

## A Review of Cooperative Principle

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**ABSTRACT:** *Cooperative Principle was proposed by Grice, which can effectively enhance the persuasiveness of communication. However, interlocutors do not always agree with those principles and their flouting of those maxims can create implicatures to express their ideas. In this paper, the author will briefly introduce the CP theory, conversational implicature, and conventional implicature.*

**KEYWORDS:** Cooperative principle, Conversational Implicature, Conventional Implicature,

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## INTRODUCTION

Grice (1975) proposed the CP theory to explain how interlocutors communicate smoothly with each other and list the principles in conversations. Actually, the interlocutors do not always agree with those principles and their flouting of those maxims can create implicatures to express their ideas. The application of CP theory and implicature contributes to the theoretical structure for the thesis.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

*Pragmatics* was presented firstly in the *Foundations of the Theory of Signs* (Morris, 1938), which became an independent branch until the 1970s. Levinson (2001) issued the initial workbook on applied linguistic nominated *Pragmatics*. In 1975, H. P. Grice brought out the theory of CP as he addressed *Logic and Conversation* in Harvard. Grice holds that conversations should always be organized and coherent, that is, for the acceptant conversational direction, interlocutors tend to follow certain principles with or without consciousness. Grice (1975) divided the theory of CP into four maxims. He also proposed the idea of conversational implicature connecting with CP closely. However, such maxims would not always be observed in daily conversations. When they are flouted, the implicature or the implicit meaning is generated, which should be grasped by the interlocutors. The CP theory is not perfect, and it has some shortcomings. Politeness is a supplement to the CP theory, developing the theory on the basis of CP (Leech, 1983). In 1984, Laurence Horn categorized the four maxims of CP into Q- and R-principles. Then, Stephen Levison put forward the Q-, I-, and M-principles. In *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*, there is a theory related to

Relevance proposed by Wilson and Sperber emphasizing the relevance in implicit meaning.

The theory of CP has been applied to various fields in studies after its proposal. Speakers can get the loss proposition and the shared knowledge on the basis of common rules to promote the conversation agreement (Edwards & Mercer, 1987). Goody researched on the theory of Question and published a book focusing on the intercultural communication based on the CP theory. Questions convey meanings and disclose the connection between the interlocutors. The questioner's social class may restrict the proposal and comprehension of the questions (Goody, 1980). The theory of CP has also been viewed grammatically. The theory of CP was named as as "social theory of indirectness" by Rundquist who published *Indirectness: A study explains how gender affects the flouting of Gricean Maxims*. Compared with female, male will make more violation of the maxims of CP (Rundquist, 1992).

Hu Zhuanglin (2001) published *Pragmatics* which firstly introduced the theory of CP into China. *Gricean Conversational Implicature and Related Discussion*, presenting Gricean Theory, was once seen as the most extensive article about the CP theory (Sun, 1994). Scholars such as Chen Rong also contributes to exploiting and developing the CP theory.

### **Cooperative Principle**

In Pragmatics, The Key Issue Is To Explore why interlocutors can smoothly communicate with each. The basic view is that they should follow some widely accepted principles to continue the communication. The CP theory, one of those principles, said that the speaker and the hearer cooperate in the communication through sustaining the intercourse (Grice, 1975). Additionally, principles of pragmatics (Leech, 1983) illustrate that interlocutors act gently because they must show appreciation to others especially when they are talking in person (Brown& Levinson, 1978). A cognitive explanation (Sperber & Wilson, 1986) to speech events illustrated that interlocutors tend to be relevant to the content of the conversations and to whom they are exchanging. Principles of pragmatics (Leech, 1983) and Relevance (Sperber & Wilson, 1986) both develop Gricean theory.

The British philosopher, Grice H. P., made the most notable effort to formulate pragmatic rules, which formalize why language users can successfully perceive implicature in a conversation. He suggested that language users can calculate implicatures according to some implicit principles called Cooperative Principle.

Grice used the imperative mood to express the CP and the four maxims, which led people to believe that Grice prescribed people's communication behavior. In fact, Grice was just referring that interlocutors tend to follow the principles operating in the discussion, except for something opposite (Thomas, 1995). In other areas of life, we make similar assumptions. Thomas (1995) compared Grice's Maxims with driving to understand the assumption. When someone is driving, he or she assumes that other drivers will follow the same traffic rules. If drivers cannot reach the common point, the

traffic system will collapse. However, sometimes other drivers might not obey the rules (a drunk, a learner, etc.) or they might follow different rules. We should reexamine our assumptions on such situations.

### **Implicature**

The verb to imply, meaning enfold, generates Implicature. Pragmatists explored more on conversational implicature because there is always something implicit in actual conversations. When implicatures cannot be interpreted by linguistic devices merely, they may be explained by certain conversational rules (Bilmes, 1986). To achieve a satisfactory explanation of implicature, we must concentrate on pragmatic accounts based on pragmatic principles. Those principles are ‘complicated’, and have to be unfolded, ‘explicated’.

### **Conversational Implicatures**

To understand others’ intention, you need to interpret their words. However, interpretation is tricky; misunderstanding always occurs. Basically, construing the delivery is the same as guessing (Leech, 1983). Suppose my uncle’s birthday is coming, but I don’t know the exact date. I may ask,

When is Uncle’s birthday?  
The person may tell me,  
It’s sometime in May.

Sometime in May can be interpreted as any day in May, from May 1 to May 31. Thus, when it comes to talking about date, it is better to give the specified sometime in a month, for instance, sometime in the middle of May or sometime at the end of May.

Logically, all these possibilities imply sometime in May. However, sometime in May could be interpreted as the first, the middle, or the last days of the month. If the speaker has a clear perception of the exact date, but conceal the information, the hearer will be bewildered. People might accuse the speaker of withholding information: why did he or she express in such a vague way, although he or she knows the exact date?

The answer Sometime in May means that the speaker only knows Uncle’s birthday is in May, but he or she doesn’t the exact date. How can the hearer get this excess message, and how is the conversational implicature conveyed in this conversation?

In the process of analysis, it is useless to consider strictly logically to some extent. Guessing is the only thing people can do. In addition, people should not deduce meanings philosophically; thus, qualified guessing depends on the context, gender, social backgrounds, etc. The more information the communicators get about the context, the more adequate the guesswork will be.

### **Conventional Implicatures**

Not All Implicatures, Which Depends on the context of the language, must be conversational. Certain expressions implicate certain states of the world. For instance,

last means final (e.g., the last page of the book, that is, a conventional implicature). It also means 'most recent' (e.g., last year, that is, a conversational implicature).

Certain dialects are considered as the symbol of inferior social class, which lacks culture and education. Such implicatures are standardized by convention, rather than context. They are called conventional implicature.

It is the convention which governs the culture, history and the class relating to the implicature, that is, conventional implicature may conflict with conventional use. Difference forms of address (e.g., the Chinese 你 vs. 您; the French tu vs. vous) will only be useful in certain contexts. For example, it is acceptable to use tu to ask for a drink in Québec; however, none would do so in France. To show respect to others, people in northern China usually use 您; however, it is seldom used by people in southern China. According to culture or context, conventional implicature may be cancelled out.

The word but is the most frequently quoted example. Logically, in conjoining two parts of a sentence, the sentence conjoined by but has the same truth condition as the one conjoined by *and*; if A is true, B is true. The following parts of but is considered as being in contrast with the preceding parts; however, no such implicatures can be generated by *and*. Thomas (1995) illustrated a conventional implicature with *but*: Kathleen Turner once has talked about the attitude of film arena towards female: "The protagonist is 37 years old, but she remains beauty." I circled the but in red ink and I sent it back and said, "Try again!"

*But* represents the concept that thirty-seven-year-old woman is not attractive anymore. This example vividly shows that but has a conventional implicature which would converse people's prospect.

## CONCLUSION

Generally, interlocutors follow the maxims of CP in conversations and talk explicitly to maintain the communication; However, people may flout the maxims and express indirectly. The relation maxim demands accordant message. The flouting of relation maxim is seen as conveying irrelevant information and converting the original focus. The flouting of the maxim of quality is always created by trope. The flouting of quantity maxim can inspire imagination. Thus, the implication can be created clear to the utmost. The flouting of the manner maxim is often expressed in an ambiguous way to let the receiver think more and leave deeper impression.

### Limitations and Suggestions for Future Studies

This paper limits its scope to the cooperative principle in theory. However, the topic of the current paper is to review CP theory. Further studies can combine it with specific genre, such as newspaper, seminar, and so on. Since each genre has its own characteristics, it is important to analyse the CP theory in different genres.

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