

Violation of Cooperative Principles: Taking Donald Trump's Speech as an Example

Gu Jiatong^{1,a,*}

¹The School of Translation Studies, Jinan University, Qianshan Road 106, Xiangzhou District, Zhuhai, Guangdong, China

a. gujiatong1999220@163.com

*corresponding author

Keywords: cooperative principle, speech, particularized implication

Abstract: Cooperative principle in conversation was proposed by Paul Grice as a magnificent principle. Under the cooperative principle, there are four maxims: the maxim of quantity, the maxim of quality, the maxim of relation and the maxim of manner. Taking the speech of Donald Trump in the 73rd UN General Debate as an example to illustrate the application of Grice's principle of conversation in practical speeches, this essay mainly focuses on how the speaker runs against cooperative principle raised by Grice. Besides, the author applies Grice's cooperative principle to speech, which is also an innovation.

1. Introduction

On September 25, 2018, US President Trump delivered a speech at the 73rd UN General Debate, defending the "US priority" policy pursued since he took office and opposing the concept of globalism. At the same time, he not only expressed his distrust of international organizations like the WTO and the International Criminal Court but also insisted in implementing sanction to countries like Iran, China and so on. Trump's speech made the audience feel not convinced and gave rise to controversies.

On the one hand, Trump has a clear personal style of political discourse which is criticized by many researches. It is noted by Li Peng that Donald Trump's presidential campaign speech has impolite speech acts which offended his competitors and part of the audience[1]. Ge Hanwen, 2018, also argues that Trump's unconventional style of political discourse deepens a rift between the academia and the public[2].

On the other hand, Trump received criticisms from Media. For example, Cable News Network (CNN) launched a special report to satirize Trump's brag which is called *Donald Trump's me, me, me, me press conference*[3].

The main question is that Trump attended an international conference for cooperation, whereas he did not express his purpose of cooperation in a proper way accepted by the international community. Therefore, this essay uses the principle of conversation and cooperative as theoretical support by focusing on cooperation, which is also the primary intention of Trump's speech.

The principle of conversation and cooperative was proposed by Paul Grice in William James lecture at Harvard University (1967). He mentioned this theory in his second speech called Logic and Conversation at this lecture. The goal of this principle is carrying forward a conversation and accomplishes the purpose of cooperation. Grice imitated Immanuel Kant's theory by listing quantity, quality, relation and mode for measurement and produced four relating maxims containing quantity, quality, relation and manner[4].

In this case, Trump violated Grice's cooperative principle. As some examples mentioned below, he appeared to be evasive and held evidence-less opinions, failing to achieve the purpose of cooperation. From the perspective of Pragmatics, he obeyed parts of Grice's cooperative principle while he was not able to seek common grounds with the audience and realize his goal of cooperation.

Although Grice's four cooperative principles are often referred in conversation researches, the author argues that cooperative principles are also of great significance to speeches because speech is a kind of conversation in a broad sense. As a result, applying Grice's cooperative principle to Trump's speech is a theoretical innovation. In addition to that, combining Grice's cooperative principle to this speech also realizes this essay's intention of analyzing Trump's speech critically and understanding why he was surrounded by extensive criticisms from the public. This essay uses principle of conversation raised by Paul Grice, hoping to restore the context and communication scene at that time and implementing this principle for practical speech, rational analysis and researches for international relations.

2. Literature Review

Cooperative principle in conversation was proposed by Paul Grice, the American language philosopher. In the early 1950s, Grice had a preliminary idea of the theory. In 1967, he gave three lectures on the William James lecture at Harvard University. During the second lecture, he put forward the theory of "cooperative principle" and "conversational meaning".

Grice thinks that participants in a conversation should obey the recognized principle in order to achieve the purpose of cooperation in natural speech, which means that Grice focuses on how people use language instead of studying the meaning of language from the internal language system[5]. This principle also has two premises, which means that this conversation must be rational and efficient. Apparently, Trump's speech in the UN General debate meets this premise.

The cooperative principle appeared very early in the field of pragmatics analysis, enjoying a high reputation. Grice's "cooperative principle," including conversational implicatures and maxims, is applied frequently in current pragmatics and conversational analysis in current pragmatics and is generally applied in conversational analysis.

Grice's cooperative principle is used widely in fields other than conversation. Some other researchers also apply Grice's principle to speech, education, advertisement, psychology. Take Michal Ephratt's study for example, he found that there are some relations between Grice's cooperative principle and silence in speech ,which means that Grice's cooperative principle is adopted to Donald Trump's speech as well[6].

Grice's cooperative principle was firstly applied to conversations because this principle could measure one participant's cooperation and performance from feedback from another participant. Speech is something just like conversation for it includes two parties: lecturer and listener. To some extent, Trump's speech also has feedback as most conversations do.

The maxim of quantity is mentioned in both Classical-Gricean Principle and Post-Gricean Principle. As for its earliest definition proposed by Grice, it said that a participant should add proper amount of information to his or her discourse. This maxim was followed and upgraded by many

researchers for it is easy for them to start quantitative analysis. Horn's scale[7] and the first principle of Levinson[8] are examples.

The maxim of quality contains three sub-principles. First, one should make a true contribution in a discourse. Second, one should never deliver false words on purpose. Thirdly, one is not allowed to say something without enough evidence as support.

The maxim of relation is about delivering a speech or a conversation relevantly, which seems easy to understand. While the author of this essay perceives that discourses should be relevant to the topic and former context. Post-Gricean Pragmatics like Levinson gave up this maxim because it is too general and hard to measure.

The maxim of manner means that one is required to be perspicuous, orderly, and brief instead of being obscure, ambiguous and unnecessary. Wee, Lian-Hee and Winnie H.Y. Cheung perceive that this maxim drives participants to organize and revise their language mindfully, reaching a higher efficiency of discourses[9].

In Trump's speech, there is also some violation to Grice's cooperative principle. However, Trump violated cooperative principle on purpose, adding particularized implicature to his speech. The author will discuss this point in following paragraphs.

When it comes to next part, the author is going to analyze Donald Trump's speech from the perspective of violation of cooperative principle.

3. Violation of Four Maxims in Speech

3.1. Analysis of Grice's Four Maxims in Donald Trump's Speech

In this example, the author is going to make an analysis from the maxim of quantity.

In this context, the 73rd UN General Debate values global cooperation. Although Donald Trump, on behalf of the United States, promised to participate in cooperate with other countries in UN affairs. However, by analyzing his hidden purpose through Grice's maxim of quantities, we can see Trump give lip service to global cooperation.

Trump said: "... I have told our negotiators that the United States will not pay more than 25 percent of the U.N. peacekeeping budget. This will encourage other countries to step up, get involved, and also share in this very large burden...[10]"

What Donald Trump was talking about is cutting foreign aid from the United States. He began his speech by demonstrating the purpose of cooperation and praising the effort made by the United Nations, which contained information and attitude required in a UN forum. However, one of the themes of the 73rd UN General Debate is global governance and cooperation. Around the peacekeeping problem, Trump's solution of cutting US peacekeeping budget in UN ran contrary to the theme of this debate and the principle of UN, which contained useless information for the context of global cooperation. In fact, Trump hid his stand of nationalism and American isolationism. Although Trump mentioned cooperation at the beginning of this paragraph, representatives from other countries could sense his strong unwillingness of cooperation. In conclusion, this violation sometimes may cause severe effect like straying a long way from original theme of a discussion, making a speech misleading and vague.

Next the author will focus on Trump's violation of the maxim of quality

For instance, Trump said: "...The United States will not be taken advantage of any longer. ...We allowed foreign goods from all over the world to flow freely across our borders...[10]"

In this context, Donald Trump talked about the United States' stand on multilateral trade issues. Trump claimed that foreign goods are allowed to move freely across the borders of the US. As this

speech was made in September 26th, 2018; The United States had already employed anti-dumping tax policy to countries including Canada, China, and India. Those policies demonstrate that Donald Trump did not tell the truth intentionally in his speech. Under the motivation of showing the so-called openness and inclusiveness to the whole world, Trump violated the first principle of the maxim of quality.

Here is another example. Trump said: “The United States is the world’s largest giver in the world, by far, of foreign aid. But few give anything to us. ...We will examine ...whether the countries who receive our dollars and our protection also have our interests at heart...[10]”

In this context, Donald Trump emphasized that the United States is the largest contributor of foreign aid. Without including any figure or speech in his report, this opinion is totally wrong. In terms of the Commitment to Development Index 2018 from Center of Global Development, US comprehensively ranked 23/27. As for foreign aid, the US was at the bottom of that list[11]. As a result, this viewpoint proposed by Trump is not only in lack of evidence but also not true.

Thirdly, Donald Trump ran against the maxim of relevance.

Under the purpose of cooperation, Grice defines the maxim of relevance as one should say something relevant to the topic of a conversation. Gootopedia defines the maxim of relevance as the following: if the speaker does not stick to the theme or have a contextual irrelevance, the purpose of cooperation will be defeated [12]. According to Paul Grice’s view, there are two stages of irrelevance: irrelevance of the theme of specific occasion and contextual irrelevance [13].

In this example, Trump’s speech was irrelevant to the theme of the UN General Debate.

Trump said: “For similar reasons, the United States will provide no support in recognition to the International Criminal Court...We will never surrender America’s sovereignty to an unelected, unaccountable, global bureaucracy...[10]”

In this context, Donald Trump explained that the US was dissatisfied with some international organization like UN’s Human Rights Council and the ICC for they did harm to the US’s interest. Because of that, Donald Trump is opposed to globalism. So the first irrelevance appears. One of the themes of 73rd UN General Debate is globalism, not one country’s own interest. The reason why Trump talked this way is that he disagrees with globalism. In order to demonstrate his attitude without standing against most countries that support globalism, he made international organization like ICC the scapegoat. To some extent, Donald Trump violated the maxim of relevance. As a result, the audiences are confused by his speech and caught him trying to switch the topic from globalism.

After that, Trump’s speech shows contextual irrelevance.

Trump said: “...Today, socialism has bankrupted the oil-rich nation and driven its people into abject poverty. Virtually everywhere socialism or communism has been tried, it has produced suffering, corruption, and decay...All nations of the world should resist socialism and the misery that it brings to everyone...[10]”

In this context, Donald Trump condemned Venezuela on its ideology after talking about the refugee problem. He blamed ideology for bringing suffering and poverty. Actually, ideology implement is a country’s internal affair and should not be interfered by other countries. As Trump mentioned that he respect each nations ‘culture at the beginning of this speech, he is in collision with himself. This contextual irrelevance makes others feel that he applies double standards on autonomy.

Then the author will focus on Grice’s maxim of manner.

According to this maxim, one should speak perspicuously, which means that he should not only avoid obscurity and ambiguity but also be brief and orderly.

Trump said: “...we agreed that it was in both countries’ interest to pursue the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. Since that meeting, we have already seen a number of encouraging measures that few could have imagined only a short time ago...[10]”

In this context, Donald Trump talked about his discussion with Kim Jong Un about the North Korea nuclear issue. Although Trump demonstrates that the US shares the same stand with North Korea and those two countries have already figured out efficient solutions. However, he does not explain the solutions further in his speech, which makes his speech ambiguous. The reason why Trump speaks ambiguously is that he insists in implementing sanction against North Korea in a long term. If he had mentioned solution to North Korea nuclear issue, it would have sent other countries a wrong signal that the US would withdraw the sanction against North Korea soon thus misleading the audience. As a result, he ran against the maxim of manner intentionally.

Trump said: “America’s economy is booming like never before...We’ve added more than 4million new jobs...We have passed the biggest tax cuts and reforms in American history...[10]”

In this context, Donald Trump boosted his achievements in his official career at the beginning of the speech. He mentioned specific figures for four times in a paragraph. About one fifth of his speech was devoted to those achievements which did not concern global issues, making the audience experience clichés. Trump could squish this part down but he did not do that because he values the US’s interest more than global development.

3.2. Conflicts between Grice’s Four Maxims in Trump’s Speech

In some interactions, people may violent one of the four cooperative principle raised by Grice in order to obey another cooperative principle. In Donald Trump’s speech, this process also works:

Trump said: “America’s economy is booming like never before. Since my election...The stock market is at an all time high in history, and jobless claims are at a 50 year low...[10]”

In this paragraph Trump mentioned achievements of USA since his term of office. In developing USA’s economy, especially in sections like the stock market and employment, he may be true. According to CNBC and Blue Chip’s prediction, in 2017, the increment rate of USA reached to over 3%[14]. Thus he abides by the maxim of quality. However, this paragraph is at the beginning of his speech in the Generational Debate of the UN seminar. As the theme of this general debate is talking about global development and problems, Trump’s celebration of USA’s progress is reluctant to the theme of UN seminar, running against the maxim of relation.

The reason why he violated the maxim of relation is that he is an opponent of globalism, whereas under this occasion he had to say something related to globalism. As a result, he chose to switch the focus of his speech to USA’s achievements, both demonstrating his attitude about globalism invisibly and passing his particularized conversational implicature to the audience.

Trump said: “Not long ago, Venezuela was one of the richest countries on Earth. ...it has produced suffering, corruption and decay. Socialism’s thirst for power leads to expansion, incursion and oppression.

...In that spirit, we ask the nations gathered here to join us in calling for the restoration of democracy in Venezuela. Today, we are announcing additional sanctions against the repressed regime...[10]”

To some extent, the second example runs contrary to the first example. Most importantly, Trump drew a conclusion of misfortune of all nations implementing socialism by mentioning Venezuela’s own misfortune, which was sweeping and vague, violating the maxim of quality. However, He obeyed the maxim of relation by voicing for global problems like Venezuela’s misfortune. The reason why he did so is that on the one hand he was trying to get rid of responsibility without mentioning USA’s sanction on Venezuela but to blame socialism. On the other hand, Trump was targeting some countries through ideology.

4. Conclusion

After analyzing Trump's speech under the perspective of Grice's four cooperative principles, the author found that he violated cooperative principle intentionally in order to add particularized conversational implicature to his speech.

According to Grice's theory, he divided conversational implicature into two kinds, which are generalized and particularized. Unlike generalized implicature that relies on words and phrases, particularized conversational implicature depends on the context, which is the focus of this essay, conveying implicit meanings. According to Wayne Davises view, people add extra meanings and effects to verbal communication through particularized conversational implicature[15].

In this speech, particularized conversational implicature uncovers his speech purposes. His purposes could be distributed to following kinds as the analysis mentioned before.

First, Trump avoided making positive response to global problems in his speech, which violated the principle of the maxim of relevance. Instead of providing efficient solutions to the global issue of poverty elimination and peace-keeping, he chose to blame Venezuela and other socialist countries. By emphasizing the difference of ideology, He hid his conversational purpose of distraction and blame passing.

Second, Trump demonstrated his attitude of anti-globalism, violating the maxim of relation, for one of the themes of the 73 UN General Debate is globalism .The particularized conversational implicature that drove Trump to violate general conversational principle is that he should be in accordance with his political opinions since his term of office and be responsible to his voter.

Thirdly, Trump values USA's interest more than global development, violating the maxim of quantity. Trump announced his decision of cutting foreign aids budget from the US, which does not facilitate solving global issues in the 73rd UN General Debate. In that case, Trump violated general conversational principle for his specific purpose of giving superiority to national interest.

Fourth, Trump expressed his dissatisfaction with international organizations like UN and ICC, which ran contrary to the maxim of relevance. His dissatisfaction with international organizations is just a cover of his attitude of anti-globalism because he does not want to offend most countries. In order to output this particularized conversational implicature, he violated general conversational principle.

Besides, the author also found that Grice's four cooperative principles could not only apply to conversation but also speech. Speech is a kind of conversation in a broad sense, for it involves both the speech maker and audiences. The former and the latter are similar to speaker and listener (in a conversation) respectively.

From the analysis above, we can learn that the conversational style of Donald Trump is really unconventional and unpredictable, for he used to be a businessman instead of a politician unlike the Bushes. A traditional politician will implement a much more stable and inspiring conversational style, trying hard to catch audiences' attention. He may also tell a lie but he will not brag himself all the time. As a result, Donald Trump broke traditional conversational habits frequently at the UN General debate. This phenomenon of running against traditional conversational habits may also exist in other occasions, which provides others a chance to study Donald Trump's political conversational habits in general, especially form a perspective of political ecology.

References

- [1] Li Peng.(2018) *An Analysis of Impolite Speech Acts in Donald Trump's Speeches: With Special Reference to Prosodic Components[D]*. Jinan University.
- [2] Ge Hanwen.(2019) *Donald Trump: a Strategist or Ignorant [J]*. *Weishi*, 88-92.

- [3] Cable News Network. [R/OL]. Donald Trump's me, me, me, me press conference. 2018(09). <https://www.cnn.com/2018/09/26/politics/donald-trump-press-conference-analysis>
- [4] H. Paul. Grice. (1975) *Logic and Conversation* [A]. *Studies in the Way of Words*. Harvard University Press. 45
- [5] H. Paul. Grice. (1975) *Logic and Conversation* [A]. *Studies in the Way of Words*. Harvard University Press. 42
- [6] Michal Ephratt. (2012) "We try harder" – Silence and Grice's cooperative principle, maxims and implicatures [J]. *Language and Communication*, 32, (1).
- [7] Horn, (1984) L.R. *Towards a New Taxonomy for Pragmatic Reference: Q-based and R-based Implicature* [A]. in Schifffrin, D. (ed). *Meaning, Form, and Use in Context: Linguistic Applications* [C]. Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press
- [8] Levinson S.C. (1987) *Pragmatic and the Grammar of Anaphora* [J]. *Journal of Linguistics*, 397-431.
- [9] Wee, Lian-Hee and Winnie H.Y. Cheung (2009) *An animated and narrated glossary of terms used in Linguistics*. Hong Kong Baptist University. [M/OL]. <https://digital.lib.hkbu.edu.hk/linguisticglossary/PDF-HO/Maxim%20of%20Quality.pdf>, 2009
- [10] U.S. Mission China. (2018) *Remarks by President Trump to the 73rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly* | New York, NY. [R/OL]. <https://china.usembassy-china.org.cn/remarks-by-president-trump-to-the-73rd-session-of-the-united-nations-general-assembly-new-york-ny/>.
- [11] Ian Mitchell. (2018) [R/OL]. *Commitment Development Index of 2018*. <https://www.cgdev.org/publication/commitment-development-index-2018>.
- [12] Glottopedia. (2014) [M/OL]. *Definition of Maxim of Relevance*. www.glottopedia.org/index.php/Maxim_of_relevance
- [13] H. Paul. Grice. (1975) *Logic and Conversation* [A]. *Studies in the Way of Words*. Harvard University Press. 44.
- [14] *Blue Chip Economic Indicators and Blue-Chip Financial Forecasts* (2017). [R/OL]. *Evolution of Atlanta Fed GDP Now Real GDP Forecasts for 2017, Q2*. <https://www.fxstreet.com/news/atlanta-fed-gdpnow-model-forecast-for-real-gdp-growth-q2-of-2017-is-27-201706301452>.
- [15] Wayne Davis. (2019) [M/OL]. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Conversational and Conventional Implicature*. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/implicature/>.