

An Analysis of Conversational Implicature in *Flipped* from the Perspective of the Cooperative Principle

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Abstract: *This paper takes Grice's Cooperative Principle as the theoretical framework, and the American film Flipped as the study object and the dialogues between the female protagonist and other characters as the corpus. This thesis mainly studies the conversational implicature generated by violating one of the maxims of Cooperative Principle, namely: violation of quality maxim, violation of quantity maxim, violation of relation maxim, and violation of manner maxim. Then, Julie's personality is analysed through those conversational implicatures. This study finds that Julie dares to defend her own rights. She is innocent, kind, reasonable, romantic, and optimistic. She is passionate about the things and people around her. She has an independent and mature mind and her own judgment on things. This study can help readers better understand the content of the film and the personality of Julie, learn the purpose and meaning of people's violation of cooperative principle, and accurately express their own opinions and implicit meanings.*

Keywords: *Cooperative Principle; Conversational Implicature; Shaping the Personality; Flipped*

1. Introduction

Grice (1975) ^[1] put forward Cooperative Principle for the first time when he delivered a lecture entitled Logic and Conversion at Harvard University in 1976. In his opinion, successful communication requires both sides of the communication to observe the principle of cooperation and their conversation should move towards the same direction. However, the implicit meaning, called conversational implicature, will arise when people intentionally violate the maxims of Cooperative Principle in daily communication. Later, Cooperative Principle has been applied to different fields. First, Lusi and Rina (2021) ^[2] analyzed the use of Cooperative Principle in a Facebook group. They found that although violation of the maxims is inevitably in actual communication, the communication can still be effective and understandable as long as both sides of the conversation are aware of the implications of the conversation. Second, Reza and Agwin (2023) ^[3] examined the collaborative nature of successful conversations between teachers and students. The study illustrated that Cooperative Principle can boost students' cultural understanding, which helped students to develop a sense of respect and appreciation for different cultures.

In China, Grice's Cooperative Principle was first introduced by Hu Zhuanglin (2001) ^[4], then many scholars have studied this principle and achieved certain achievements. For example, Han Ling (2016) ^[5] analyzed five representative dialogues in *The Great Gatsby* and explored the application of this principle in the dialogues of the characters. The study concluded that it was feasible to use Cooperative Principle to analyze the dialogues in the novel. Besides, by using everyday conversations as the corpus, Bi Mengyuan (2019) ^[6] examined the implicit meanings that arose from the violations of the Cooperative Principle. The paper concluded that communication can go on well when both parties of the communication are in the same context and the implicit meaning expressed by the speaker is realized by the listener. And changes in conversational meaning included several situations, but the key was for the speaker to do his best to make the listener aware that he deliberately violated the principle of cooperation, in this way, the true meaning of the dialogue can be inferred.

With the deepening of China's opening up to the outside world and the acceleration of globalization, excellent film and television works from home and abroad have reached the world audience, which included *Flipped*, an American film adapted from the novel of the same name written by Wendelin Van Draanen. It has been highly acclaimed since it broadcasted, partly due to the fact that it enables domestic audience to experience exotic culture, enriches their knowledge and horizons, and promotes cultural exchanges between the two countries. Previous scholars have studied the lines of film and television works from the perspective of cognitive linguistics and pragmatics. However, few previous scholars have

analyzed the conversational implicature in *Flipped* or explored the character's personality in terms of the Cooperative Principle. Therefore, by using the qualitative approach as the main method, this paper aims to provide an in-depth analysis of conversational implicature of the lines in *Flipped* under the theoretical basis of Grice's Cooperative Principle. Besides, the paper analyses the deep meaning of the lines as a means of examining Julie's inner world, the theme of the story, and the function of the conversational implicature resulting from the violation of Cooperative Principle.

2. Theoretical Framework

Grice put forward Cooperative Principle and the theory of conversational implicature, which are often used to analyze the meaning and function of utterances in pragmatics.

2.1 Cooperative Principle

Grice (2002) ^[7] gave a definition of Cooperative Principle: make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the state at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged. And Cooperative Principle consists of four maxims. According to this principle, speakers usually strive to make their speech clear, easily understandable, relevant to the context, concise, and focus on the topic (Ismi & Didin, 2021) ^[8].

2.1.1 The Maxim of Quality

The maxim of quality is to provide true and accurate information rather than false or unsubstantiated information. It stresses the importance of being honest and avoiding spreading false content. The speaker should be truthful and credible, and promote credible and meaningful communication. By adhering to the quality maxim, people can build trust between each other and improve the credibility of communication.

Example 1:

She has a book.

In communication, this statement indicates that the speaker thinks she has a book, and the speaker also has sufficient evidence to prove that she has a book. Therefore, this sentence is in line with the quality maxim.

2.1.2 The Maxim of Quantity

The maxim of quantity is to provide the right amount of information required for the conversation, which should be neither too much nor too little, so that the expectation of conversation can be fulfilled. This maxim helps the speaker to communicate clearly and concisely, promotes effective understanding between both parties in communication.

Example 2:

A: How many colors do you find?

B: I find three colors.

B answers to A's question about the number of colors without elaborating on which colors they are. This is an example of following the quantity maxim.

2.1.3 The Maxim of Relation

In the process of communication, people should provide relevant information so as to maintain the effectiveness and efficiency of communication. This maxim ensures the content of the dialogue is related with the context and the purpose of the communication, promotes the understanding of the communication, and facilitates effective problem solving, decision making, and knowledge sharing (Reza and Agwin, 2023) ^[3].

Example 3:

A: What do you think about my new dress?

B: It is beautiful and matches your makeup.

A: Thank you.

B's reply completely fits the topic of this conversation. What B provides is relevant information, that is, how A's new dress is. After B praises A's new dress, A expresses her gratitude. The conversation focuses on a common theme, so the communication can go on smoothly.

2.1.4 The Maxim of Manner

The maxim of manner requires the information provided by the speaker is clear, concise, and orderly, rather than ambiguous or difficult to understand. This maxim emphasizes the importance of using proper language, which refers to uses correct grammar and vocabulary, and organizes ideas logically.

Example 4:

(a) I want to eat ice cream.

(b) I want to eat I-C-E-C-R-E-A-M.

These two sentences express the same idea, but sentence (a) is shorter and easier to understand than sentence (b). People tend to use the expression of sentence (a) in daily life, and the use of sentence (b) is usually to emphasize the strong desire to eat ice cream, rather than other food. In general, people prefer clear sentences, rather than ambiguous expressions.

2.2 Conversational Implicature

As a core term in pragmatics, conversational implicature plays a crucial role in communication. It typically arises when people intend to conceal their true thoughts or state their opinions in an indirect manner. Besides, in film and television works, directors often use implicit meanings to shape characters and promote the development of the story.

Grice pointed out that conversational implicature has five characteristics. First, cancellability means that when certain factors of communication change, such as words, phrases, and context, the originally implied meaning in the conversation may be cancelled. Second, non-detachability means that conversational implicature is not separated by synonym substitution at the pragmatic level, or in linguistic form. In other words, in a given context, implicit meaning exists no matter how the linguistic form of a synonym changes. The third feature is calculability. Conversational implication is usually simple and therefore easy to interpret. And the listener is able to infer the implicit meaning from literal meaning of the dialogue based on the Cooperative Principle and the specific setting of communication. The fourth feature is non-conventionality. According to Grice, conversational implicature is not part of the surface meaning, but rather derives from it, so the literal meaning of the conversation will remain basically unchanged.

2.3 Violation of the Maxims

In communication, the participants are supposed to cooperate with each other. But sometimes, in order to achieve certain goals, people will disobey certain maxims. This is called the violation of the maxims, which results in conversational implicature.

2.3.1 Violation of the Quality Maxim

If people provide false information or information that lacks evidence, we treat this situation as a violation of quality maxim. This violation can be seen in sentences that use rhetorical devices, such as exaggeration, metaphor, rhetoric question or sarcasm.

Example 5:

A: Thank you very much for what you have done for us.

B: Not at all. This is the least I could do.

What B says contradicts the reality, because a person can do various things and help others a lot. Therefore, this conversation violates the maxim of quality. However, B's reply can often be heard in daily life, and people know that B observes the principle of politeness. In fact, B's reply is an example of modesty in Chinese culture, that is, lowering others' appreciation of oneself.

2.3.2 Violation of the Quantity Maxim

When people communicate with others, the communicator may deliberately add or delete certain information to express his or her true feelings.

Example 6:

A: How did Tom do on his exam?

B: Oh, not at all well. They asked him things that happened before the poor boy was born.

For A's question, the utterance "Oh, not at all well" is adequate. But in this conversation, B adds something unnecessary—the reason why Tom did badly in the exam. Thus, this conversation violates the maxim of quantity. B seemingly thinks that it's not Tom's fault that he didn't do well in the exam, but because he was asked about things that happened before he was born.

2.3.3 Violation of the Relation Maxim

The violation of the relation maxim happens when the speaker says something that is not relevant to the topic of communication, then this irrelevant information may be used to disrupt the process of communication and divert the focus of the original topic. In this case, he may try to avoid answering a question by changing the subject, or by answering the question in a different way.

Example 7:

A: Could you please tell me the time?

B: The milk man has just come.

Here, A asks for the time, but B answers A with milkman, thus it violates the relation maxim. On the surface, B's answer is not related to A's statement, but we can assume that B abides by Cooperative Principle. Then, we can estimate that, in B's opinion, A's original knowledge reserves the information about the time the milkman usually delivers milk. Thus, A should be able to deduce the approximate time.

2.3.4 Violation of the Manner Maxim

Sometimes, in order to produce the desired conversational implicature, such as creating humor, satire, or other communicative effects, people will deliberately utter some wordy, ambiguous sentences. This shows the dynamic and context-dependent characteristics of communication.

Example 8:

A: What did your sister buy in the shop yesterday afternoon?

B: Oh, she bought a red dress, she bought a green dress, and she bought a yellow dress.

In response to A's question, B could simply mention the three dresses that his sister bought in the store, but he listed them one by one, it is too wordy. Therefore, it violates the manner maxim of brevity. It can be inferred that B may express that his sister bought too many dresses at one time.

3. Violation of Cooperative Principle in *Flipped*

From the perspective of the Cooperative Principle, this paper analyzed the conversations that violate the four maxims in the *Flipped* respectively, studied the conversational implicature contained in them, and explored Julie's personality from the conversational implicature.

3.1 Introduction to *Flipped*

Flipped has been highly acclaimed since it broadcasted. The film tells the growth of the two protagonists and reflects on issues such as growth, family, reality and dream, truth and hypocrisy. At the beginning of the story, the Bryce family moved to the town of Julie's family. And Julie fell in love with this little boy at the first sight due to his bright eyes. Then, she tried her best to approach Bryce, but Bryce avoided it. After experiencing the "buttonwood incident" and "egg storm", Julie did not like Bryce any more. Later, she accidentally heard Bryce's slander of her family, Julie began to sort out her feelings and gradually felt disappointed about Bryce. However, with a family dinner and a "Lunch Boy" contest, Bryce realized how much he cared about Julie. Therefore, he apologized and planted a fig tree in Julie's yard. Finally, they became good friends again.

Besides, there have been some studies on *Flipped*. Guo Ruijiao (2023) ^[9] evaluated the subtitle translation of *Flipped* from Skopos theory. The study pointed out that the application of the Skopos theory in the film was mainly reflected in the translation problems caused by cultural differences. Therefore, in order to present the film successfully, translators need to understand the film deeply, take the principles

of coherence and fidelity into account and choose appropriate translation strategies. He Ming (2018)^[10] interpreted the film from the inner monologue, interaction and emotional trend between the two protagonists. He Jianli (2022)^[11] analyzed the symbolism of the tree in *Flipped*. The research pointed out that the fig tree symbolized the growth of the two teenagers, and they moved towards the sun just like the tree. Even though they suffered setbacks, they still maintained their desire for good.

3.2 Violation of the Quality Maxim in *Flipped*

Example 9:

Richard: What's going on with you and, uh, Bryce Loski?

Julie: What do you mean? Nothing.

Richard: Oh, okay. My mistake.

Julie: Why would you even think that?

Richard: No reason. Just that you talk about him all the time.

Julie: I do? I don't know. I guess it's something about his eyes. Or maybe his smile.

This conversation happened after Julie's beloved tree was cut down, but Bryce refused to help her prevent the tree from being cut down. They didn't talk afterward. Julie's father asked about the matter between them, then Julie answered with "nothing", but in fact, they had a contradiction over the tree. So, Julie deliberately provided a wrong information, which violates the quality maxim. Julie's father said that Julie had often talked about Bryce in the past, but Julie responded with "I don't know", this was untrue. Thus, this was a misinformation, which is also a violation of quality maxim. The conversational implicature of these two violations is that Julie had not been aware of her feelings for Bryce. This reflects that Julie is an innocent and kind person, she is passionate about the things around her.

3.3 Violation of the Quantity Maxim in *Flipped*

Example 10:

Bryce: I'm sorry for what I did.

Julie: I just don't get it, Bryce. Why didn't you just tell me?

Bryce: I don't know. It was dumb. And I shouldn't have said anything about your yard, either. It wasn't right.

Julie: Maybe it's all for the best. I mean, look, I learned so much from Chet, it's amazing. You're lucky. I don't even have grandparents anymore. I feel sorry for him. He misses your grandma. Can you believe it? He says I remind him of her.

Bryce apologized for throwing Julie's eggs and saying that her yard was dirty. Julie only needed to reply "maybe it's all for the best" for Bryce's apology without adding any other information. But she said more than that, she mentioned Chet, saying that she learned a lot from him and that Chet missed Bryce's grandma. These sentences are superfluous and unnecessary information. Thus, they violate quantity maxim. The implicit meaning of these sentences is that Julie was upset about Bryce's bad behavior, and she has gained a lot from mowing the lawn. It can be seen that Julie is a rational person and she has a positive attitude towards life.

Example 11:

Sherry: I hear you're planning to bid on Bryce.

Julie: What? Who told you that? No, I'm not.

Sherry: Someone saw you with a wad of cash this morning. How much do you have?

Julie: It's none of your business. And I'm not bidding, okay? I don't even like him anymore.

Sherry: Oh, that'll be the day.

Julie: It's true. Go ahead, waste your money on him. I don't care.

Sherry thought Julie would bid on Bryce and then they started the above conversation. Sherry asked Julie how much money she has prepared. Julie's reply "it's none of your business" was enough for

Sherry's question, but she emphasized that she was not joking, and she didn't like Bryce anymore. These are all superfluous information and are not necessary for the conversation. Thus, they violate the quantity maxim. The implicit meaning is that Julie was no longer interested in Bryce. This conversation shows that Julie is a mature and independent girl.

3.4 Violation of the Relation Maxim in Flipped

Example 12:

Bryce: Hi. You look nice.

Julie: I heard you and Garrett making fun of my uncle in the library. And I don't want to speak to you. Not now, not ever.

Bryce: Julie, can I talk to you? It was wrong, what Garrett said. I know it.

This plot took place in the party where Bryce's family invited Julie's family. Bryce talked to Julie about how beautiful she looked that night. Then, Julie should reply to his praise, but she said Bryce's taunting of her uncle in the library and that she didn't want to talk to Bryce anymore. This was completely irrelevant to Bryce's praise, which is a violation of relation maxim. Julie's implicit meaning is that Bryce's mockery of her uncle made her disgusted and his behavior was completely wrong. This shows that Julie is a girl with self-respect and she dares to defend her own rights.

Example 13:

Richard: Are you okay?

Julie: It was just a tree.

Richard: No, it wasn't just a tree. I never want you to forget how you felt when you were up there.

Julie: Thanks, Dad.

This conversation took place after Julie's favorite tree had been cut down. When Julie's father asked Julie about her feeling, Julie should have said that she was sad or depressed, but Julie mentioned the tree, which was not directly related to her father's question. Therefore, she violated the relation maxim. The implication of this sentence is that Julie was unhappy because the tree was cut down. It shows that Julie enjoyed her time in the tree and the view seen from the tree. This reflects Julie's love for nature and life. And she is a romantic person and good at discovering beauty.

3.5 Violation of the Manner Maxim in Flipped

Example 14:

Julie: Where's Clyde? Clyde? Hey, Clyde. What's the matter? Are you okay? Aren't you hungry? Come on. Come here. What's wrong, baby? Come here. Hey, you're not Clyde. You're Clydette.

This was what Julie said to the chicken. She was looking for Clyde and asked it what was wrong. Because it is well known that humans and chickens can't have conversation with each other, the hearer may not realize that Julie was talking to a chicken at the beginning. Thus, this sentence causes ambiguity and makes the hearer misunderstand it. Therefore, these sentences violate the manner maxim. The implication of Julie's saying is that she treated chickens like humans, and she gave them names and paid attention to their lives. This shows Julie's enthusiasm for life and love for small animals.

Example 15:

Mrs. Steuby: Julianna. Hello, dear. I'm so sorry it's taken me so long to get this to you, but I keep missing you in the morning.

Julie: Mrs. Steuby, I don't want that. You don't have to...

Mrs. Steuby: Don't be ridiculous. I'm gonna pay you. I'm going to pay you.

Julie: I don't want that. I don't want it.

The plot is based on the condition that Julie gave eggs to Mrs. Steuby. Mrs. Steuby wanted to give Julie the money for the eggs, but Julie didn't want to take her money. The sentences "I don't want that" and "I'm gonna pay you" would be enough, but both Mrs. Steuby and Julie repeated by "I don't want it" and "I'm going to pay you". Hence, these two sentences violate the manner maxim of "be brief". The

implication of this conversation is that Julie didn't want to bring money to school, because she was afraid that she would bid on Bryce. This shows that Julie still has a crush on Bryce, and she is a reasonable girl and has her own opinions about things.

4. Conclusion

From the perspective of the Cooperative Principle, this paper analyzes the conversational meaning of the dialogues between Julie and other characters in *Flipped*. Then, this paper studies the personality of Julie according to conversational implicature.

4.1 Findings of the Research

By analyzing the conversations in the film, the paper draws the following conclusions. First, the characters in the film do not always abide by the principle of cooperation. On the contrary, they often violate this principle, which results in different conversational implicatures. And their personality and the plot of the story are vividly described by these implicatures. Second, due to the similarity between film and television works and daily life, the methods and techniques used to study film and television works can also be applied to study dialogues in daily life. Besides, if the speakers want to maintain a good interpersonal relationship in the communication, they are supposed to put themselves in others' shoes, eliminate bad feelings, respect each other and use appropriate language to communicate.

4.2 Research Significance

This paper has theoretical significance and practical significance. Theoretically, this thesis supports the hearers to detect the deep intention from daily communications in the film. In addition, this paper explores the violation of the Cooperative Principle of film lines, which is helpful to the development of pragmatic study in film and television works. Practically, the study of lines can analyze Julie's character. It allows people to use communication strategies accurately to achieve communication goals. The study of film and television works also helps the audience to understand western culture. Besides, conducting this study is necessary because it provides a linguistic explanation of the phenomena in everyday life.

4.3 Limitations and Future Prospects

There are still some shortcomings in this study. First of all, this paper only applies Cooperative Principle as the theoretical framework, other theories such as Politeness Principle and relevance theory can also be adopted. Second, the dialogue quoted in this article is randomly arranged, which is not consistent with the development of the film. Third, there are not many examples in this paper, so the research results should be improved to be more effective. Additionally, there are some suggestions for future research. First, different theoretical principles should be used to analyze dialogues. Second, the layout of the quoted dialogue could be more logical, so that it can be consistent with the development process of the research object. Third, more dialogues should be collected and studied. In this way, the research results can be applied to more fields.

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