

## A STUDY OF GRICE'S CO-OPERATIVE PRINCIPLE IN THE LIGHT OF PINTER'S PLAY

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### ABSTRACT

*The work of Grice is mostly linked with the theory of the Cooperative Principle and its attendant maxims Quantity, Quality, Relation and Manner regulate the exchange of information during the interaction. Grice stressed that our talk consists of a string of correlated remarks which makes it coherent and we are able to converse with our interlocutors because we recognize common goals in conversation and follow specific ways to achieve these goals. Very few of the linguists challenged this approach and tried to add, revise and alter the maxims of Grice to analyze the discourse more efficiently and effectively. In this article I will try to proof that Grice's maxims are themselves enough to regulate the conversation effectively without any major change and they can be applied on pre-planned dialogues like spontaneous conversation. The Caretaker, Pinter's master piece has been selected for this purpose and maxims are going to be applied on the dialogues of the play to proof their universality.*

**Key Terms:** Grice, Co-operative Principle, Conversational Implicature, Pinter, The Caretaker.

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## 1. Introduction

The research studies and investigations of observance, violation, flouting, opting out, and clash between the Cooperative Principle, as laid out by Grice is generally done by analyzing the artificially created utterances, in the form of dialogues, conversation, talk and discussion done by the characters, actors or participants in a play. From that we should first understand the principles in detail:

### 1.1 Grice's Principles of Exchange of Information

The work of Grice is mostly associated with the theory of the cooperative principle and its attendant maxims which together regulate the exchange of information between individuals involved in interaction. Grice stressed that our talk consists of a series of related remarks which makes it rational. And that we are able to converse with one another because we recognize common goals in conversation and follow specific ways to achieve these goals.

### 1.2 The cooperative principle

Thus, the counter part of Grice's argument is the Cooperative Principle, which means that CP is based on the assumption that language users tacitly agree to cooperate by making their contributions to the talk as is required by the current stage of the talk or the direction into which it develops. This principal assumes that people cooperate in conversation to reduce the chances of misunderstanding of the utterances of interlocutors. CP itself demands to take part in conversation only up to the extent which is required in a particular situation. In order to adhere to this rule speakers simultaneously follow four maxims and their sub maxims, these are as follows (Grice, 1975: 45-7):

#### 1.2.1 Maxim of Quantity

Provide sufficient information.

#### Sub maxims

- Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange).
- Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

### 1.2.2 Maxim of Quality

Try to make your contribution one that is true.

Sub maxims

- Do not say what you believe to be false
- Do not say that which you lack adequate evidence.

### 1.2.3 Maxim of Relation

Be relevant.

### 1.2.4 Maxim of Manner

Be perspicuous.

Sub maxims

- Avoid obscurity of expression.
- Avoid ambiguity.
- Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).
- Be orderly.

### 1.3 Conversational implicature

The above given four maxims operate *conversational implicatures*. These implicatures make it possible to deduce the meaning underlying the surface level of literal meaning. Grice was interested in explaining the difference between ‘what is said’ the literal meaning, and ‘what is

meant' the implicit meaning i.e. the impact that the speaker wishes to produce on the addressee by the identifications of this intention. This can be understood by a common example that if some one says, 'I'm very tired now' it means he is asking the interlocutor who is constantly talking to him or wasting his time that, 'Please now leave the room I want to take rest.' The words which are used in the sentence are not indicating to these meanings lexically but the hidden message is the illustrated one.

#### 1.4 Five ways to deal with the maxims

Grice has also proposed five different ways in which conversationalists can deal with these maxims:

- 1) *Observes*: Speakers can simply follow the maxims and in this case no implicature is generated.
- 2) *Violates*: Speakers can violate a maxim by telling a deliberate lie or by potentially misleading or deceiving, and no implicature generated.
- 3) *Opts out*: Speakers may opt out of the maxim, by indicating plainly that he is not willing to cooperate in the way the maxim requires, but it occurs rarely.
- 4) *Maxim clash*: Speakers, for example, may violate one maxim in order to fulfill the other.
- 5) *Flouts*: This is most interesting case; speakers intentionally and blatantly fail to fulfill a maxim, and thus, generate an implicature. In this way the speaker does not observe a maxim, and neither violates and opts out of it, but it leaves the addressee with a "minor problem" (1975: 49) i.e. to work out the implicature.

## 2. Statement of the problem

Communication is the most interesting human phenomenon, as it has diverse forms, which alternate with each situation and place; it always leaves the hearer in different moods. Sometimes a piece of talk makes one pleased, at another occasion any other piece of talk makes one feel gloomy, or angry, or rather depressed, even I always found these questions very intriguing that why people laugh at the jokes?, what makes a piece of utterance sound funny?, why a lawyer is able to win a case and rescue his subject? and why people say that a good lawyer is one who knows how to talk well?. But these questions always kept me disturbing and also that what is meant by 'talk well'? and what are the rules to talk well etc. But I could not arrive at any satisfactory answer; until I got familiar with the Cooperative Principle

and the theories of Text Analysis then I got some of my questions answered comprehensively. Due to this reason I developed my interest and curiosity into my research topic and decided to accomplish this task by bringing CP in relation to the context of absurdity, in Pinter's play, and thus to prove its universal application to an extent. However, due to the limited period of time I restricted my investigation to a single field i.e. media and decided to analyze utterances in a play.

### 3. Objectives of the study

The main objective of my research is to investigate the application of Cooperative Principle and its associated maxims in deliberately created dialogues spoken out by the actors in an English play. The underlying aims are to see the universality of the CP by applying it into an artificially designed play in English language context, it also aims to observe that how people deal with the maxims in the society, and justification for selecting a play for this purpose is that the media and literature of a country or a linguistic community is actually the manifestation of its society, in a way we can call it 'a micro-society'. It also attempts to set a path of future in the same context and new comers can apply it in their local languages like Urdu in Pakistan, Arabic in UAE and French in France etc. to check its universality.

### 4. Research questions

The research questions addressed in this study are:

1. Why in spite of being pre-planned most of the times characters in the play do not observe the cooperative principles?
2. Do the actors in the play violate, opt out, or flout the maxims intentionally or unintentionally?
3. What are the implicatures generated, if any, by the non observance of the maxims and the sub-maxims?
4. Are the people able to work out or understand these conversational implicatures?

### 5. Discussion

This section is going to deal with the detailed analysis of the examples of dialogues or talk

exchange in which the cooperative principles and its maxims are not observed due to flouting, opting out, maxims clash or violation. The examples are going to be taken out from the Pinter's play, *The Caretaker* which is divided into three acts. It is the psychological study of the convergence of power, innocence, allegiance and corruption among the three characters out of which two, ASTON and MICK are brothers and the third one, DAVIES is a tramp. It is the sixth famous work of Pinter for stage and television and firstly premiered at the Arts Theatre Club in London. It was performed about 444 times in Broadway from 1960 to 1964 and was also converted in to the film version by Clive Donner. This play is divided into 3 Acts and total 8 scenes which are divided into 3 Acts as 2, 3 and 3 scenes respectably.

### 5.1 Analysis

Dialogues or utterances are analyzed by grouping the utterances within the four maxims starting from Quantity, Quality, Relation and Manner. Let us analyse every maxim's violation one after another:

### 5.2 *Examples in which one maxim is violated, but its violation to be explained by the supposition of a clash with another maxim*

Some times when we talk to the people, we deliberately give an answer which is not up to mark but it is not because we hide something or speak falsely but it is deliberately done which second person understands because of the context and the supporting environment of the surroundings.

Some good examples of this are also found in this play out of which two are as follows:

#### 5.2.1 *Context*

Discussion goes on (Act One, Scene-1, on pg. 17) between the DAVIES and ASTON about the room and its arrangement and when DAVIES sees to the mower and ask about its purpose so ASTON replies that it is to build the shed and lifts the curtain to show the place from the window where he is interested to build it. Then DAVIES says:

DAVIES: Where you going to put your shed?

ASTON: (turning). I'll have to clean the garden first.

#### *Analysis*

According to the common rules of CP ASTON should have replied by indicating the place where he is interested to build the shed in the downstairs area but he didn't answer by indicating the place and replied, "I'll have to clear the garden first" which apparently looks as he is flouting

from the principle of CP and not cooperating with the first speaker but if he had answered him exactly, DAVIES might have confused because the garden was full of trash and the maxim of Quality can be flouted because he had lack of evidence to proof it so he replied with these words by which maxim of Quantity is flouted because he used extra words instead of indicating the exact place and save the maxim of Quality not to be infringed which was more important in this case.

### 5.2.2 Context

Likewise at another place (Act Two, Scene-1, on pg. 33) when MICK and DAVIES have the discussion with each other and MICK asks about the sleep at night whether it was comfortable or not so DAVIES replied him by flouting the maxims of Quality and Manner in which false and ambiguous answers are avoided. Mick asks after a pause:

MICK: What sort of sleep did you have in that bed?

DAVIES: (banging on floor) All right.

MICK: You weren't uncomfortable?

DAVIES: (groaning) All right.

### Analysis

In this discussion when Davies was asked about the nature of sleep so he spoke a lie which is clear from the description of his action i.e. 'banging on the floor' but his answer was complete. It means maxim of Quality was flouted and Quantity was focused and when he was again asked about the comfort so he gave again a vague and very brief answer, 'All right' and didn't explain the reason that why he was uncomfortable and finished the issue by saying 'all right' otherwise the word 'groaning' shows his discomfort in the sleep. So in this second part again Quantity was enough to tell the meaning of the word but actually he deliberately hid the condition and replied with the ambiguous words to not tell him clearly what exactly he meant.

### 5.2.3 Conclusion

In the above two examples it has been shown that sometimes speaker deliberately flouts the maxim but not by opting out or any other hidden reason but simply to save the other maxim from the flouting and by the supposition of a clash with another one.

5.3 Examples which involve exploitation i.e. a procedure by which a maxim is flouted for the purpose of getting in a conversational implicature by means of something of the nature of a figure of speech

This portion will show how the whole situation is spoiled due to opting out, flouting and violating of Grice's maxims. Let's start from the examples about the Quantity in which maxim or sub maxims of Quantity are infringed which requires one's contribution as informative as is required for the current purpose of exchange.

#### 5.3.1 Context

In the very beginning of the play (Act One, Scene-1, on pg. 7) the two characters ASTON and DAVIES appear on the stage and situation tells that they both are standing in the room of ASTON. ASTON says to DAVIES:

ASTON: Sit down.

DAVIES: Thanks. (looking about.) Uuh.... ASTON: Just a minute.

*Aston looks around for a chair, sees one lying on its side by the rolled carpet at the fireplace, and starts to get it out.*

DAVIES: Sit down? Huh . . . I haven't had a good sit down . . . I haven't had a proper sit down . . . well, I couldn't tell you. . .

#### Analysis

In this situation maxim of Quantity is flouted by the character, DAVIES, completely. When he was asked by ASTON to sit on the chair and the chair wasn't available so he should have asked for the chair or where to sit because he was offered by his host but he used unnecessary wording which looks purposeless like 'I haven't had a proper sit down . . . well' etc. This shows that the principle of CP, Quantity which demands only the usage of words as informative as is required and to avoid from unnecessary discussion is infringed and redundant repetition is used which flouts the maxim.

#### 5.3.2 Context

DAVIES and MICK have the discussion (Act Two, Scene-2, on pg. 46-47) in which DAVIES shows as he is very lenient to his friends but if someone hurts or disturbs him so he never leaves



him and tries to take MICK under his pressure:

DAVIES. I can be pushed so far . . . but. . . MICK: No further.

DAVIES: That's it.

*MICK sits on junk down right.*

What you doing?

MICK: No, I just want to say that . . . I'm very impressed by that. DAVIES: eh?

MICK: I'm very impressed by what you've just said.

*Pause.*

Yes that's impressive, that is.

*Pause.*

I'm impressed, anyway

*Analysis*

By reading these dialogues a reader can easily identify that the last speech of MICK in which he is repeating the same point that he's very impressed from the wording and statements of DAVIES are flouting the maxim of Quantity because only to say that, "I'm very impressed by what you've just said" was enough to show his will of praise to DAVIES but he repeated it to emphasize and infringed the maxim of Quantity.

After discussing two examples of the infringement of the first maxim, Quantity now let's move towards the second maxim, **Quality** to figure out how characters of the play flout and infringed this cooperative principle in their dialogues.

### 5.3.3 Context

First example of flouting the maxim of Quality due to a lie is found (Act Two, Scene-1 on pg. 30) when MICK is seated, DAVIES on the floor, half seated, crouched, so MICK asks to DAVIES:

MICK: What's your name?

DAVIES: I don't know you, I don't know who you are.

*Pause.*

MICK: Eh?

DAVIES: Jenkins. MICK: Jenkins? DAVIES: Yes.

*Analysis*

In this situation when DAVIES was asked about his name so he deliberately tells a lie by telling his wrong name, Jenkins about which he already admitted in the Act One, Scene-2, on pg. 25 of the play in front of ASTON that it is not his right name. By this, CP presented by Grice is being violated because Grice explains that if you say what you believe to be false, it infringes the maxim of Quality.

5.3.4 *Context*

Sometimes this maxim of Quality is flouted due to the use of ironical sentences in the speech. In this play the example of irony is found (Act Two, Scene-2, on pg. 49) when MICK and DAVIES talk about the ASTON and MICK says:

MICK: He's supposed to be doing a little job for me . . . I keep him here to do a little job . . . but I don't know . . . I'm coming to the conclusion he's a slow worker.

*Pause.*

What would your advice be?

DAVIES: Well . . . he's a funny bloke, your brother. MICK: What?

DAVIES: I was saying he's . . . he's a bit of a funny bloke, your brother.

*MICK stares at him.*

MICK: Funny? Why?

DAVIES: Well . . . he's funny. . . .

MICK: What's funny about him?

*Pause.*

DAVIES: Not liking work.

### *Analysis*

In this example the word 'funny' which is used thrice by DAVIES is used ironically. What actually DAVIES wants to say is that ASTON is a lazy and lethargic person who doesn't want to work physically any only beats about the bushes. For this purpose he uses a word which generally means comic, humorous or witty because he doesn't want to express his opinion openly to ASTON's brother but when MICK constantly asks about why and how he's a funny bloke then he expresses that he doesn't want to work. This shows that DAVIES deliberately hides the reality about what he believes is true that ASTON is a lazy person that's why it falls in the category of infringement of Quality's maxim.

### *5.3.5 Context*

Sometimes maxim of Quality is flouted due to the usage of metaphorical language as it has been discussed by Grice. Metaphors also give the different meanings in appearance than the actual meanings of the speakers. A good example of metaphorical language is found in the play (Act Two, Scene-2, on pg. 46 of appendices) when MICK and DAVIES have the discussion and DAVIES explains him the reason of taking care of the apartment and moves towards DAVIES and indicates the knife and says:

MICK: What are you waving that about for?

DAVIES: You come near me . . .

MICK: I'm sorry if I gave you a start. But I had you in mind too, you know. I mean my brother's guest. We got to think of your comfort, en't we? Don't want the dust to get up your nose. How long you thinking of staying here . . .

### *Analysis*

In this excerpt of MICK's speech which is underlined, he used the metaphoric language which apparently shows as he is really talking about the dust which can come on the nose of the DAVIES but in reality he wants to say that he doesn't want to disturb him because he's his brother's guest. This kind of metaphorical language also flouts the Cooperative Principle and

infringes the maxim of Quality because in appearance what is said differs from what actually is meant by the saying.

### 5.3.6 Context

One of the condition in which maxim of Quality is also flouted i.e. exaggeration in which speaker uses a hyperbolic statement which is used to show or demand something extra ordinary, bigger, better, more etc. than they are. The use of hyperbole in the play is found (Act Three, Scene-3, on pg. 76-77) when DAVIES tries to flatter ASTON to get the permission to stay with him in his room and ASTON shows his rudeness. ASTON says:

ASTON: Anyway, I'm going to be busy. I've got that shed to get up. If I don't get it up now it'll never go up. Until it's up I can't get started.

DAVIES: I'll give you a hand to put up your shed, that's what I'll do!

*Pause.*

I'll give you a hand! We'll both put up that shed together! See? Get it done in next to no time! Do you see what I'm saying?

*Pause.*

ASTON: No. I can get it up myself.

*Analysis*

In this discussion DAVIES uses hyperbolic statement by saying that he'll get it done in next to no time, means without spending a minute and we know that it's impossible but it is said to show the emphasis that means without wasting any time. This kind of hyperboles which shows exaggerations of speakers are considered the reason of infringements of CP specially the maxim of Quality is flouted due to it.

After discussing four examples of the infringement of the second maxim, Quality now let's moves towards the third maxim, **Relation**. As we have already discussed in chapter one that under the category of Relation, Grice placed a single maxim 'be relevant' though the maxim itself is concise but the problems of its identification creates problems for a new reader. Here we

are going to discuss few examples to figure out how characters of the play flout and infringed this cooperative principle in their dialogues.

### 5.3.7 Context

In the very beginning of the play (Act One, Scene-1, on pg. 8) when ASTON asks DAVIES to sit and looks around for a chair, sees one lying on its side by the rolled carpet at the fireplace, and starts to get it out and says:

ASTON: (placing the chair). Here you are.

DAVIES: Ten minutes off for a tea break in the middle of the night in that place and I couldn't find the seat, not one. All them Greeks had it, Poles, Greeks, Blacks, the lot of them, all them aliens had it. And they had me working there . . . they had me working . . .

*ASTON sits on the bed, takes out a tobacco tin and papers, and begins to roll himself a cigarette.*

*Davies watches him.*

All them Blacks had it, Blacks, Greeks, Poles, the lot of them, that's what, doing me out of a seat, treating me like dirt. When he comes at me tonight I told him.

### Analysis

In this discussion it is very obvious that the discussion which started in the beginning of the play between these two characters was very simple that ASTON brought DAVIES at his apartment and asked him to sit and when he found no chair so started arranging it for his guest but DAVIES considers it a deliberate mistake of ASTON to not give him a chair and starts discussing about the events of the tea break in the middle of the night when all chairs were occupied by the people of different countries including Blacks, Greeks, Poles etc. and he was deprived from the opportunity of sitting and discusses about their behavior that they treated him unsympathetically. This complete diversion from the topic without following any rule of CP is opting out of the maxim of Relation and due to it infringement of this CP does exist.

### 5.3.8 Context

Same sort of infringement of this maxim of relationship finds (Act One, Scene-1, on pg. 9) when in the very next page of the beginning ASTON and DAVIES discuss about the behavior of the people that how badly they treat the people especially the individual who attacked on DAVIES so ASTON says:

ASTON: Yes. I saw him have a got at you.

DAVIES: All them toe-rags, mate, got the manner of pigs. I might have been on the road a few years but can take it from me I'm clean. I keep myself up. That's why I left my wife. Fortnight after I married her, no, not so much as that, no more than a week, I took the lid off a saucepan, you know what was in it? A pile of her underclothing, unwashed. The pan for vegetables, it was. The vegetable pan. That's when I left her and I haven't seen her since.

#### *Analysis*

This part of the play can also be a good example of infringement of Quantity CP but here we are taking it as an example of irrelevance. The discussion which was going on between ASTON and DAVIES that was about the attack which was made by an individual at night on DAVIES but he took out a totally irrelevant issue of his wife that why he left her and what were the reasons behind it. This shows complete irrelevance from the topic and it is an infringement of CP of Relation.

Now let me move to the last maxim of CP i.e. **Manner** which demands not to what is said but how is said? It has four sub maxims avoid obscurity of expression, avoid ambiguity, be brief and be orderly. These entire four maxims actually leading to the one important point that is, "Be Clear and Perspicuous". Now let's see their examples in the play.

#### *5.3.9 Context*

A very good example of flouting the maxim of Manner is found (Act Two, Scene-1, on pg. 42) when ASTON offers Davies to be appointed as a caretaker in his house and keep an eye on the stairs, the landing, the front step and to polish the bells of his room and DAVIES asks astonishingly by saying:

DAVIES: Caretaking, eh?

ASTON: Yes.

DAVIES: Well, I . . . I never done caretaking before, you know . . . I mean to say . . . I never .

. . what I mean to say is . . . I never been a caretaker.

#### *Pause*

ASTON: How do you feel about being one, then?

DAVIES: Well, I reckon . . . Well, I'd have to know . . . you know . . . .

### *Analysis*

In this conversation we can see that the attitude and response of DAVIES is too vague to understand what he actually wants to communicate. He looks so surprised because of ASTON's offer and replies in confusion which is quite ambiguous. Tautology and unnecessary prolixity have made his reply confusing for the listener that what he is replying that is positive or negative. Because of this confused and ambiguous response this conversation is infringing the maxim of Manner which requires clear and perspicuous response in dialogues.

#### *5.3.10 Context*

Second example of flouting of this CP is found (Act Three, Scene-3, on pg. 70) when DAVIES had the brawl with ASTON in the end of Act Three, Scene-2, on pg. 69 of the play and complains for his attitude with MICK in the beginning of Act Three, Scene-3, on pg. 70 and says that ASTON is senseless as compare to MICK and MICK asks what does he mean? So DAVIES confuses and replies him unsatisfactorily so MICK asks:

MICK: What did he say then, when you told him I'd offered you the job as caretaker? DAVIES: He . . . he said . . . he said . . . something about . . . he lived here.

### *Analysis*

This reply of DAVIES shows that he got confused when he realized that MICK didn't like his answer and he didn't even have any strong point to convince MICK about his statement. So he replied with no clear words and amalgamated the answer by unnecessary repetition which made his conversation vague and doubtful.

## **6. Conclusion**

I discovered that the claim of Grice that the cooperative principle is a universally accepted phenomenon (consciously or unconsciously) is true, and the principles and their maxims do in fact exist in English Language specially. I discovered that the whole communication is built on the basis of these four maxims, those are either observed or infringed. Thus, it would be right to

say that the rational communication is not possible without the cooperative principles and their maxims.

I found that in spite of being pre-planned the maxims were infringed because of which ironies, metaphoric language, hyperboles etc. were found in the dialogues. It has also observed that one can change the meaning and the sense of the whole discussion through the violation of these maxims.

The analysis also explained that most of the times characters deliberately opt out, flout and violates the principles to show specific expressions, to maintain appearance, to generate an implicature etc. Moreover, the speakers generally know that when they should follow the CP and when should they avoid hiding or disclosing certain feelings.

The implicature generated serve a number of purposes; but the important thing that I observed was that the hearer, for whom the implicature is intended to work, is able to work it out and even the speaker understands that hearer has got it. It rarely happens that a common reader is unable to get the implicit meaning of the message.

Finally, I have deduced from this study that the cooperative principle of Grice is not only operative in the observance of the maxims, but also equally active when the maxims are flouted, opted out or violated.

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