

# ANALYSING UTTERANCES ON MOVIE BY USING THE GRICEAN MAXIM

by

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**Abstract:** Expressing what we want to say to other speaker can be done by saying directly and indirectly. This can be successful or not. Many women, however, tend to fail to use directness in certain conversation. This study was to investigate whether women flout Grice maxim in Cooperative Principle. The study analyses utterances of speakers taken from movie. The study suggested that interlocutors follow Cooperative Principle in the conversation. However, some utterances do not show this principle due to some factors; for example chance to speak and politeness.

## Introduction

The reason why people use indirectness has been an interesting study to investigate by many linguists. In general, people govern more direct utterances in a conversation and apply them in various ways (Thomas, 1995). Indirectness, for example, occurs when an utterance is failed to express, therefore the speaker uses implicature instead. It is assumed that women tend to be more indirect than men do in the purpose of being polite (Lakoff, 1975, Brown and Levinson, 1987 as cited in Brumark, 2006).

This assumption creates some arguments among the researchers. In the recent study on the family dinner table, it is noted that the theory of gender differences regarding to indirectness has shown that indirectness occurred due to socializing purposes (Blum-Kulka, 1990, 1997; Brumark, 2003a, 2003b as cited in Brumark, 2006).

When we see indirectness based on the Gricean maxim perspectives, indirectness is may be explained as more or less deliberate non-observance the

maxims of requesting someone to be informative, brief, relevant, and a sufficient information (Brumark, 2006, p. 1207). In relation to gender differences, this study has found that the mother flouted the Gricean maxims more frequently than the father did.

This paper is going to investigate whether women flout the Gricean maxims more frequently than men do in different situations. The conversation is taken from a movie. This paper also will try to find out the reason why the speakers use indirect speech in uttering their sentences. To observe this, this paper considers the concept of communication using Cooperative Principle theory and the conversational implicature in the given dialogue.

## Background of Dialogues

The dialogues which are going to be observed are taken from a movie entitled "Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason". The dialogues are conversation between Bridget Jones, a TV reporter and Mark Darcy, her boyfriend who is a lawyer.

The setting of the movie is in Thailand. Bridget goes to Thailand with her colleague, Daniel Clever, who is also her ex-boyfriend. They are on duty to see Thailand's culture and report it for a TV show. In this story, Bridget is caught bringing out drugs in a pot like a snake when she is in an airport on her way home to London. This snake is not actually hers; it belongs to her friend, Schazzer, whom accompanies her while she is in Thailand. Bridget is accused of taking drugs is then put into a jail.

The dialogues take place in a prison when Mark visits Bridget. A conflict occurs when there is a misunderstanding between Bridget and Mark. Mark assumes that Bridget makes intimate relationship with Daniel. However, Bridget fails to explain the truth as there is no chance for her to clarify the situation. From these dialogues, the speakers often breach Gricean maxims and generate conversational implicature.

### **What is Cooperative Principle?**

It is assumed that people will cooperate in talk exchanges they are engaged in. Both speaker and hearer will follow the rules of conversation. Some talk exchanges will be successful to recognize but some need effort to observe. Therefore, Grice (1975) develops a concept of implicature where the talk exchanges between interlocutors may be practised. The concept of implicature is actually about how people use a language (Levinson, 1983, p. 101). In other words, understanding conversation by 'what is meant is from what is said'.

In order to make a conversation accepted by both speakers, a general principle is formulated. Grice (1975) formulated a conversational principle which is required in a conversation that is the Cooperative Principle (CP). He defines the CP as "make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted

purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged" (Grice, 1975, p. 45).

Grice's theory of the CP is important and needed in talk exchanges. It is assumed that CP is needed to help to account for the relation between sense and force (Leech, 1983, p. 80). Grice (1975) assumed that his theory of implicature may be a standard of conversational interaction as he says

"I would like to be able to think of the standard type of conversational practice not merely as something that all or most do IN FACT follow but as something that is REASONABLE for us to follow, that WE SHOULD NOT abandon" (Grice, 1975, p. 48).

Although his theory could not be found in some culture (i.e. Malagasy people) (Keenan, 1976), it is believed that the CP is applicable in certain circumstances.

### **What is Conversational Implicature?**

The notion of conversational implicature is one of the concepts of pragmatics which is interesting to observe. Conversational implicature is usually also called implicature as shorthand. The term of implicature was introduced by Grice (1975, p. 97) which refers to implied meaning from what is said. Levinson (1983) adds that implicature "provides some explicit account of how it is possible to mean (in some general sense) more than what is actually 'said'". Furthermore, implicature means a hint which a speaker indicates intentionally by means of language (Thomas, 1995). In this case, the message that the speaker utters may be or may be not understood by the hearer.

Conversational implicature is used as a guideline in a conversation. To follow this guideline, Grice considers maxim of conversation. They are namely;

The maxim of Quality;

Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of exchange).

ii. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

The maxim of Quantity;

i. Do not say what you believe to be false.

ii. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

The maxim of Relation : Be relevant

The maxim of Manner:

i. Avoid obscurity of expression.

ii. Avoid ambiguity.

iii. Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).

iv. Be orderly.

(Grice, 1975, p. 45-46).

### Non-observance Gricean Maxim

Implicature cannot be explained solely by semantic meaning. It is beyond the semantic content utterance. Levinson (1983, p. 104) noted that implicature stems from “both the content of what has been said and some specific assumptions about the co-operative nature of ordinary verbal interaction”. Some of these inferences can be observed, while others cannot be observed.

Grice (1975, p. 50) concludes that conversational implicatures are derived at the following basis:

1. The conventional meaning of the words used and identity of references involved.
2. The CP and its maxims
3. The context of the utterances
4. Relevant shared background knowledge.
5. All relevant items that participants assume

Based on these rules, it can be concluded that if the interlocutors cannot follow one of these rules, they will be likely to exploit the maxims. Interlocutors may fail to observe the Gricean Maxim in various ways. Grice (1975) proposed four non-observance maxims: violating, flouting, opting out, infringing, and suspending a maxim. However, this paper is only going to focus on violating and flouting a maxim.

### Violating a maxim

To violate means to unostentatiously breach the maxim. If a speaker violates a maxim unostentatiously, he will be liable

to mislead. In other words, a speaker says a deliberately covert statement in order to not to be noticed. The following examples will attempt to show how interlocutors violate *the maxim of quality*.

- (1) Bridget: Mark?  
Mark : You are right?  
Bridget: O:h Fine  
((laughing) )Hmm hhh  
And scared shitless. But you know  
(.) perky ((laughing))

In this example, one of the maxims has been violated, that is *the maxim of quality*. Bridget does not tell the truth when Mark asks her condition. Although she says that she is in a good condition, she does not really mean it. In fact, she implies she is in a different condition. This can be seen from the following statement she gave that she is bored staying there. This is related to the maxim of quality that is “do not say what you believe to be false” (Grice, 1975, p. 45). Furthermore, in later utterance, Bridget again has breached the maxim of quality. Her utterance tries to mislead the hearer, Mark, by showing that she looks like happy staying in a jail.

- (2) Bridget: I can't believe you've come for all this way.  
Mark : I haven't. I was out here handling a (.) Foreign Office case when I heard about your situation

This is another example of speaker has broken the *maxim of quality*. Mark's utterance suggests that he comes to jail by accident, not because of his willingness to handle Bridget case. By saying this, there are two assumptions that can be sorted out. First, it is assumed that Mark will not come to jail if she was not in Thailand. It is unlikely that he would go to Thailand only to handle Bridget's case. Second, he visits Bridget because he heard that she is in a jail. So, there is a chance for him to tackle the case while he is handling a foreign case at the same time.

When we examine Mark's remark, it is possible that he hides something that he does not want Bridget to know. Therefore

he does not tell the truth. When someone violates a maxim of quality, it is possible for him/her to tell a direct lie.

### Flouting maxim

According to Grice (1975, p. 49) a speaker flouts a maxim if he may blatantly fails to fulfil the maxim. In other words, a speaker tries to deliberately make his utterance overt or to be noticed (Murray, 2007). This makes the hearer infer an implicature. The following examples illustrate how speakers flout a maxim.

- (3) Bridget: I think about you all the time (.) And I'm so (.) so:rry  
I ↑rea:lly, rea:lly am, for e:verything that happened between us.  
Mark: Yes, well (( clearsthoat))(.)  
We don't have much time (.) and I need you to identify someone for me.

In this example, there is a conversation failure between both speakers. Bridget assumes that Mark will respond her utterance as what she expects. Although Mark seems to believe what she said, he tries to change the topic. This is probably because Mark does not want to talk about it. As a result, Mark flouts a *maxim of relation*, that is 'be relevant'. The maxim of relation (be relevant) is exploited by making utterance irrelevant to the topic. Although this maxim is rarely found in daily real life situation (Grice, 1975, p. 54), it can be considered in a conversation.

Responding to irrelevant utterances can be done in various manners. One of them is by changing the topic of conversation (Thomas, 1995, p. 70). Extract (3) is a good example to observe. Mark probably is not interested in what Bridge said by changing the subject of conversation and focusing on her case. However, Mark 's utterance may be true that they do not have much time to talk about their problem in a jail, since they have only been given five minutes to meet. It can imply a different meaning that he

wants to talk about their problem in a different situation, not in a jail.

Another way to reply to someone's utterance is by overtly failing to address the other person's goal in asking a question (Thomas, *ibid*) or explaining a problem. In the example above, Mark fails to address Bridget utterance. Bridget fails to clarify the problems they have and assumes that Mark will discuss their problems as well. However, this does not exist since Mark responds it with irrelevant subject.

Furthermore, using 'maxim hedges' such as *well* as can be seen in the utterance L12, L16 and L29, indicates the recipients meet the cooperative expectation (Brown and Levinson, 1978 as cited in Levinson, 1983). As Lakoff (1973a) has pointed out (as cited in Levinson, 1983) that the word *well* notices that the speaker is aware that he/she is unable to fulfil the maxim of quantity in full.

- (4) Mark : Is this the man with whom you were seen taking hallucinogenic mushrooms before you spend the night with Daniel Cleaver in a hotel room?

Bridget: Yes, that's him (.) But, I think you should know (.)

In this dialogue, there is a clash between *the maxim of quality and quantity*. A clash between maxims can happen when a speaker may be unable to fulfil, for instance, the maxim of quality and quantity (Grice, 1975, p. 49). In the dialogue it seems that Mark flouts the maxim of quality by saying an ironic expression to Bridget e.g ....'before you spend night with Daniel Cleaver in a hotel room?'. It is noted that irony flouts the maxim of quality (Grice, 1975; Thomas, 1995; Brumark, 2006). Mark will not utter this utterance otherwise he implicates other meaning. He should have not asked questions like that when he investigates a case. There is indeed a reason for this; it can be that he wants to put Bridget down or loses her face by this question. As

Brumark (2006) says that the reason why people fail to fulfil a maxim is because they want to put down the spouse. The implicit utterances often come up with irony or sarcasm behaviour. The ironic utterance is often indicated by exaggerating or making understatement expression (Leech, 1983) to misjudge the interlocutors.

This evidence support Grice's theory that men flouted the Gricean maxims (Grice, 1975 as cited in Brumark, 2006) more often than women did. It can be seen clearly that Mark uses direct speech in some dialogues for example in the utterance L19 and L26. Moreover, this evidence is also in line with the research finding conducted by Brumark (2006). He found that the father was responsible for most of sarcastic flouts.

In relation to flouting the maxim of quantity, Bridge experiences to flout this maxim. When Mark asks her a question, she can just say yes or no, without any further explanation, except she is asked to do so. However, as can be seen in the dialogue above, she seems to explain and clarify what Mark assumes about her with Daniel. This is against to one of the rules of maxim quantity that is "do not make your contribution more informative that is required" (Grice, 1975).

Furthermore, there is a strange utterance in dialogue (4). What is strange about it is that Mark's questions in not relevant to what he really wants to find out. And this utterance flouts the maxim of manner. The question is much more likely to be interested in whether Bridget answers the question related to affair rather than the person who has given her hallucination drugs. Hence, Mark's question is redundant and conversationally bizarre to maxim of quantity. This generates confusion to the hearer to answer the question.

Other reasons why a speaker fails to observe the Gricean maxims is that a speaker wants to provide indirect speech.

Indirectness is "a conceptual distinction between a situationally variable 'utterance meaning' and more context-independent sentence meaning" (Brumark, 2006, p. 1209). As Brumark (2006) quotes Searle (1975, p. 59) that indirectness occurs when "the speaker's utterance and the sentence meaning come apart in various ways". In other words, the speaker utters "a sentence, means what he says, but also means something more", or he may utter "a sentence and mean what he says and also mean another illocution with different propositional content" (p. 1209). This can be seen in L30. From this utterance there are some implications that can be pointed out. First, Mark may assume that Bridget can have a lesson from the jail. Second, it can be also a good time for Mark to see how Bridget faces this situation. Third, Mark may use this situation to insult her in a sarcastic expression. This evidence is different from Brumark's finding (2006) in Swedish family that the mother was responsible for flouting the Gricean maxims by governing indirect speech.

Indirectness and implication have attracted some scholars to find out. Indirect speech is one of the examples flouting the maxim of quantity. Thomas (1995, p. 144) suggests some possible reasons, such as to increase the force of one's message. The hearer has to work hard to convey the meaning. Another reason is that the speaker has two goals to compete (Pyle as cited in Thomas, 1995). On one hand, the speaker wants the hearer to detect the problem, however on the other hand the speaker has to tell the truth that may hurt other's feeling. However, the interlocutors may not always be able to work on this, as can be seen in the utterance L26.

Flouting a maxim of quantity commonly occurs in a conversation. In a conversation, speakers usually give more information than is required. This is probably in order to clarify information he gives. If he does not give further

information, there will be understanding between a speaker and a hearer. For example someone is interrogated by a law maker. The utterance in L24 relates to this problem. In the dialogue, Bridget gives more information than is needed. Instead of saying that she was given drugs by Jed, she also emphasizes that the drugs belong to her friend, Schazzer. Although the information is very important, she has already flouted a maxim quantity that is 'do not make your contribution more informative than is required' (Grice, 1975, p. 45).

However, misunderstanding exists in the dialogue in L25 and L26. This will not arise if Mark listens to Bridget opinion about what happens between Daniel and her. It seems that Mark does not do his job appropriately as a lawyer in this situation. His question indicates that he wants to know what happened between Bridget and Daniel.

- (5) Mark: [The same man who gave you the snake containing the drugs?  
 Bridget: Yes, that's him. That's Jed.  
 But it was Scha:zzer's snake not mine and as far as Daniel Cleaver goes....  
 Mark: Your sex life doesn't concern me at all (( music background)) (10.0)

In the example (5) above, there is a clash between a maxim of quality and quantity. On one hand, incomplete information drives misunderstanding. On the other hand, this information misleads the hearer to judge the truth. Mark's utterance in L26 implicates that he comes to visit Bridget because he is concerned on Bridget's life. This flouts the truth condition that what he meant is different from what he said.

In this example (5), misunderstanding occurs again because of incomplete information given. Questions play an important role to seek information. It is hoped that both parties, questioner and answerer, understand the questions. According to Levinson (1979, p. 383) there are two strategies in understanding

conversation. First, question-answer format can control the topical organization to the questioner. That is the questioner and the answerers construct turn-taking in a dialogue. Utterance L18 meets this requirement. However, not all questioners address the information that he is seeking for. Second, the role and the function of a question may be in relation to the goals and strategies of the participants. This means that the questioner expects a response that will count as part of an implicit argument, and the answerer will try to stay away from the response. The questions may be rhetorical, for example utterance L22, that both participants know the answer already.

Misunderstanding between a speaker and a hearer may also occur due to imbalance of turn taking in talk exchanges. People usually take turns in speaking; they do not talk at once (Scollon & Scollon, 1983). The speaker will talk and the listener will listen to him. This process is quite difficult to achieve when one of the interlocutors does not give a chance to other speaker to speak. When it happens, the listener sometimes interrupts as others as a way of showing their unwillingness to go along with the presumed social agreement (Scollon & Scollon, 1983, p. 160). In a dialogue above it can be seen that one of the speakers, Mark, dominates the conversation. It happens many times that another speaker, Bridget, interrupts while he is talking. It appears that turn taking does not work in this dialogue for example in extract (4) and (5).

It is important to note that, not all interlocutors succeed in deliberating information. Unsuccessful information delivered may cause other interpretation and the worst thing is that it will generate misunderstanding between the speaker and the hearer. Hence, misunderstanding may offend the other party and disadvantage it. Some people may notice this situation by changing the topic of discussion. As can

be seen in utterance L28, the questioner changes the topic of conversation.

Other examples of clash in maxims also occur in the following example:

(6) Mark: Has there been any illtreatment?

Bridget: No no (.) well (.) () (0.2) the toilets are well (.) below PAR, but

Mark: [fair enough that things make simpler

It can be seen that in the first response of given by Bridget, there is no maxim which is flouted. However, the latter utterance fails the maxim of quantity and manner. It is not really clear why she mentions the toilet where as she was asked about ill treatment. It can be assumed here that she implied other meaning that Mark can notice. She probably wants to let Mark know her condition in a jail so that Mark could help her out from prison, or perhaps she only wants to share her problem to him. Whatever the assumption given, she gives more information than is needed.

Giving a clear response is obviously very important in communication. However, people sometimes fail to do it. Giving an ambiguous utterance is unique some people. By saying "fair enough that things make simpler" it forces the hearer again to look for the implied meaning. It seems that the speaker, Mark, often uses indirect utterances. He appears to enjoy play with the words where the hearer should work hard to convey his utterance. Thomas (1995) notes that some people like to play with the words they utter in order to make the words less interesting (p. 143). Perhaps, Mark assumes that what he said means nothing to Bridget.

Another example also shows ambiguity in a conversation. The utterance L36, for instance, has no clear meaning whether the speaker wants to add important information or to end the conversation. When a speaker uses expression like *and*, it is assumed that the speaker has something to say. However, in this example (L36) the speaker fails to

fulfil the expression and say good bye instead.

The last utterance also flouts a maxim a manner and quality is utterance L42. From this utterance, there some implicatures we can carry out. First, in literal interpretation it is possible for Bridget to indicate that Mark is only a person who is sent to see her and handle her case. Second, because of this, it can be assumed that Mark does not love her anymore because he comes to see her only because of an order from someone. Using indirectness utterance may lead a hearer to implicate wrong. Therefore, it is possible to assume that the utterance L42 is only a direct lie. This expression may mislead the hearer's assumption. Again, this interpretation will flout the maxim of quality.

## Conclusion

The cooperative principle has played important role in the talk exchanges. It is assumed that people usually share information to others to build an understanding in a conversation. In general, people will be informative if they are asked a question. However, not all people share their information to others. This is probably because they are unable to perceive the meaning of an utterance. As a result, misunderstanding occurs between interlocutors.

In some situations participants may follow the principle of conversation. That is, the speaker and the hearer will work together to build conversation and provide the required information. Both interlocutors assume that they will provide the required information.

In other situations, however, the interlocutors fail to observe the talk exchanges between interlocutors. The speaker and the hearer will find it difficult to convey what is said. Sometimes what the speaker meant may be different from what he said. This phenomenon can be found in real life situations. If people are

not aware of this, misunderstandings will occur among them.

To provide information as informative as possible is not an easy task. We sometimes find it difficult to convey what people are saying and not all people succeed in communication. Interlocutors may use implicature to convey what they mean. In certain situations, people may not provide information which a speaker asks for. People may sometimes fail to interact between interlocutors as the interlocutor provides ambiguous meaning. It is interesting to observe because this problem happens occasionally in daily conversation.

Furthermore, although woman is found to flout the Gricean maxims by governing indirectness, they are not frequently occurred in this dialogue. In contrast, the man tends to flout the maxims more often than the woman does. Moreover, he uses some direct speeches which may offend the hearer's feeling.

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## Appendix

Mark is visiting Bridget in the prison in Thailand.

- 1 B: Mark?  
2 (0.5) hh  
3 M : You are right?  
4 (.)  
5 B : O::h ↑Fine ((laughing) )Hmm hh  
6 (0.5) And (0.2) scared shitless. But you know (.)↑perky ((laughing))  
7 (0.2)  
8 I can't believe you've come for all this way.  
9 M : I haven't. I was out here handling a (.) Foreign Office case when I heard about your  
10 situation  
11 B : I haven't done (.) anything wro:ng. I'll promise you, it's all a bi:g mistake.  
12 M : Yes, well, I'm sure it is  
13 I've got all papers here and I'm sure we can sort it out ((zip))  
14 B : I think about you all the time (.) And I'm so (.) so:rry  
15 I ↑rea:lly, rea:lly am, for e:verything that happened between us.  
16 M : Yes, well (( clears throat))(.)  
17 We don't have much time (.) and I need you to identify someone for me.  
18 Is this the man with whom you were seen taking hallucinogenic mushrooms before  
you  
19 spend the night with Daniel Cleaver in a hotel room?  
20 (0.2)  
21 B : Yes, that's him (.) But, I think you should know ()  
22 M : [The same man who gave you the snake containing the drugs?  
24 B : Yes, that's him. That's Jed. But it was Scha:zzer's snake not mine and and as far as  
Daniel  
25 Cleaver goes....  
26 M : Your sex life doesn't concern me at all (( music background))  
27 (1.2)  
28 Has there been any ill treatment ?  
29 B : No no (.) well (.) () (0.2) the toilets are well (.) below PAR, but  
30 M : fair enough that things make simpler  
31 (0.2)  
32 Listen, there're prepared to drop all charges against you which is extre:mely lenient,  
given  
33 the circumstances  
34 (0.3)  
35 You are going to be out (.) within a week (0.3)  
36 .hh and (0.2) hh ((zip)) Good bye  
37 (0.2) ((Door is opening))  
38 B : Mark? ((clang))  
39 (0.10)  
40 Thank you.  
41 (0.1)  
42 M : You're welcome. I 'm just the messenger. The order came from above.  
43 (0.1) Well, ↑good luck  
44 Glad I could be of help  
45 ((Door is closing)) ((music background))