

A Pragmatic Analysis Based on the Character Dialogue in the Great Gatsby

Cui Ruoyu

Sztc of Jinan University, Shenzhen, China

Keywords: The great gatsby, Conversational implicature, Cooperative principle

Abstract: H. P. Grice pioneered the study of conversational logic and put forward the classic theory of Conversational Implicature and Cooperative Principle. Completely adhering to Cooperative Principle or deliberately violating it will lead to Conversational Implicature. In *The Great Gatsby*, the main characters, such as Gatsby and Daisy, tactically violate or abide by the relevant maxims of Cooperative Principle in their conversational communication, thus generating Conversational Implicature and expressing their true feelings. At the same time, the conversational style and language style of the characters in the novel reflect the character characteristics and status of the characters, which plays an important role in shaping the image of the characters and establishing the relationship between the characters.

1. Introduction

The Great Gatsby is a book published by F. Scott Fitzgerald in 1925. The novel tells the story of Gatsby's short life of persistent pursuit of dreams of money and love, and the disillusionment of his dreams at last[1]. The profound theme of the novel, unique narrative, writing skills, symbolic art and other factors contribute to the brilliant achievements of the novel. The life of Gatsby in Fitzgerald's novel is absurd. Through Gatsby's tragedy, the novel reveals the spiritual crisis hidden under the surface of the Jazz Age and the decline of people's morality and value, and reflects the American people's vague emotions towards the world and life in the 1920s as well as people's disillusionment with the American Dream. The novel is famous for its accurate and vivid dialogue and vivid characterization of characters. The dialogue of Gatsby, Daisy, Tom and Nick not only promotes the development of the story plot, but also makes the characters portrayed in the novel vivid on paper. It is a new attempt to explore the linguistic value of literary texts in an interdisciplinary study of linguistics.

When talking about the relationship between literature and linguistics, Hu Zhuanglin once pointed out that pragmatics is a powerful weapon used in linguistics to study and analyze the characteristics of literary language. From the perspective of pragmatics, this essay takes H. P. Grice's Conversational Implicature and Cooperative Principle as the theoretical framework to study the series of dialogues between the main characters in the novel, excavates the deep conversational implicature in the characters' conversations and explores how the characters comply with or violate the relevant norms of the Cooperative Principle to achieve conversational implicature. There is also further analysis for the relationship among the conversation styles, language features and social

status of the characters in the novel.

2. The Theory of Cooperative Principle

Pragmatics is a relatively new branch in the field of linguistics, and the core of it are Conversational Implicature and Cooperative Principle. Cooperative Principle is a concept put forward by H. P. Grice. He pointed out that the participants would reach a tacit understanding while having a conversation, and form a principle that he called the Cooperative Principle. "In order for the conversation to go smoothly, both parties should follow the same principles that guide the conversation, the Cooperative Principle[2]." In other words, the purpose of the Cooperative Principle is to allow both parties to find the right time and the right way to express their ideas. It contains the following 4 maxims: The Maxim of Quality, Quantity, Relation and Manner[3].

The Maxim of Quality requests you not to say what you think is untrue or lack of sufficient evidence; The Maxim of Quantity requests you to make your words as detailed as required, but not more detailed; The Maxim of Relevance requests the words expressed to be relevant; The Maxim of Manner requests what you said to be brief and clear, avoiding the ambiguity of expression.

3. Dialogue Analysis of the Great Gatsby under Cooperative Principle

1) Tom: "Did you give Nick a little heart to heart talk on the veranda?"

Daisy: "Did I, I can't remember, but I think we talked about the Nordic race. . ."

Tom: "Don't believe everything you hear, Nick."

This example is from Chapter 1, when Nick visited his cousin Daisy and her husband, and this conversation happened before leaving. Because Daisy and Nick talked for long on the veranda, Tom asked her: "Did you give Nick a little heart to heart talk?" Here Tom disobeyed the Maxim of Manner, used obscure and dim words of "heart to heart talk" to refer to his cheating facts or any other comments that may do harm to his reputation. Maybe right then Nick couldn't understand the meaning of "heart to heart talk", but Daisy was totally aware of Tom's implication, so she replied: "Did I, I can't seem to remember, but I think we talked about the Nordic race. . ."

It reflected the violation against the Maxim of Manner and Quantity that Daisy stated ambiguously about whether they had had a "heart to heart talk" and provided far more information than what Tom had requested. "Nordic race" represented the meaning of bellicosity, invasion and conquest. Daisy used this metaphor to indicate the woman who had called at dinner, and to satirize Tom's dissolute character. Tom quickly understood her metaphor, so he immediately told Nick not to believe whatever he had heard before Daisy finished her speaking. This conversation shows that Tom's will to maintain his reputation in front of Nick.

2) Myrtle: "Is it a boy or a girl?"

Old man: "That dog? That dog 's a boy."

Tom: "It's a bitch. Here's your money. Go and buy ten more dogs with it."

This example is from Chapter 2, Tom's mistress, Myrtle asked the seller about the gender of a puppy. Tom's expression clearly disobeyed the Maxim of Quality, that he called that dog "a bitch" even if he knew it's a male dog. "Bitch" originally meant female dog, mostly used to insult women in communication. Tom's intentional violation against the Maxim of Quality shew his rude and vulgar nature, Myrtle, who was from the bottom class, was just a tool for pleasure to Tom, so he had no manner or respect for her.

3) Nick: "Don't bring Tom."

Daisy: "What?"

Nick: "Don't bring Tom."

Daisy: "Who is Tom?"

Nick promised Gatsby to arrange a one-on-one meeting for him and Daisy, then he called to tell Daisy to come alone, not to bring Tom. Daisy didn't directly answer: "Yes, I won't. "On the contrary, she used "what?" to pretend that she missed it, when Nick repeated his request, she just replied: "Who is Tom?"

Actually, Daisy was totally aware of who was Tom: her husband. However, she lied, and threw a rhetorical question back to Nick. As a result, Daisy's words disobeyed the Maxim of Quality, and conversational implication was created. She was not intended to ask "Who is Tom", she just wanted to express her own point of view, which was that she wouldn't bring Tom to the meeting. This conversation showed that Daisy was hypocritical and easy to stagger.

4) Tom: "Is it standard shift?"

Gatsby: "Yes."

Tom: "Well, you take my coupe and let me drive your car to town."

Gatsby: "I don't think there's much gas."

In Chapter 7, the background was that Daisy and Gatsby decided to show down to Tom after a period of underground romance, but Daisy was unable to disclose their personal affair in her and Tom's house, so she suggested to go into town, along with Nick and Jordan.

This conversation happened before leaving. Tom wanted to drive Gatsby's yellow car to town, after making sure that Gatsby's car was "standard shift", he used an imperative tone to declare that he would drive his car. It was obvious that Gatsby was unwilling, he replied: "I don't think there's much gas. "There was no direct connection between the lack of gas and Tom's driving the car, let alone the gas was full in fact. Gatsby disobeyed the Maxim of Quality and Relevance, the truth was that he hesitated about this proposal, and refused him in an indirect way. It showed Gatsby's good manners and endurance.

5) Tom: "By the way, Mr. Gatsby. I understand you're an Oxford man."

Gatsby: "Not exactly."

Tom: "Oh, yes, I understand you went to Oxford."

Gatsby: "Yes, I went there."

Tom: "You must have gone there about the time Biloxi went to New Haven."

Gatsby: "I told you I went there."

Tom: "I heard you, but I'd like to know when."

Gatsby: "It was in nineteen-nineteen, I only stayed five months. That's why I can't really call myself an Oxford man."

Having been to Oxford during the service, Gatsby claimed that he had studied there, hoping to earn the respect of others, but his words and deeds made upper class people like Tom feel incredible about his experience as an "Oxford man". Gatsby didn't clearly respond to the question of whether he was a graduate of Oxford, but used an ambiguous "Not exactly" to prevaricate, disobeying the Maxim of Manner. Next, Tom mentioned: "Biloxi went to New Haven"(Yale University is located in New Haven), this matter had no connection with whether Gatsby had been to Oxford, so Tom disobeyed the Maxim of Relevance and said something irrelevant.

In the novel, Biloxi was a liar who claimed to be Tom's classmate in Yale University, while there hadn't been such a man in Tom's class. Here Tom deliberately tried to satirize Gatsby for fabricating his educational background with this matter. Facing Tom's sarcasm, Gatsby became a little angry and answered: "I told you I went there. "This expression emphasized that he had been to Oxford, but avoided explaining whether he had been an "Oxford man", violating the Maxim of Manner, making it difficult for the listener to judge between "been to Oxford" and "an Oxford man". He also disobeyed the Maxim of Quantity when Tom asked about the exact time, redundantly stated that he "only stayed five months. That's why I can't really call myself an Oxford man". This conversation fully showed Gatsby's nervousness when being suspected of fabricating the educational background, and his

desire to earn the respect of others.

6) Gatsby: "Did you see any trouble on the road?"

Nick: "Yes."

Gatsby: "Was she killed?"

Nick: "Yes."

Gatsby: "I thought so; I told Daisy I thought so. . ."

In the reality of communication, people don't talk to each other mechanically and invariably under the Cooperative Principles, people's conversations would always obey or disobey the Cooperative Principles because of the difference in contexts, topics, emotions, etc. And both of the obeying and disobeying can lead to conversational implicature.

This example shows that character's obeying the Cooperative Principles can also lead to conversational implicature. It's from Chapter 7, after Daisy caused the car accident and killed Myrtle unconsciously. When Nick met Gatsby, he took 2 "Yes" as his response to Gatsby's continuous questions, which were accurate answers to the questions, and completely obeyed the Maxim of Quantity and Relevance. However, in actual situation, Nick's answers was so mechanical that a special conversational implicature was made. Without being told the truth, Nick thought that the car accident was caused by Gatsby, and felt very disappointed and disapproving that Gatsby had run away as a coward. As a result, he just gave 2 "Yes" to express affirmation to Gatsby's questions, but these 2 words implied an inner resistance to Gatsby, not willing to have any more communication with him.

4. Character Conversation and Image Analysis

In the novel, Gatsby is a hard-working and brave representative of the people at the bottom. Embracing the "American Dream", he wants to squeeze into the upper society by making a fortune through personal struggle. Out of politeness, Gatsby often expresses his intention indirectly in communication. When Tom proposes to drive Gatsby's car into town, Gatsby politely refuses Tom's request by violating the Maxim of Relevance, which shows his restrained and reserved character. Gatsby was also kind and upright. When his educational backgrounds were questioned, he was not good at lying and violated the Maxim of Quantity and Manner, using implicit and vague expressions and providing redundant information to cover up his inner nervousness and confusion[4].

Daisy and Tom are the representatives of the old aristocracy in American society. They pursue material enjoyment and life interest. They are haughty and selfish, and indifferent to the harm caused to others. When Daisy talked with Tom and Jordan, she violated the Maxim of Manner and Relevance, which reflected her changeable mood and capricious personality. When Tom bought a puppy for his mistress, his conversational violation of the Maxim of Quality revealed his rude and vulgar character. When questioning Gatsby's educational backgrounds, the violation of the Maxim of Relevance and Manner reflects his selfish, indifferent and aggressive side.

Nick is a member of the upper class who returned to America after World War I. He is also a young generation who is keenly aware of the drawbacks of The Times, such as social moral decay, spiritual desolation and the disillusion of the "American Dream". In the novel, although Nick is upset that Gates did not treat him honestly, he refuses to refuse Gatsby's invitation directly. Instead, he refuses with objective reasons by violating the Cooperative Principles, which reflects his modest and gentlemanly character. Although he is close to Gatsby, Nick deliberately abides by the Cooperation Principles and refuses to have too much communication with Gatsby after he is mistaken for a hit-and-run accident which leads to the death of Gatsby, which reflects his justice and kindness.

5. Conclusion

The Great Gatsby was a classic literature work of F. Scott Fitzgerald's, both ideologically and artistically. It shows the reader the social landscape and values of the United States in the 1920s and 1930s. Through the study of the conversation series of characters, it is found that the main characters, such as Gatsby, Daisy, Tom and Nick, generate conversational implicature mainly by deliberately violating the relevant norms of the Cooperative Principle in the conversation, so as to convey their true feelings in their hearts, and seldom by obeying the relevant norms of the Cooperative Principle. The characters in the novel violate the Maxim of Quantity, Relevance and Manner more frequently than the Maxim of Quality in conversation. At the same time, the conversational style and language style of characters are closely related to their personality and status[5]. The study of conversational implicature and its generation process in the fictional characters' conversation helps to analyze the characters' conversational psychology, deepen the readers' understanding of the fictional characters' images and the relationship between characters, and thus better interpret the theme of the novel. It is a relatively new perspective to conduct interdisciplinary research on literary texts from the perspective of pragmatics.

References

- [1] *The Great Gatsby: English and Chinese/ (US) by Francis Scott Fitzgerald; Translated by Fang Zhenyu—Beijing: Dolphin Press, 2017. 4 (Reprinted in 2020. 12)*
- [2] Grice H. P. "Logic and Conversation" in P. Cole&J. Morgan (eds.). *Syntax and Semantics 3: Speech Acts[M]* . New York: Academic Press, 1975.
- [3] Han Ling. *Interpretation of Dialogues in the Great Gatsby from the Perspective of Cooperation Principle [J]*. *Journal of Changsha University*, 2016, 30(04):98-99+105.
- [4] Gao Zhengzheng, Liu Hongqiang. *A Theoretical Analysis of Conversational Implicature in the Great Gatsby [J]*. *Contemporary Educational Practice and Teaching Research*, 2019, (01):217-218.
- [5] Zheng Chang. *A Pragmatic Analysis of Characters' Conversation in the Great Gatsby [J]*. *Journal of Yuzhang Normal University*, 2019, 34(06):116-119+128.