

Analysis of the Application of Cooperative Principle and Politeness Principle in the Movie *The Lord of the Rings*

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Abstract

The movie *The Lord of the Rings* took the world by storm upon its release, winning 351 international awards and 284 nominations, including 17 Academy Award nominations. It is adapted from the epic fantasy novel, written by Professor Tolkien, which has caused a sensation in UK and even across the globe since its publication in 1954. And Tolkien was then known as “the originator of fantasy literature” and “the father of fantasy literature”. As is thought by some critics, without *The Lord of the Rings*, a modern literary type of fantasy genre would not be produced. The characters in the successful works have different speaking styles whose conversations largely promote the development of plots. Thus, for the purpose of understanding its plots more precisely, it is necessary to find out the Conversational Implicatures, the real meaning conveyed by the speaker, and explore the real meaning expressed by the speakers. Here, the Cooperative Principle and the Politeness Principle in pragmatics will be helpful. Therefore, this paper analyses some selected conversations in *The Lord of the Rings* which violate the Cooperative Principle and the Politeness Principle in pragmatics. It aims to find out the generation of the Conversational Implicature or the effects of these conversations in characterization and plot arrangement. Meanwhile, it may also be enlightening for analyzing daily conversations in various occasions of real life.

Keywords

The Lord of the Rings; The Cooperative Principle; The Politeness Principle; Conversational Implicature.

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

The Lord of the Rings trilogy is adapted from the fantasy novel of the same name written by John Ronald Reuel Tolkien, who was a successful British writer, poet, linguist, and also a professional of ancient English language and literature at Oxford University.

The story is about some ancient rings symbolizing power. The long lost One Ring to Rule Them All of Dark Lord Sauron has been found by accident and given to Frodo, a Hobbit, whose quest to destroy the One Ring in Mount Doom where the Ring was made will be the only hope for the end of the Dark Lord's reign!

The novel and the films are of great value in literary and in linguistics, in which each character is designed to speak in different styles due to different positions or personalities, so that the writer could better portray the images as well as create reasonable plots. Given that, this thesis explores some selected typical dialogues in *The Lord of the Rings* from the perspective of the Cooperative Principle (“CP” for short) and the Politeness Principle (“PP” for short) in pragmatics.

1.2. Significance of the Research

The significance of the study is presented as following:

First of all, this research verifies that the Cooperative Principle and Politeness Principle can be used to study *The Lord of the Rings*. It concerns about the characters' dialogues, and through deep analysis, their personalities can be revealed, which may also help audiences get a comprehensive view of the theme.

Second, most studies on *The Lord of the Rings* have been finished from the perspective of aesthetics or literary criticism, while little about its dialogues has been done. Thus, there would be a fresh attempt if the movie is studied from the perspective of the CP and the PP.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Previous Studies on the Lord of the Rings from Different Perspectives

In terms of the literature criticism, Li Ying, in 2016, published the paper *The founding significance to fantasy literature of "The Lord of the Rings"*, and she talked about how the novel had pioneered fantasy literary and why fantasy movies thrived thereafter (Li, 2016).

When it comes to language study, Liu Liying mentions in *Narrative Language Style of "The Lord of the Rings"* that as a scholar of middle English, Tolkien seemed to prefer reverse-order, internal rhyme and alliteration (Liu, 2008). Besides, in 2019, Shi Yonglian published *Interpretation of Characters' Language in the Fantasy Movie "The Lord and the Rings"*, in which she appreciates several dialogues of different characters, in attempt to show "the subtlety and perfection of phrasing and grammar". She also says at the end of her essay, "Its essence of language and literature remains to be further appreciated and studied (Shi, 2019)."

As for cultural background, Xing Yiping has analyzed its religious metaphors based on the main line of the story, the point of view, and the personality of the characters in his paper *Analysis of Religious Metaphors in The Lord of the Rings* in 2009 (Xing, 2009).

Furthermore, there are also some cross-cultural studies making detailed Cross-cultural comparison between West and East. For example, Liu Dongmei explains the balance between good and evil and the relationship between religion and human life in *On the Cross-cultural Analysis of the Movie "The Lord of the Rings"* (Liu, 2014). And Sun Jingbo argues that the extent that people interact with nature in the work is quite different from that of East in *Cross-Cultural Analysis of the Cultural Symbols in the "Lord of the Rings"* (Sun, 2013).

2.2. Previous Analysis on Dialogues from the Perspective of the Cooperative Principle and the Politeness Principle

Since the 1970s, the method that analyzing literature works from the perspective of pragmatics, especially the Cooperative Principle, began to flourish. Afterwards, the central frameworks including the CP and the PP and the CI began to be applied to the studies of literary texts. Scholars who approach the CP from more than one perspective are more likely to find the CP most useful. (Lindblom, 2001).

Shao is the first one who applies the pragmatics into literary criticism by analyzing Hamlet with the CP and the PP (Shao, 1990). As for recent research, Wang Tingting provided a typical research case in her *Conversational Implicature in "Flipped" from the Perspective of the Cooperative Principle and Politeness Principle* (Wang, 2019).

So far, there has been a lot of research on *The Lord of the Rings*, but most of them are from the perspective of cultural transmission, literary meaning, film appreciation or media marketing, while very few, if any, scholars have studied it from a linguistic perspective. Also, when studying the language of the work, researchers usually take the original novel as the subject, while the movie version seems to be ignored. Given that, the author tries to enrich related research by analyzing the typical selections in movie trilogy from the perspective of the CP and the PP.

3. Theoretical Framework

The research is finished under the guidance of pragmatics theories concerning the Cooperative Principle and Politeness Principle.

3.1. The Cooperative Principle and its Four Categories

In 1967, H. P. Grice, a linguistic philosopher, was invited to deliver a lecture at Harvard University, and it was then that he, for the first time, outlined his theory of conversational implicature, abbreviated as CI, which aims to explain the means by which a hearer can understand the implied meaning when a speaker is not explicit but actually attempting to convey far more than expressed meaning.

Grice suggested that in conversational interaction people generally observe certain underlying principles to make their conversation more successful by proposing the Cooperative Principle (CP) and its four conversational maxims in *Logic and Conversation*. The four maxims might help us understand that implicature, and they were formulated as follows:

3.1.1. Maxim of Quantity

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

3.1.2. Maxim of Quality

- (1) Do not say what you believe to be false.
- (2) Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

3.1.3. Maxim of Relation

Be relevant.

3.1.4. Maxim of Manner

- (1) Avoid obscurity of expression.
- (2) Avoid ambiguity.
- (3) Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).
- (4) Be orderly (Thomas, 2014).

3.2. The Politeness Principle and its Six Categories

Although the CP succeeds in explaining the link between what is said and what is meant, it fails to reveal why a speaker resorts to such an indirect way when expressing himself and why itself is often violated in real life. Later, politeness was found very important, so the PP was introduced separately and then began to share the equal status as Grice's CP (Liu, 1987). The PP runs as follows:

3.2.1. Tact Maxim

- (1) Minimize cost to other.
- (2) Maximize benefit to other.

It is the most important maxim of the PP.

3.2.2. Generosity Maxim

- (1) Minimize benefit to self.
- (2) Maximize cost to self.

3.2.3. Approbation Maxim

- (1) Minimize dispraise of other.
- (2) Maximize praise of other.

3.2.4. Modest Maxim

- (1) Minimize praise of self.
- (2) Dispraise of self.

3.2.5. Agreement Maxim

- (1) Minimize disagreement between self and other.
- (2) Maximize agreement between self and other.

3.2.6. Sympathy Maxim

- (1) Minimize antipathy between self and other.
- (2) Maximize sympathy between self and other (Jenny, 2014).

3.3. Summary

In this part, the system of the CP and the PP, the theoretical framework of the paper, is simply described, and in the following research, all the data collected will be classified and analyzed according to the criteria.

4. Analysis of the Violation of the CP and the PP in the Movie *The Lord of the Rings*

In this part, 16 dialogues selected from *The Lord and the Rings* by referring to the CP by Grice and the PP by Leech, as a theoretical framework.

4.1. The Violation of the Cooperative Principle

In real communication, there are often various phenomena that violate the principle, resulting in conversational implicature or illocutionary meaning (Chen, 2019).

4.1.1. The Violation of the Quantity Maxim

Example:

Arwen: *You have the gift of foresight. What did you see?*

Elrond: *I looked into your future, and I saw death.*

Arwen: *But there is also life. You saw there was a child. You saw my son.*

Elves can be immortal, but only in the Far West, extremely far from the Middle-Earth. Elrond, the Lord of the Elves, has been trying to persuade his daughter Arwen, the Princess, into sailing west for her longevity, who has fallen in love with a mortal man in the Middle-Earth, unwilling to leave. In this scene, Arwen asks about her future, while Elrond merely mentions their death and withholds some details of positive aspect, which provides less information than expected and violates the maxim of quantity and implies that he does not want Arwen to know that there is still possibility of her permanent stay in the Middle Earth.

4.1.2. The Violation of the Quality Maxim

Example:

Bilbo: *I've thought up an ending for my book: "And he lived happily ever after to the end of his days."*

Gandalf: *And I 'm sure you will, my dear friend.*

This dialogue takes place between Bilbo and Gandalf when they are parting. Bilbo is starting another journey, full of unknown factors, and probably an extremely perilous one. When Bilbo is praying for himself in his way, Gandalf replies, "I'm sure you will", which violates the maxim of quality because there is no evidence that Bilbo will be safe and happy in the coming days. The violation of the quality maxim may occur when the speaker says something without enough evidence or tell lies. Usually, the speaker does not tend to tell lies, but in some cases the speaker does that because of some particular situational or cultural difference (Li, 2015).

Example:

Frodo: *It's just a feeling. I don't think I'll be coming back.*

Sam: *Yes, you will. Of course, you will. That's just morbid thinking. We're going there and back again, just like Mr. Bilbo. You'll see.*

This is a dialogue between Frodo and Sam. Every day Frodo is in a dangerous situation, with life hanging by a thread. Frodo thinks he will be caught or killed and never have the chance to go back home safely. Samwise, the companion, speaks words of cheer like "Yes, you will...", which violates the maxim of quality. No one will criticize a beautiful white lie, for everyone is allowed to reserve this good wish. With Sam's encouragement, Frodo succeeds in the end and comes back safe and sound. Indeed, yes, he will.

4.1.3. The Violation of the Manner Maxim

Example:

Saruman: *What do you want, Gandalf Greyhame? Let me guess. The Key of Orthanc. Or perhaps the Keys of Barad-dur itself, along with the crowns of the seven kings and the rods of the Five Wizards!*

Gandalf: *Your treachery has already cost many lives. Thousands more are now at risk.*

This dialogue takes place between Saruman and Gandalf. They two had been friends at first, but then became enemies since Saruman began to serve the Dark Lord, an evil demon with great power. The dialogue takes place between Gandalf and Saruman when they meet again after Saruman was defeated and captured by Gandalf, who always fights for justice. Apparently, Saruman hopes to be spared by currying favor with Gandalf through asking what benefits he wants. But Gandalf does not tell what he wants from Saruman, and he only replies by condemning Saruman's evil deeds, which provides unrelated information than Saruman expects to get. This violates the maxim of relation and generates a CI that "Saruman will not be forgiven despite his juicy terms."

As is required by the manner maxim, speaker's words should usually be related to the topic in a conversation. But out of some reasons, people may deliberately provide information which is not relevant to the topic if they want to avoid the topic or change the topic.

Example:

Frodo: *What food have we got left?*

Sam: *Let me see... Oh, yes... Lovely. Lembas bread. And look! More Lembas bread.*

This dialogue happens between Frodo and Sam. During the long journey to Mordor, Frodo and Sam have to suffer from thirst and hunger, as if they were toiling across a desert of tough conditions. So they very much cherish food. When Frodo asks about the food, Sam checks his backpack and finds that Lembas bread is the only food left. Sam could have briefly said, "Just Lemvas bread," but he just cannot bear to tell Frodo the bad news, so he replies in a prolix way, which violates the maxim of manner.

According to Grice, the manner maxim requires the speaker to talk briefly and orderly to avoid ambiguity and obscurity (Jenny, 2014). When a speaker uses obscure and ambiguous words on purpose in a prolix or disordered way, the maxim of manner is violated (Shao, 1990).

Example:

Gandalf: *It was more than mere chance that brought Merry and Pippin to Fangorn. A great power has been sleeping here for many long years. The coming of Merry and Pippin will be like the falling of small stones that starts an avalanche in the mountains.*

Aragorn: *In one thing you have not changed, dear friend. You still speak in riddles.*

Gandalf: *A thing is about to happen that has not happened since the Elder Days. The Ents are going to wake up and find that they are strong.*

The background of this conversation is that Merry and Pippin rushed into the Forest of Fangorn by mistake, where Ents, the ancient creature with a great power, sleep. As fate would have it, Merry and Pippin's unexpected arrival is going to wake up Ents. At first, Gandalf only mentioned "a great power", but he did not point out who or what it exactly was, which made the listener confused. Aragorn knew him best: Gandalf was a knowledgeable wizard, well versed in history and the present, who spoke lyrical, elegant but obscure language, and who often withheld information. So it was not until Aragorn complained that Gandalf began his further explanation. Gandalf's obscure words violate the maxim of manner.

4.2. The Violation of the Politeness Principle

In *The Lord of the Rings*, the PP is seldom violated unless there is intense conflict or the speaker is a roughneck. Here are examples of the violation of the tact maxim.

Example:

Gandalf: *The courtesy of your hall is somewhat lessened of late, Theoden King.*

Theoden: *Why should I welcome you Gandalf Stormcrow?*

This dialogue happens between Gandalf and Theoden when they meet again after a long separation. "The courtesy of your hall..." is the first thing Gandalf says to Theoden King, complaining that he should have been treated much well. Though Gandalf is annoyed, he still politely adopts a respectful attitude and adds the word "King" after the name of "Theoden". However, instead of greeting or apologizing, Theoden flings out hard words in a rhetorical question, calling him "Gandalf Stormcrow", which apparently violates the tact maxim, and generates the CI that Gandalf is unwelcome in Rohan. This dialogue shows the different social status and also conflict between Gandalf and Theoden.

Example:

Legolas: *These trees are talking to each other. They have feelings, my friend. The Elves began it. Waking up the trees, teaching them to speak.*

Gimli: *Talking trees... What do trees have to talk about? Except the consistency of squirrel droppings.*

This is a dialogue between Legolas and Gimli. They are now in the Forest of Faragorn, where talking trees named Ents live. When Legolas, an elf, whose ancestor had taught the Ents to speak, is introducing these trees, Gimli replies in a disparaging way, "Except the consistency of squirrel droppings." Gimli is a towering gruff, red-bearded Hobbit, who is frank but vulgar all the time and everywhere. He knows clearly that the Ents were listening to their conversation as the third party, but he has no respect for their feelings and makes a coarse joke on them, which violates the tact maxim. Gimli is a red-bearded Hobbit, and his language relentlessly betrayed him that he is just an uneducated, silly and outspoken bumpkin.

4.3. Summary

This part illustrates and analyses 18 examples selected from the movie *The Lord of the Rings* through the observation or violation of the CP or the PP, and finally finds out how the CIs are generated. The results show that both Grice's CP and Leech's PP help us to appreciate literary work and even better understand the real personal relationship by precisely judging the hostility or kindness contained in words.

5. Conclusion

The study analyses the characters' dialogues in *The Lord of the Rings* which violate the cooperative principle or the politeness principle. This part mainly concentrates on the major findings of the research, limitations of present research and some suggestions for further study.

5.1. Major Findings of the Study

The occurrence of CI has close relationship with the violation of the CP and the PP. This thesis conducts a primary study to investigate the implicature of dialogues. Also, the personal relationship can be identified with the help of the two principles. The conclusions are as follows: First of all, the generation of implicature is closely related to the CP and the PP. It can be found in the results that the CP is a general term while the PP is more important in most cases. People do not always need to provide or obtain information; instead, to create a harmonious atmosphere and to maintain a good interpersonal relationship is more desired by participants. The CP is involved during information exchange while the observation of the PP is often required to create a friendly atmosphere.

Second, the relationship between characters can be understood by analyzing their dialogues with the CP and the PP. For instance, in the movie, friends like Sam and Frodo, as well as relatives like Frodo and Bilbo, usually talk according to the PP. And people tend to give priority to the PP, the remedy of the CP, if there is a conflict between these two principles. But the reason why a speaker violates the PP varies from person to person, and the factors may involve intense speech conflict, personal relationship, education, different social status, etc.

Third, the four maxims of the CP the are sometimes self-conflicting under certain circumstances. In other words, people may observe one maxim at the cost of violating another.

5.2. Limitations and Further Suggestions of the Research

The thesis analyses the utterances in movie *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy from the perspective of the Cooperative Principle and Politeness Principle. But there remain limitations:

First, it would be better if more linguistic materials are involved. The result will be more precise with more data. Many typical examples are not analyzed here because the limitation of the time, still they are equally worth noting.

Second, due to the different cultural backgrounds and ways of thinking, how the author interpreted the dialogues in the movie may be a little different from the writer's original meaning.

Finally, the limitation is about structure. All the dialogues in the paper are classified according to the maxims they violate instead of speakers themselves, which increases the difficulty in personality analysis of each character.

Due to the limitations above, some suggestions for further study are proposed here. Above all, to make the results more comprehensive and convincing, more representative and typical materials need be selected as research subjects. Then, samples can also be grouped by other different standards according to various research goals. At last, it could be better if more rhetorical devices are adopted in literary analysis.

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