational goal because of people's violation of the Cooperative Principle. Perhaps, *Liu Xiaomin's Family* is deficient in some respects, but it is enough that the play uses the most everyday language to tell warm stories in life from the point of view of research significance. We can see a lot of broken words that cannot be connected into sentences in this TV drama --- *Liu Xiaomin's Family*. Although the lines in this play are not as neat and smooth as those in other movies and TV plays, it is a language like this that allows us to see ourselves in life. There is no rehearsal in life. The language we use in everyday conversation is mostly casual, but there is a different inner world beneath the casual language.

## 2. Background

*Liu Xiaomin's Family* is a warm and realistic drama about family life. Before coming to Beijing, Min once had a paragraph from the past that she did not want to mention. In her hometown, because she was misunderstood for having an affair with Mr Su, she was subjected to insults and abuse from people around her. Hence, Min was forced to come to Beijing alone to struggle, running away from all the gossip about her. Then she met Chen Zhuo here, who was also divorced, and they fell in love. It seems that Min's life is peaceful and beautiful. However, as the arrival of her son (Jin Jiajun) and her mother (Wang Sumin), her serene life is broken. She has to face the past that makes her pain, has to face Li Ping who has ever done harm to her, and has to face the trouble that her ex-husband Jin Bo causes. Meanwhile, the amour between Min and Chen Zhuo is also being tested in these sudden changes. Min and Chen Zhuo concealed their love while discovering that the relationship between their respective children was getting closer and closer during the children's preparation for the college entrance examination. In addition, the marriage of Liu Xiaojie, Min's sister, was also full of ups and downs.

All kinds of trivialities, contradictions and quarrels in life follow one another, but in this script, "the warmth that kisses the road of life full of ebb and flow, twists and turns resists difficulties step by step"<sup>[4]</sup>. "Through the introduction of different lifestyles of different characters, as well as fluctuations in family and social relationships, this TV play, *Liu Xiaomin's Family*, reveals the truest aspects of life to the audience. That is to say, it records everyone's experiences, joys and sorrows in a mundane way"<sup>[5]</sup>. From the perspective of violating the Cooperation Principle, this thesis will analyze the conversational implicature under dialogues of characters, with the aid of the auxiliary role of discourse markers, so as to help people to understand better and complete the conversational goals.

## 3. Theoretical Framework

The theory of conversational implicature was introduced by philosopher Grice in 1967. Grice found that in daily conversations, people usually do not straightly tell the hearer the information

they want to express, but imply the hearer through the medium of language. Grice used the term "implicature" to refer to what people really want to say beneath the surface of the spoken language. He wanted to know how the speaker conveys the information hidden below the surface of the conversation. After a series of explorations, Grice eventually concluded that conversations in life are of a certain regularity<sup>[6]</sup>. Grice said that "our talks exchanges do not normally consist of a succession of disconnected remarks, and would not be rational if they did. They are characteristically, to some degree at least, cooperative efforts; and each participant recognizes in them, to some extent, a common purpose or set of purposes, or at least a mutually accepted direction"<sup>[6]</sup>. Then Grice proposed the Cooperation Principle. This theory not only provides some theoretical basis for the rationality of conversational implicature from the cognitive background assumed by both sides of the conversation, but also provides a new perspective for people to further comprehend and analyze conversational implicature, which thus gives very important enlightenment on the analysis and research of language use<sup>[7]</sup>. In order to further illustrate the Cooperation Principle, Grice proposed four categories of maxims, which are known to us as the Quantity maxim, the Quality maxim, the Relation maxim and the Manner maxim, as illustrated in the following table (presented in Table 1 below):

Table 1: Four categories of maxims in the Cooperation Principle

Four categories of maxims				
Type	Content			
Quantity	① "Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange)" <sup>[6]</sup> .		② "Do not make your contribution more informative than is required" <sup>[6]</sup> .	
Quality	"Try to make your contribution one that is true" <sup>[6]</sup> .			
	① "Do not say what you believe to be false" <sup>[6]</sup> .		② "Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence" <sup>[6]</sup> .	
Relation	"Be relevant" <sup>[6]</sup> .			
Manner	"Be perspicuous" <sup>[6]</sup> .			
	① "Avoid obscurity of expression" <sup>[6]</sup> .	② "Avoid ambiguity" <sup>[6]</sup> .	③ "Be brief (avoid prolixity)" <sup>[6]</sup> .	④ "Be orderly" <sup>[6]</sup> .

Grice intended to describe what happened during the actual conversation by the Cooperative Principle and the four maxims. While in the course of daily communication, we may not be aware of such maxims to guide us, however, in general, we always try our best to provide corresponding information to the hearer with a clear way for a certain conversational purpose, and the hearer tries his or her best to comprehend what he or she has heard according to his or her own knowledge background and the conversational context at that time, so as to complete a dialogue successfully and realize the meaning of the dialogue. Nevertheless, it is difficult for communication participants to follow these four maxims due to various factors in the real world. They always violate these maxims more or less, intentionally or unintentionally, thus resulting in the generation of "conversational implicature". Conversational implicature refers to the implicature to be expressed in a specific context, that is, the unconventional pragmatic meaning of utterances<sup>[8]</sup>. After conversational implicature is produced because of the speaker's violation of maxims, the hearer deduces the implied meaning of the conversation according to contextual information. Therefore, the conversational goal can be achieved.

## 4. Application Analysis

### 4.1. The Violation of the Quantity Maxim

Background 1: Jin Bo fled to Beijing because he was in debt. He wanted to find a job here and pay off his debts while working, but he could not find a way. By coincidence, he met Li Ping at Nengcheng Education, and knew her identity, so he wondered if he could get a position from Li Ping. The following conversation takes place in Li Ping's office. Jin Bo finds Li Ping, hoping she can arrange a job for him at Nengcheng Education.

Case 1:

Li Ping: That's a good thing, right? The child will attend the college entrance examination. At such an important time, his parents can be with him, which is a nice thing and also the right thing to do.

Jin Bo: So, I suppose, I can't afford to be idle these few months, right? The cost of his studying is not small, so I want to find a job here. To be honest, in Beijing, you're the only person I know besides Min. Er, so I was wondering if you could arrange a job for me, because, after all, you know me, right? In those days, at our factory, I was, uh, I was the chief of security for so many years, right? So, it's just you and me, and I'm gonna be honest with you. You know, the first time I came here, I had a little run-in with a security guard here. I just... I just feel like the quality of security guards here, you know, needs to be improved. Hey, let's see if we can do this. After I become the chief of security, I guarantee that in a short time, they will make a qualitative leap in their quality.

Table 2: Case analysis of the violation of the Quantity maxim

Background	Jin Bo asks Li Ping for a job.	
The utterance meaning the speaker should have expressed	He should have answered some words like "Because I want to ask you to help me get a job here".	
The maxim violated	The second Quantity maxim: "Do not make your contribution more informative than is required" <sup>[6]</sup> .	
Reasons why the speaker violates the maxim	①On the one hand, this is due to the high-context culture in China.	②On the other hand, everything Jin Bo answers is a prelude to his final conversational goal.

Li Ping asks about the purpose of Jin Bo's visit. Without violating maxims, Jin Bo should have stated directly that he wants to find a job at Nengcheng Education and answers "Because I want to ask you to help me find a job here" or such words.

In the Quantity maxim, speakers should follow the maxim of not making their words more informative than is required<sup>[6]</sup>. In his answer, according to the reason that Jin Jiajun wants to repeat the college entrance examination, Jin Bo communicates his intention to accompany his child, then introduces his willingness to find a job, then turns to his past, and finally comments on the quality of security guards at Nengcheng Education. It is only after "beating around the bush" that he says the purpose of his visit. It is clear that Jin Bo provides too much information for his purpose. Therefore, Jin Bo violates the second Quantity maxim in this conversation.

On the one hand, the reason why Jin Bo violates the Quantity Maxim is the cultural background of China. The culture in our country is high-context, and people tend to speak in a more indirect way and express things or emotions indirectly, rather than express their purposes too directly, especially when they ask others for help. On the other hand, the seemingly irrelevant information in Jin Bo's answer is in fact closely related to his purpose. The reason for him to find a job is that his

child needs money to repeat the college entrance exam, and his experience as head of the security department in his father's factory is a guarantee for his job hunting. Additionally, he points out that the quality of security guards is not good, which can provide him with an opportunity to apply for a job. He seems to answer casually, but at every step he paves the way for his job search. Therefore, Jin Bo expresses the "conversational implication" of his eagerness to find a job from Li Ping by violating the Quantity maxim.

In addition, Jin Bo uses several discourse markers in this dialogue, such as "I suppose", "right", "You know" etc. With the help of these discourse markers, Jin Bo advances the topic step by step and explains the purpose of his visit. As mentioned above, Jin Bo's step-by-step statements pave the way for his conversational goal of finding a job by means of discourse markers.

The analysis of this part is briefly summarized in the table above (see Table 2).

#### 4.2. The Violation of the Quality Maxim

Background 2: Chen Zhuo was diagnosed with renal carcinoma and was scheduled for surgery after several stages of chemotherapy. Because of the operation, Chen Zhuo's hair had to be completely shaved, so Min was cutting Chen Zhuo's hair by herself. This conversation takes place before Chen Zhuo's surgery.

Case 2:

Chen Zhuo: Min.

Min: I'm here.

Chen Zhuo: Actually, I'm not really sure about the outcome of my surgery.

Min: I know.

Chen Zhuo: You tell me, will I come back?

Min: You will.

Table 3: Case analysis of the violation of the Quality maxim

Background	Min cuts off Chen Zhuo's hair for his operation.		
The utterance meaning the speaker should have expressed	Min should have said some utterances like "I don't know" or "I'm not sure", etc.		
The maxim violated	The second Quality maxim: "Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence" <sup>[6]</sup> .		
Reasons why the speaker violates the maxim	①Min wants to relieve Chen Zhuo's stress before the surgery.	②Min also uses language to give herself psychological hints.	③Min tries to hide her restlessness because she wants to avoid her emotions affecting Chen Zhuo.

Min is cutting Chen Zhuo's hair for his surgery. She chats with Chen Zhuo while cutting his hair. Chen Zhuo confesses to Min that he feels a little panicky and asks her a question of "You tell me, will I come back?". After hearing Chen Zhuo's words, Min should have replied "I don't know." or something like that, because no one can know what the outcome will be before the future happens, but Min does not do so.

In the Quality maxim, speakers should try to be honest and not say anything without sufficient evidence<sup>[6]</sup>. Instead of saying "I don't know.", Min firmly says to Chen Zhuo, "You will". In fact, no one knows whether the outcome of the operation is good or bad, and even the doctor cannot guarantee that Chen Zhuo will survive. However, it is in such a groundless situation that Min makes a promise to Chen Zhuo. It is clear that Min has violated the second Quality maxim.

On the one hand, the reason why she violates this maxim is that she wants to give Chen Zhuo

some confidence and relieve his nervousness before the surgery. In daily life, people often use words to give others some psychological hints, thus affecting their emotions. On the other hand, these words are not only what she says to Chen Zhuo, but also to herself. Additionally, these words also reflect her hope for the future. In fact, she does not know whether Chen Zhuo's operation will be successful. She just wants to gain some confidence by saying positive words. Furthermore, it seems that she is very determined that his operation will succeed, but on the contrary, she is very scared and worried about this surgical outcome. Language is just an external representation of her disguise, while fear is her true inner emotion. She does not want her emotions to affect Chen Zhuo, so she hides her true feelings through language. Therefore, in this case, Min expresses the "conversational implicature" of hiding her true emotions and relieving Chen Zhuo's pressure by the violation of the Quality maxim.

Additionally, Chen Zhuo uses the discourse marker "You tell me" to transform a new topic, at the same time introducing his own perspective on this operation. Thus, a dynamic interpersonal interaction process is further generated. With the help of the discourse marker, Chen Zhuo triggers Min's answer, which provides an opportunity for Min's violation of the Quality maxim. Then, through the violation of the Quality maxim, Min produces the conversational implicature, so that the conversational goal of the dialogue can be realized.

The analysis of this part is briefly summarized in the table above (see Table 3).

### 4.3. The Violation of the Relation Maxim

Background 3: Min had a quarrel with her mother about the past. When Min was upset at home alone, Chen Zhuo invited her to go downstairs to eat noodles. The following dialogue takes place while Min and Chen Zhuo are eating noodles.

Case 3:

Chen Zhuo: No, you can't. You still have to get something to eat. If you don't eat, you won't have the energy to be angry and annoyed, right? Oh, you are almost finished. Would you like to have another bowl for a change of taste? There are beef noodles, noodles with peas and meat sauce, Chongqing spicy noodles, and noodles in chili sauce, Sichuan style. How about noodles in chili sauce, Sichuan style? OK?

Min: You say, why did I fall in love with you?

Chen Zhuo: Huh?

Chen Zhuo knows that Min is in a bad mood and then comforts her in his own way. Chen Zhuo notices that Min soon is about to finish her noodles, so he asks if she wants another bowl and asks her "How about noodles in chili sauce, Sichuan style?". After hearing Chen Zhuo's inquiry, Min should have answered his questions directly, such as "No, thank you." or "One more bowl, noodles in chili sauce, Sichuan style, please." or "One more bowl, no noodles in chili sauce, Sichuan style, please." etc.

In the Relational maxim, the contents are related to each other in a conversation<sup>[6]</sup>. Instead of giving a relevant answer, Min says something irrelevant to the original question. She asks Chen Zhuo why she is with him. It is obvious that Min's answer has nothing to do with Chen Zhuo's question, which is a clear violation of the Relation maxim.

The reason why she violates the Relation maxim is related to the situation and state in which she is. Because of the quarrel with her mother, she is very depressed, but just when she is sad, Chen Zhuo brings her warmth and consideration. While eating noodles, she is also thinking. When Chen Zhuo asks her what she wants to eat, she has got caught up in her own thoughts, so she turns the topic directly into what she wants to express, ignoring Chen Zhuo's words. The reason why she asks Chen Zhuo why she is with him is out of her own doubts, which are shown in the following

dialogue. Min always thinks she will be with someone she esteems, but Chen Zhuo does not belong to the person that makes her admire very much. Even so, Min still chooses to be together with him. Min is very confused about this point and expresses what she thinks in her heart, but Chen Zhuo is caught off guard by Min's question. Therefore, by violating the Relation maxim, Min expresses her doubts about why she is with Chen Zhuo, which also reflects the conversational implicature of Chen Zhuo's uniqueness to Min from the side.

In terms of the influence of discourse markers on the expression of conversational meanings, Min avoids Chen Zhuo's question by using the discourse marker of "You say", turns the topic to her own question, and expresses her own doubts about why she is with Chen Zhuo. "You say" serves as a buffer for the sudden change of topic, and foreshadows Min's behavior of violating the Relation maxim and the production of the conversational implicature generated by Min's violation.

The analysis of this part is briefly summarized in the table above (see Table 4).

Table 4: Case analysis of the violation of the Relation maxim

Background	Min and Chen Zhuo eat noodles in a noodle restaurant at night.
The utterance meaning the speaker should have expressed	Min should have answered directly, some utterances like "One more bowl, noodles in chili sauce, Sichuan style, please".
The maxim violated	The Relation maxim: "Be relevant" <sup>[6]</sup> .
Reasons why the speaker violates the maxim:	At that time, Min's mental activity was not consistent with Chen Zhuo's state of mind. Therefore, out of Min's own doubts, an irrelevant answer is given.

#### 4.4. The Violation of the Manner Maxim

Background 4: After experiencing the incident that Jin Jiajun insisted on returning to his hometown during his preparation for the college entrance exam, Jin Bo came to his senses to what he had done in the past. The following conversation takes place when Jin Bo comes to Min's door to say goodbye to her for the last time.

Case 4:

Liu Xiaomin: Oh, what's wrong?

Jin Bo: These... Here are the letters in the past, from you, and also from "him". Actually, when you first left, I hated you very much, to tell you the truth. The more I hated you, the more I wanted to read these letters, and the more I saw, the more I hated you, just like a psycho. But then, when I read them over again, I thought, I was really bad to you when we were together. I was kind of a jerk. Well, all right, now these are all back to you. From this day forward, no reference will be made to what has gone before. Oh, well, it's over.

Jin Bo returns letters to Min. When referring to letters, he says that some of these letters belong to Min and some belong to "him". He should have clearly pointed out the other person to whom these letters belong, that is, the specific name of the person referred to by "him". As he said before, "Here are the letters in the past, from you", the person referred to by "you" is Min.

In the Manner maxim, the speaker should provide clear information and avoid ambiguity<sup>[6]</sup>. However, Jin Bo deliberately obfuscates the other person to whom these letters belong and does not specify the name of "him", thus violating the first Manner maxim in this dialogue.

The main reason why he does this is that people subconsciously choose to avoid things that are painful to them. An event in which the person referred to in "from him" is involved is exactly the past that Jin Bo and Min are reluctant to talk about. In this play, the "him" refers to "Mr Su". In

Min's hometown, she is once misunderstood as having an affair with "Mr Su" because she exchanges letters with Mr Su to discuss poetry. Then she is "publicly reviled" by people in her hometown, which brings untold pain to Min. Jin Bo is also one of the many who do not believe her. Because of this, they have unpleasant memories, and Jin Bo also knows that this event is not a very good memory for Min. Therefore, no matter whether Jin Bo or Min, they will subconsciously and deliberately avoid the unpleasant things of the past, from here to there, and then will deliberately avoid the name of "Mr Su", the main character involved in those recollections. Although Jin Bo does not explicitly mention it, Min, as the central figure of the event, naturally understands what Jin Bo wants to express, which indicates that they are in the same conversational context.

In addition, in this dialogue, after hearing Min's question, Jin Bo elucidates his topic through a discourse marker "these". With the help of the discourse marker, Jin Bo then points out the two of them to whom these letters belong, including Min and "him", and introduces the main theme of the conversation. Therefore, discourse markers not only provide the external conditions for Jin Bo to violate the Manner maxim, but also for him to express his conversational implicature. However, at this time, he does not express the purpose of his visit, so in his later words, he expresses his apology to Min, which is his first purpose. Moreover, at the same time, by using discourse markers "well" and "all right", he turns the topic to another purpose of his visit -- to return letters.

The analysis of this part is briefly summarized in the table above (see Table 5).

Table 5: Case analysis of the violation of the Manner maxim

Background	After experiencing a series of things, Jin Bo comes to say goodbye to Min and returns these letters to Min.
The utterance meaning the speaker should have expressed	Jin Bo should have specified the name of "him", that is, the other person to whom these letters belong.
The maxim violated	The first Manner maxim: "Avoid obscurity of expression" <sup>[6]</sup> .
Reasons why the speaker violates the maxim:	Jin Bo deliberately avoids the main characters involved in the unhappy past out of the "avoidance of harm" in his heart.

## 5. Conclusions

Based on the Cooperation Principle raised by Grice, selecting four dialogues in this TV drama as the corpus, this thesis analyzes in depth the "implicature" of the dialogues between characters with the aid of the auxiliary function of discourse markers, which shows the charm of language. Therefore, through analysis, we can realize that discourse markers are also a part of living language, just as we always inevitably violate the maxims more or less in our daily life. By means of these discourse markers, characters in this play achieve their various conversational purposes in the context at that time. In addition, many of the conversation scenes in the play overlap with our authentic life situations, because *Liu Xiaomin's Family* is a TV drama based on ordinary life. Therefore, by a conversational analysis of similar scenes in the play, we can better comprehend deeper meanings beneath the surface of language expressed by speakers in the same context, and then better respond accordingly or we will say some expressions more appropriate to the purpose of the conversation, in order to achieve our conversational goals successfully and effectively.

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