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## An Analysis of Conversational Implicature in Nirvana in Fire from the Perspective of Cooperative Principle

Guo Fang<sup>1</sup>, Li Xin<sup>2</sup>

### ABSTRACT

American linguistic philosopher P. Grice believes that in all the language communication activities, there is a tacit understanding between speakers and hearers to achieve a specific goal; and both sides should abide by the principle, that is Cooperative Principle. The Cooperative Principle includes four maxims: the maxim of quantity, the maxim of quality, the maxim of relation and the maxim of manner. In people's daily life, they do not always follow the Cooperative Principle during the communication. When they violate one of the maxims of the Cooperative Principle, there is implicature. And only when the hearer shares the same knowledge with the speaker, the communication could move smoothly. In recent years, a variety of subjects Chinese TV series emerge. Especially, the historical TV plays become more and more popular around the world. Nirvana in Fire which was released in 2015 is well received. This story revolves around a young man Lin Shu who is devoted to revenging for his father and Chi Yan Army. The plots are ups and downs and at the same time the dialogue between the characters is also very characteristic. In this thesis, the author mainly uses the theory of Cooperative Principle and implicature to analyze the dialogue in Nirvana in Fire. By analyzing the selected examples, we can better understand the character, the plot and the theme. Due to the limitation of the material and the current competence of the author, the selected examples are mainly classical examples. In case study, the author analyzes the every maxims of violating the Cooperative Principle to help the readers better understand the characteristics of the characters and the development of the plot. Meanwhile, the author also hopes to help the readers know more about Grice's Cooperative Principle and Conversational Implicature.

**Keywords:** Conversational Implicature, Cooperative Principle, Dialogue, Nirvana in Fire, The Violation of Maxims. This is an open access article under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License.

### 1. Introduction

<sup>1</sup> School of Foreign Language, North China Electric Power University, China. E-mail: [gf922@163.com](mailto:gf922@163.com)

<sup>2</sup> School of Foreign Language, North China Electric Power University, China

## 1.1 Cooperative principle

In 1967, Oxford philosopher Herbert Paul Grice put forward Conversational Implicature Pragmatics. Grice believed that people's talk was not made up of a bunch of incoherent words under normal circumstances. The most obvious feature of conversation is that it is a kind of rational, cooperative and purposive behavior. The reason for people's conversations are able to go smoothly is that both sides follow the certain purposes, and act in harmony with each other. He considered that people should follow some principle, when they are communicating with each other, and this principle is called the Cooperative Principle (CP). The Cooperative Principle has four maxims which I will introduce in the following.

- **Quantity**
  1. Make your conversation have the sufficient information just as it is desired (for the present aims of the exchange).
  2. Do not make your conversation more informative than it is desired.
  
- **Quality**

Try to make your conversation be faithful.

  1. Do not say what you think is not faithful to the fact.
  2. Do not say that for which you do not have enough evidence.
  
- **Relation**

Make your conversation be correlative.
  
- **Manner**

Be coherent.

  1. Be clear.
  2. Make your utterance avoid ambiguity.
  3. Make your utterance avoid prolixity.
  4. Be regular.

(Grice, 1975)

However, the maxims of the Cooperative Principle which Grice had put forward could not solve all problems. In spite of the four maxims we have mentioned, there are other rules that people should follow when communicating. There is no doubt that the CP is not perfect and scholars should make more efforts to perfect the explanation of implicature. For example, in the following studies, Levinson proposed the Politeness Principle which I would explained it with detail in the following chapter.

## 1.2 Conversational implicature

The theory of Conversational Implicature was first known to people in 1967 by Grice in his speech at Harvard University. According to Paul Grice, if people want to understand the implicature of the conversation, the listener should share the same knowledge with the speaker, and he should know why the speaker flouts the maxims of the Cooperative Principle (Grice, 1967).

In the end of Grice's speech, *Logic and Conversation*, Grice mentioned some characteristics of conversation implicature (Grice, 1967). They are calculability, which means we can calculate the implicature from the utterance; cancellability, and it's also called defeasibility, and it can be explained as the present implicature in spite of relying on the CP, it also be determined by the conversational meaning of the word it used, the linguistic and situational context, etc.

If any of them changes, the previous implicature can be canceled; non-detachability, which means implicature is not detached to the linguistic form and it's relevant to the semantic content;

non-conventionality, by this characteristic we mean that the implicature meaning is not same with the literal meaning of the words. When the context changes, the implicature will become different.

In this paper, the author will analysis the implicature of dialogues in *Nirvana in Fire* in the perspective of Cooperative Principle to better present the art of conversation in *Nirvana in Fire*. This study also has some advantages which I will introduce in the final of the paper and in the future there needs more things to do to make the study better.

## 2. Literature review

Grice's Cooperative Principle is considered as the ideal communication, but with the evolution of study in cooperation, the disadvantages also become more and more obvious. And many scholars review the CP from a new view. Focusing on the shortage of the academic circles, there are three significant schools solving the problems of CP. First, some scholars sustained Conversational Implicature, especially for its quantity maxim and do the more specific study of it. For instance, Levinson (1983) following Gazdar (1979a) takes account into scalar Quantity implicatures and clausal Quantity implicatures. Furthermore, he proposes the principle of informativeness, that in some situation allows us to read more information than the utterance actually contains (Levinson, 1983). Second, scholars finished other principle which is based on supplementary principles. For example, on the basis of CP, Leech created another parallel principle--Politeness Principle which has six maxims, they are tact maxims, generosity maxims, modesty maxims, approbation maxims, agreement maxims and sympathy maxims (Leech, 1983). And the third one completely put away the Cooperative Principle and created other principles. Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson's (1986) Relevance is the instance of this aspect (Hu Zhuanglin, 2011:184).

Recently, Cooperative Principle has been faced with many criticisms, Ladegaard was one of the representatives. By analyzing the asymmetric conversation between teachers and students, he believed that no consociation was the priority of communication strategies, the unsuccessful dialogue may be the purpose of utterance. He believed that the concept of cooperation must be studied in aspect of what people want to know in communication (Ladegaard, 2008).

The Cooperative Principle has become more and more popular in China and many scholars begin to analysis the words from the aspect of the Cooperative Principle. And there has a promising future for the study of the Cooperative Principle. And Chinese researchers should continue remedying the disadvantages of the CP and apply it in more fields.

## 3. The study of Nirvana in fire

### 3.1 Nirvana in fire

*Nirvana in Fire* is a famous Chinese TV play which is based on an Internet novel written by the author Hai Yan. This play is often called the Chinese version of *The Count of Monte Cristo*, the story acts around a young and wise man named Lin Shu, whose father worked as a general in the Chi Yan army. Already a high-ranking military officer in his teenager years, and Lin Shu had a close relationship with the Prince Xiao Jingyan and he was engaged to Princess Ni Huang.

At the age 17, however, Lin Shu's life became totally different when his father's army was trapped by a scheming political rival. With the help of his soldiers, Lin Shu escaped from death. He fell off the cliff, due to the cold environment, his became very weak and frail. Finally, he was saved by Lin Shu who is the host of Lang Yage. However, as Lin Shu was poisoning too deep, Lin Chen has to the unusual method to cure him. After the treatment, he lost Kong-Fu and his face was totally different from before.

There are the following main norms and characters in *Nirvana in Fire*:

- Lang Yage is the imagery situation which doesn't exist in the real life. It has high prestige in Jiang Hu, and people who wants to ask for the help of Lang Yage has to pay the price.
- Lang Yabang is the ranking list of people who has powerful Kong-Fu in Jiang Hu.
- Jiang Zuo Alliance is created by Mei Changsu. The members of Jiang Zuo Alliance are mainly the people related to Chi Yan Army and the aim of the creation of it is to revenge for Chi Yan Army.
- Chi Yan Army is the elite crops organized by Lin Shu's father and aims to fight for Liang Country, however, it was trapped in the fight of Mei Ling. Unfortunately, only Lin Shu and Nie Feng (the member of Chi Yan Army) were survived.
- Lin Shu, the most important character in *Nirvana in Fire*, is brave and intelligent. After the experience of death in the face, he changed his name into Mei Changsu, the host of Jiang Zuo Alliance, as his face was totally different. in order to revenge for the army, he prepares for 12 years. Eventually, he succeeds in helping Xiao Jingyan become the King of Liang and avenging the injustices dealt to his army.
- Xiao Jingyan also called the Prince of Jing, the best friend of Lin Shu when they were young, eventually become the King with the help of Lin Shu.
- Ni Huang, the fiancée of Lin Shu, is the manager of Prince Gong Mansion. She is in charge of the safety of the southern part of Liang.
- Meng Zhi who is the general of Yu Lin Army assists Lin Shu in the process of revenge.
- The Concubine Jing who is a beautiful and intelligent princess is the mother of Xiao Jingyan.
- Lin Chen who helps Lin Shu in his difficult time is the host of Lang Yage.

Until now, the study of *Nirvana in Fire* mainly focuses on the costume, the analysis of the personality of the characters, and the development of the plot. As far as I know, there is no article talks about the implicature of the dialogue based on the Cooperative Principle in *Nirvana in Fire*. In the following part, the author will analyze the typical dialogues in *Nirvana in Fire*.

## 3.2 Data analysis

### 3.2.1 Conversational implicature generated by violating the maxim of quantity

As we mentioned before, the maxim of quantity concludes two sides: firstly, the speaker should provide sufficient information as it is required; secondly, the speaker should not provide more information than it is needed. In *Nirvana in Fire*, people usually provide more or less information to express their implicature. This part mainly talks about the violation of the maxim of quantity. One problem is that both sides should grasp the meaning of conversation, otherwise, the ideal effect will not achieve in the end.

Here comes the examples:

#### Example 1

Eunuch, Your Majesty, His Highness Prince Jing has come back and he asks to see you.  
(The emperor continues to writing, it seems that he doesn't hear the words of eunuch)

....

Crown Prince (said to the Eunuch): Shut up, shut up.  
(They continue to talking about the calligraphy.)

When the eunuch informs the coming of Xiao Jingyan, the emperor, Crown Prince, and the Prince Yu were talking about the calligraphy. The emperor gave no answer to the request. In this sense, he violated the maxim of quantity. We can implicate that the emperor did not want to let the Prince Jing come into the Palace. It also shows his irresponsibility to the Prince Jing. In the long time. The emperor didn't like the Price Jing, as he had the relation with the Chi Yan Army.

#### Example 2

The emperor: So, it is not only done by Han Li, maybe, the Crown Prince also knows something about it?  
Shen Zhui: Lou Zhijing was the Ministry of Revenue, the official with a rank more than band four. But the supervisor of the Household of the Heir Apparent—Han Li is only the official with a rank of band four. According to the account, every year, Lou Zhijing takes only 20% of the benefits and Han Li takes the rest.

This conversation occurred between Shen Zhui and the King as for the affair of Han Li—a corrupt officer. Shen Zhui was the righteous officer who is in charge of the affair of Han Li. In the above conversation, Shen Zhui did not answer King's question directly, obviously, he flouted the maxim of quantity. He provided more information to express that the crown prince had the association to this affair and he was the controller of it.

#### Example 3

(After going on talking with Nie Feng deep into the night, the prince Jing knew the true condition of the fight in Mei Ling. He was very angry and overturned the table. At that moment, Mei Changsu walked towards the Prince Jing.

Mei Changsu: Your highness, if we want to achieve your aim, now, it's not suitable to reiterate the case of Chi Yan Army.

The Prince Jing: Now way! Mr. Mei, I have to readdress that my aim is to redress the fabricated case and rehabilitate those who have been wronged in the case of Chi Yan Army. This is the most important thing for me, and I can do not care of other matters.

This conversation occurred between Mei Changsu and the Prince Jing after the Prince Jing met Wei Zheng (a soldier in Chi Yan Army) and knew the fact of the war happened 12 years ago. The aim of Jing Wang was to tell the truth of Chi Yan Army to people, since he knew the fact of it, he wanted to others know it as soon as possible. And Mei Changsu reminded the Prince Jing that it was not appropriate for him to retry the case of Chi Yan Army. However, the Prince Jing did not simply said "no way", actually, he gave more information to show his determination.

#### Example 4

Concubine Jing: Have you given your regards to your father?

The Prince Jing: Yes, I have. And my father has just taken a nap.

(In this moment, the Prince Jing has just come back from Mei Changsu)

The Prince Jing: My dear mother, it seems that you have known Mr. Mei for a long time.

Concubine Jing: Finally, you still want to know the relationship between me and Mr. Mei.

The Prince Jing: But you don't want to tell me about it at all.

This conversation happened after Concubine Jing diagnosed for Nie Feng. The Prince Jing always wanted to know the identity of Mei Changsu, however, considering every aspect, Concubine Jing did not want to let him realize it. When The Prince Jing asked the identity of Mei Changsu again, Concubine Jing did not gave sufficient information, instead, she refused to tell him politely. And we say that she violated the maxim of quantity. And in this way, speaker could maintain the relationship between the speaker and the hearer.

### 3.2.2 Conversational implicature caused by flouting the maxim of quality

The maxim of quality has regulated the authenticity of conversation. It requires that the speaker should say something that is not false and he should not say something that he does not have the evidence. In daily life, people sometimes provides false information to express the implicature. According to Grice, irony or lying has violates the maxim of quality, but this kind of violation could be useful to express the implicature during the conversation. If one wants to understand the implicature, he has to know the context in which conversation occurs. And this part will discuss the violation of quality in *Nirvana in Fire*.

## Example 5

The Prince Yu: Look at yourself, you are always so serious! And you are so talent, one day, you must will be the Price of Liang!

The Price Jing: Do you have other things to do?

This conversation occurs between the the Price Yu and the Price Jing. The Prince Yu always wanted to be the King in the future, however, the Prince Jing was not admired by the King. So , the Prince Yu said the irony to the Prince Jing to express that although he was struggling, it was impossible for him to be the Prince. As for the answer of the Prince Jing, we can see that the Prince Jing understood the implicature of Yu Wang and he didn't want to communicate with Yu Wang any more, thus he said "do you have anything to do?"

## Example 6

Minister A&B: Good morning, my lord.

The Prince Jing: You're welcome.

Minister A: My lord, a few days later, it's the time to the jarlig the Eastern Palace. Are you unhappy about it?

The Prince Jing: Impossible. I am very happy about it. Nowadays, the Emperor has dissolved the department of Xuan Jingsi, and the question of poverty has been solved. How can I unhappy about this prosperity.

Xuan Jingsi was department specially doing for the emperor. And it was this department which trapped the Chi Yan Army 12 years ago. With the help of Mei Changsu, they succeed in defeating the Xuan Jingsi.

This conversation occurred between The Prince Jing and two secretaries, the secretaries noticed the unhappiness of the Prince Jing, instead, the Prince Jing said he was happy. The Prince Jing lied, and he just didn't want to let the ministers notice his unhappiness, so, in this sense, he flouted the maxim of quality. Because he knew that if he wanted to be the emperor, he must to bear the suffering by himself.

## Example 7

Ni Huang: You have endured so much pain and suffering, when you endured these terrible things, where am I? I didn't accompany you in that moment!

Mei Changsu: Ni Huang, actually, in these years, I...

Ni Huang: Do not say other things. I just want to know how long your life is left. I can do not pursue anything you have deceived me. But I have to know how long can you accompany in the world.

Mei Changsu: Ten years.

Ni Huang: That's enough. Promise me, you will not leave me in these ten years.

Ni Huang and Mei Changsu they loved each other so much when Mei Changsu was still Lin Shu. After a long time, Ni Huang knew Mei Changsu is her boyfriend Lin Shu. When Ni Huang knew the experience and condition of Mei Changsu, they had the above dialogue. As for the answer of the question that how long can Mei Changsu live, Mei Changsu lied. For this aspect, he violated the maxim of quality. He can not live for ten years. Ni Huang and Mei Changsu, they loved each other when they were very young. Mei Changsu did not want to make Ni Huang upset, so he lied to Ni Huang. He wanted to let Ni Huang happy in the following time instead of being worried about him.

### 3.2.3 Conversational implicature caused by flouting the maxim of relation

According to Grice, the maxim of relation means that the words should be relative to the discourse. During our conversation, we usually give some irrelevant information to show our indifference to the topic or indirectly to show that it is not the right moment to discuss this question. This part will show the examples violating the maxim of relation in *Nirvana in Fire*.

## Example 8

Ji: We intentionally break into Jiang Zuo Alliance. Please forgive us!

(Fei Liu throw the friend of Ji into the cold water)

Mei Changsu: Mr.Ji, the water is too cold to do business. I persuade you do not do business before the beginning of spring.

Ji: Yes, Mr.Mei, you are right...

(Ji bows to Mei, and he waved his hand to suggest the captain to leave the boat from the Jiang Zuo Alliance.

The leader of Shuang Cha Alliance and his friend intruded the realm of Jiang Zuo Alliance. The friend of Ji did not know the rule of Jiang Zuo Alliance, and he abused Mei Changsu. Fei Liu (the guard of Mei Changsu) caste him into the cold river. When Ji interceded with Mei Changsu, instead of saying something relevant to his question, Mei Changsu said, “the water is too cold to do business”, which was not relevant to the question of Ji. However, the implicature of Mei Changsu was that it was better for Ji not to save his friend.

#### Example 9

Ni Huang: I can wait for you to become my brother Lin again.

Mei Changsu: Mu Qing is coming back. Wipe away your tears and do not let him recognize that you have cried. I have to leave.

(As saying this sentence, Mr.Mei turns around)

This conversation occurred in Ni Huang’s home. Ni Huang and Lin Shu grew together and they love each other. After the disaster, even though Lin Shu’s outlook became totally different from before, Ni Huang could identity him and she always waited for the day that everything becomes the same as before. But Mei Changsu knew that everything had gone changed and it can not go back. When Ni Huang said, “I can wait for you to become my brother Lin again”, Mei Changsu did not reply her request, instead, he says, Mu Qing (the brother of Ni Huang) is coming back. Wipe away your tears and do not let him recognize that you have cried. I have to leave. Mei Changsu said something irrelevant to the discourse, according to his irrelevant words, we can conclude that he does want to talk about it, because he clearly knew that they can not go back and he did not want to break Ni Huang’s heart.

#### Example 10

Mei Changsu: Papa,papa...

(Mei Changsu is in a coma.)

The Prince Jing: Mother, what is he saying?

The Concubine Jing: Finally, we saved his life. We have to pay more attention in the small hours. His breath is unstable, and we can not lay him down.

In this conversation, Mei Changsu was seriously ill. When the Concubine Jing treated Mei Changsu, Mei Changsu said some nonsense. Because the Prince Jing always wanted to knew the identity of Mei Changsu, if he heard clearly what Mei Changsu said, he can confirmed that Mei Changsu was Lin Shu, so when the Prince Jing asked, “Mother, what is he saying”, the Concubine Jing did not answer him. the Concubine Jing said something irrelevant to the question of the Prince Jing to escape the problem.

### 3.2.4 The conversational implicature caused by flouting the maxim of manner

The manner maxim requires that the speaker should be concise in the conversation, do not use ambiguous and prolix words in their conversation. When people express their meaning, they usually flout the manner maxim because of the influence of emotion. This part will analyze the example of violation of manner in *Nirvana in Fire*.

#### Example 11

Zhuo Dingfeng: Please forgive me, my brother Xie. Mr.Yue and I both in the list of *Nirvana in Fire*. If I do not receive his challenge, it suggests that I have already surrendered.

Mr.Xie:But today...

Zhuo Dingfeng:Don’t worry about it. I will try my best to handle it. Trust me!

This conversation occurs in Xie Yu’s home. Xie Yu is Xiao Jingrui’s father. He was also the enemy of Lin Shu. In the day of Xiao Jingrui’s birthday, Yue came to challenge with Zhuo Dingfeng. But if Zhuo

Dingfeng fought with Yue, he would expose his level of Kong Fu, and Meng Zhi could judge that he was the murderer of an affair, and Xie Yu was behind the event. When Zhuo Dingfeng said he would accept the challenge of Yue, Xie Yu said an uncompleted sentence. According to the maxim of manner, the speaker should try to make the conversation to be perspicuous. In other words, the sentence should avoid obscurity and ambiguity. Xie Yu's words is obscure and ambiguous. If Zhuo Dingfeng did not share the same acknowledge with Xie Yu, he could not indicate the implicature of Xie Yu. And what Xie Yu actually meant that there were too many people, if Zhuo Dingfeng made a mistake, they would be doomed to die.

#### Example 12

Meng Zhi: It's normal that you're unhappy, because Nie Feng is in poisoning. But the Prince Jing also feels down in recent days. Why is he worried about?

Mei Changsu: You should think for him. There has a heavy load on his shoulder, so, it's not surprising that he is tired. I can talk with you guys, how about him? With whom can he talk? Even though the concubine Jing can comfort him, they can not see each other every day.

Meng Zhi: Yes, that's right. When people has higher power, he has less friends to talk with. When he becomes the emperor, he will become more unhappy. I think that you should tell your true identity to him, in that way, he will...

(Suddenly, Meng Zhi stops talking.)

Meng Zhi made an incomplete sentence and it made audience have the feeling of ambiguity. The reason is that he realized that it is wrong to said "I think that you should tell your true identity to him, in that way, he will...", because of this sentence, he noticed the change of expression of Mei Changsu, so he stopped saying. In this way, it can avoid the embarrassment of communication.

#### Example 13

Mei Changsu: How about him?

Lin Chen: Comparing to you, it's nothing.

Mei Changsu: You have never deal with that poison, are you OK?

Lin Chen: If you do not believe me, why do you ask for my help? I think it's time to go.

(Lin Chen turns around)

(Mei Changsu: Stops!)

(Lin Chen comes back again)

Mei Changsu: If I can find your father, I would not ask for your help.

Lin Chen: OK, I agree that if he is serious like you in those years, maybe, I can not help. But ...he is not very much serious, it is a piece of cake. But... you know..., the procedure of curing is very suffering, and maybe, there has a big change of his face, other terrible changes. So, you need to talk with him about it. If he can accept it, I will cure him.

(After saying these words, Lin Chen left Mei Changsu starring.)

This conversation occurred after Lin Chen treated Nie Feng, when Mei Changsu asked the method of treatment, Lin Chen said, "But ...he is not very much serious, it is a piece of cake. But... you know..., ". Lin Chen did not said the method clearly, in this aspect, he flouted the maxim of manner, because the method was so painful, and he did not want to explain it. As for Mei Changsu knew this method, so he can understand the meaning of Lin Chen.

## 4. Conclusion

This thesis analysis the dialogues from *Nirvana in Fire* according to the western theory of pragmatics, that is, Grice's Cooperative Principle. The characters in the fiction try to convey their implied meaning by violating the maxims of the Cooperative Principle.

*Nirvana in Fire* is one of the most popular TV plays in China in 2015. And many dialogues in it are very interesting and are worth analysing. The thesis illustrates so many examples selected in the TV play to prove that the Cooperative Principle plays an indispensable role in analyzing the TV plays *Nirvana in Fire*.

There is no difficult to understand the implicature through Grice's Cooperative Principle. Pragmatics is a discipline which makes a language significant as the research subject. It studies the words in specific context and studies how to understand the extra meaning through the context. According to the Cooperative Principle and the violation of the maxims, this papers shows the character's implied intention and helps the audience better understand the plot.

However, this paper also has the disadvantages. On the one hand, it does not include the all examples in the *Nirvana in Fire*. And the examples it gives are the only classical ones. This paper just gives a brief analysis of talks in *Nirvana in Fire*. And the author welcome others who are interested in this play and the Cooperative Principle to share their opinions or give advises to the author. One the other hand, there exist certain deficiencies in analyzing the dialogues in *Nirvana in Fire*. It is due to the competence of the author. Meanwhile, it is also related to the lack of achievement in analyzing the dialogues in *Nirvana in Fire* by using the theory of Cooperative Principle. The author just know a prat of knowledge about implicature, so the author's ability is limited. And more, *Nirvana in Fire* is a Chinese TV play, and until now, there has no English version, and all the lines are translated by the author self. So if there has any mistakes, your comment will be appreciated. There is a new perspective on the interpretation of the Chinese TV plays. And scholars should analyze the dialogue in Chinese TV plays through various theories to make Chinese Pragmatics better and better.

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