

Discourse Analysis of *Oliver Twist* from the Perspective of Pragmatics

Min Lian
Shanxi Normal University, China

Abstract—As a great representative of the British realism literature in the 19th century, Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist* is set in foggy city London, but reflects the complex social reality in that time. Many domestic scholars studied and analyzed this novel from different perspectives, while most of them paid much attention to the literature translation and analysis of the characters' image, few studied it from the perspective of pragmatic theories. In view of it, this paper selects plenty of dialogues from the novel and they are classified and analyzed on the basis of Grice's Cooperative Principle and Leech's Politeness Principle. After analyzing the characters' conversational implicature, this paper aims to provide a linguistic reference for the appreciation of characters' image and social significance of the novel. The paper consists of introduction, main body and conclusion three parts. Introduction part gives a simple introduction of the author Charles Dickens and the novel, then states the previous researches on the subject as well as the research angle, goal and method. The body (consists of two chapters) firstly gives a detailed introduction of the theoretical framework, then analyzes the selected dialogues on the basis of Cooperative Principle and Politeness Principle respectively. Conclusion part puts forward that people always express their ideas indirectly and implicitly in their speech communication to violate the Cooperative Principle, that is out of consideration of politeness to others, namely observing Politeness Principle.

Index Terms—conversations in *Oliver Twist*, Cooperative Principle, Politeness Principle, conversational implicature

I. INTRODUCTION

As a great representative of English literature in the 19th century, Charles Dickens has finished many works in his life, among which *Oliver Twist* is best known to the world. The novel describes the life of an orphan named Oliver and reflects the cruel reality in London in that time. After classifying and analyzing the conversations in *Oliver Twist*, this paper mainly studies the novel from the angle of Cooperative Principle and Politeness Principle based on previous study. There are 61 conversations connected with the protagonist in the novel, among which 24 are concerned with the CP and PP. This paper chooses 17 ones closely related to the theme of the novel to analyze. By doing that, the paper aims to further prove that the CP as an influential theory of explaining conversational implicatures also has its shortcomings, while the PP as a complement to it has great importance in people's communication. People always violate the Cooperative Principles so as to observe the Politeness Principle.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the past few years, many scholars studied *Oliver Twist* from different angles, and most of them paid much attention to the analysis of characters' image or language translation, while few studied the novel from the perspective of pragmatics. For example, Miao Yang from Xi'an University of Petroleum studied the novel from the perspective of characters' image analysis; Liu Jingxiang from Zhongnan National University also studied it from this angle; Lu Danlu from Taiyuan Urban Vocational College made the study of image research on 'London' city and Lai Qiaolin from Yangtze University studied the limitations of Dickens' thoughts. Different with these studies, the paper studies the novel from the perspective of Cooperative Principle and Politeness Principle, which aims to further prove that the PP can explain some problems the CP is difficult to solve in people's actual communication.

III. THEORETICAL BASES

In this part, mainly Grice's Cooperative Principle and Leech's Politeness Principle will be elaborated.

A. *Grice's Cooperative Principle*

H. P. Grice believes "Our talk exchanges do not normally consist of a succession of disconnected remarks, and would not be rational if they did. They are characteristically, to some degree at least, cooperative efforts." (Hu, 1987, p.177). That is in all language communications both the speaker and hearer have the willing to make the conversation be successful by cooperation together. And Grice believes that there must be some mechanisms governing the production and comprehension of these utterances. This is what Grice calls the Cooperative Principle (abbreviated as CP).

1. The Maxim of Quantity

The maxim of quantity means that the speaker should provide enough information in the conversation, neither more nor less than required. This principle contains two aspects: (1) make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purpose of the exchange); (2) Do not make your contribution more informative than is required. (Liu, 2006)

[1]:

The stranger: Hi, where will you go?

Xiao Ying: Somewhere far from here.

This conversation happens on the subway, a stranger sitting next to Xiao Ying asks her where she will go, and Xiao Ying does not provide more detailed information truthfully, she violates the maxim of quantity on purpose. It can be explained as carrying an implicature that the speaker doesn't want to reveal her precise location.

2. The Maxim of Quality

The Maxim of quality means try to make your contribution one that is true, i.e. (1) Do not say what you believe to be false. (2) Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence. (Liu, 2006)

[2]:

A: Really? When did he get married?

B: Two years ago.

A: With whom?

B: I think he married a tiger.

This conversation happens in a school gathering, A and B once were classmates in high school. They are talking about their classmate C. It is clearly that B violates the maxim of quality, because no one will marry a tiger. Maybe the speaker means to say that the wife has some characteristics of tiger and maybe she is not gentle and bad-tempered.

3. The Maxim of Relation

Be Relevant. (Liu, 2006)

The maxim of relation demands the speaker provide information closely connected with the ongoing conversation, that is, to say something be relevant. While in daily life, people always violate the maxim of relation to produce some extra conversational implicatures.

[3]:

A: Can you tell me the truth?

B: Jone is here.

In this example, the speaker B openly violates the maxim of relation. He says something has nothing to do with the conversation, but it is easy for the hearer A to assume that B does not want John know the truth, so A does not persist in asking for the truth.

4. The Maxim of Manner

The Maxim of manner means the speaker should say something in a clear manner, that is to be perspicuous. This principle contains four aspects: (1) Avoid obscurity of expression; (2) Avoid ambiguity; (3) Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity); (4) Be orderly. (Liu, 2006) While in daily life, people sometimes use ambiguous words to produce extra conversational implicatures.

[4]:

A: Where do you live in?

B: Near the bank.

Here B is not willing to tell A the place in which he lives. So he violates the maxim of manner and gives a very obscure answer. In this example, he answers A and actually avoids telling his privacy.

In simple terms, the CP implies that we should say something true in a relevant and clear way, as well as informative enough.

B. Leech's Politeness Principle

English linguist Leech puts forward the Politeness Principle (abbreviated as PP) so as to rescue Grice's CP which only explains how conversational implicature is produced but does not explain why people tend to express opinions indirectly and implicitly. So PP is proposed to make up the shortage of CP when CP fails to offer a reasonable explanation.

1. Maxim of Tact

(i) Minimize cost to other.

(ii) Maximize benefit to other.

2. Maxim of Generosity

(i) Minimize benefit to self.

(ii) Maximize cost of to self.

3. Maxim of Approbation

(i) Minimize dispraise of other.

(ii) Maximize praise of other.

4. Maxim of Modesty

(i) Minimize praise of self.

(ii) Maximize dispraise of self.

5. Maxim of Agreement

- (i) Minimize disagreement between self and other.
- (ii) Maximize agreement between self and other.

6. Maxim of Sympathy

- (i) Minimize antipathy between self and other.
- (ii) Maximize sympathy between self and other. (Liu, 2006)

This principle requires speakers to minimize the expression of impolite beliefs (Liu, 2006) and its maxims explain why certain forms are more acceptable than others. Some examples are listed for each principle respectively and they are arranged as decrease of politeness.

[5]:

Would it be possible for you to lend me your English book?

Lend me your English book!

You must lend me your English book!

Maxim of Tact explains why people tend to use the first three expressions while the last two are rarely used. The reason is that the politeness is decreased greatly.

[6]:

Do have another apple!

Please have another apple!

Would it be possible for you to have another apple?

The maxim of Generosity requires us to be generous to others. The first three expressions shows the speaker's generosity more clearly, so it seems more polite and acceptable to others.

[7]:

You are the best cook in the world.

You certainly know something about cooking.

What an awful meal you cooked!

The maxim of Approbation explains why the expression " what a marvelous meal you cooked" is better than " what an awful meal you cooked".

[8]:

A: What a clever boy you are! You get full marks in this exam.

B: Thanks. My teachers teach me these.

Thanks. The exam questions are not hard.

Yes. How clever am I.

The maxim of modesty explains why people tend to use the first three expressions while the last one is never used. Because this utterance openly againsts the maxim of modesty.

[9]:

A: This movie is really interesting, don't you think?

B: Yes, absolutely.

I'm sorry, but I can't agree with you.

No, it's boring.

The maxim of agreement requires us to attempt to soften it in various ways if expressing disagreement is inevitable. So, the expression " I'm sorry, but I can't agree with you" is highly valued than "No, it's absolutely."

[10]:

A: Last Saturday I fell off the bike and hurt my foot.

B: I'm sorry to hear that, are you all right now?

It's unfortunate that you hurt your foot.

It is your business.

The maxim of sympathy explains why people tend to use the expression two rather than the last kind of expression. It is out of politeness to others to establish and maintain a harmonious relations in society.

IV. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

A. Violation of CP in *Oliver Twist*

In *Oliver Twist*, there are 61 conversations between the protagonist Oliver and other characters, the paper selects 17 conversations as study materials in which 8 ones are related to the CP and 9 ones are related to the PP.

1. Violation of the Maxim of Quantity

The maxim of quantity demands people provide enough information as is required in the conversation, neither more nor less. While people often violate this maxim, they always express their conversational implicatures by two ways: providing more information than required and less information than required. Putting it simply, that is overstatement and understatement.

[1]:

"Get up!" murmured Sikes. " get up, or I'll strew your brains upon the grass."

"Oh! for God's sake, let me go!" cried Oliver;" let me run away and die in the fields. I will never come near London-never, never! Oh! (Dickens, 2000, p.152)

This dialogue happens between Sikes and Oliver when Oliver knows for the first time that they will get him involved in the housebreaking and robbery. Oliver is so kind and he is not willing to do that but Sikes had caught him under his arms then, he is so frustrated and worried that cried to say many words. He says "let me go, let me run away, never,never" so many times. In this example, Oliver violates the maxim of quantity aims to get his sympathy.

[2]:

"Come, come!" said the good doctor, "You will see them directly, and they will be overjoyed to find you safe and well."

"Oh! I hope so!" cried Oliver. (Dickens, 2000, p.221)

This conversation happens between Oliver and the doctor. The good doctor and Mr. Losberne will bring Oliver to visit Mr. Brownlow and now, they are looking for the house in the street where Mr. Brownlow resided. So Oliver is so excited that he repeats the words so many times. The expression "They were so good to me-so very, very good to me." violates the maxim of quality, and form that we can see clearly that Oliver is so kind and grateful.

2. Violation of the Maxim of Quality

The maxim of quality demands speakers say what is true, but not want he or she believes to be false or lacks adequate evidence. While in our daily life, people always violate the maxim of quality to produce extra implied meaning.

[3]:

"What for?" echoed the girl, raising her eyes,..... "Oh, for no harm."

"I don't believe it," said Oliver. (Dickens, 2000, p.139)

This dialogue happens between Oliver and Nancy who are kind actually, but out of helpless she became a thief from the start. Now, she comes to bring Oliver to see Bill who will sends him do a robbery. Oliver knows nothing about what he will face with so he asks Nancy about it. Nancy says "for no harm" which violates the maxim of quality because it is not accordant with her following answer and the fact. By violating the maxim of quality, Nancy means to bring Oliver to Bill quickly and does not want Oliver be frustrated because he is so kind and scared when facing this kind of thing.

[4]:

"In a word!" cried the gentleman, "better or worse?"

"Better, much better!" replied Oliver, hastily.

"Thanks Heaven!" exclaimed the gentleman. "You are sure?"

"Quite, sir." replied Oliver. (Dickens, 2000, p.233)

This dialogue happens between Mr. Giles and Oliver. When it comes to Miss Rose's state of illness, Oliver deceives him to please him and actually, on his part, he also hopes and believes Rose will be better soon or later. It is clearly that this expression againsts the fact and so violates the maxim of quality. Oliver aims to encourage Mr. Gile and himself, he is so kind and innocent.

3. Violation of the Maxim of Relation

If the speaker violates the maxim of relation, he may say something which has nothing to do with the on-going conversation. By violating this maxim, there's always extra conversational implicature produced.

[5]:

"Now, you are a nice young fellow, ain't you?" said Sowerberry

"He called my mother's names," replied Oliver. (Dickens, 2000, p.45)

This dialogue occurs between Mr. Sowerberry and Oliver. Oliver can't stand up Noah's insult to his mother and has a fighting with Noah. While all of the people put the blame on Oliver, he is dragged into the dust-cellar and locked up. The master Mr. Sowerberry feels irritated and asks Oliver angrily, but Oliver gives an answer which has nothing to do with the question. He says "he called my mothers" which implies it's not his fault and he is not a bad boy.

[6]:

"Did you want a coffin, sir?" inquired Oliver innocently

"You don't know who I am, I suppose, Work' us?" said the charity boy

"I'm Mister Noah Claypole," said the charity boy, "and you're under me" (Dickens, 2000, p.29)

This dialogue happens between Oliver and the charity boy Noah. They meet here the first time, so Oliver don't know Noah at all. When the door is kicked, Oliver asks if he wants a coffin, while Noah answers something which is not concerned with the question completely. Noah says his name and tells that Oliver is under him, then demands Oliver do some jobs. By violating the maxim of relation, he means that he doesn't like Oliver and it would be better if he will be obedient to him. This reflects Oliver's miserable life again.

4. Violation of the Maxim of Manner

If the speaker violates the maxim of manner, he may says something ambiguous,obscure or out of order to produce conversational implicatures.

[7]:

"Come, get up," said the man, roughly.

"It wasn't me," said Oliver

"They are here somewhere." (Dickens, 2000, p.65)

This conversation happens between Oliver and the man who catches him. Oliver is mistaken for the thief who stole Mr. Brownlow's handkerchief. When he is caught by a man, he said "It wasn't me, indeed, sir. Indeed, indeed, it is two other boys." It is clearly that the ambiguous words "somewhere" and "other" violate the maxim of the manner. By violating this maxim, Oliver's implicature is produced, that is he knows who stole Mr. Brownlow's handkerchief and where they are, but he doesn't speak out their names and just says their rough position. He wants to prevent himself from hurting but doesn't want to hurt his "partners" so he employed ambiguous words to convey his implicature.

[8]:

"What for?" echoed the girl, "Oh, for no harm."

"I don't believe it," said Oliver, (Dickens, 2000, p.139)

This dialogue happens between Oliver and Nancy and we analyzed this conversation in section 3.1.2. Here the expression "Oh, for no harm." violates the maxim of relation again. When is asked what he will need to do for Bill, Nancy just says for no harm but doesn't give Oliver the thing detailed. She avoids discussing of it deliberately because she has to bring Oliver to Bill successfully and if telling the truth, it is most likely that it will be failed. So by violating the maxim of manner, Nancy implies that he has to go back with her and the thing will be done. It reflects Nancy's helpless and Oliver's misery.

B. PP Employed in *Oliver Twist*

In this part, mainly 9 dialogues are selected from the novel and they are explained from the perspective of the application of the PP.

1. Application of Tact and Generosity Maxim

The tact maxim demands people pay attention to the benefit or cost of others, that is other-centered. Conducted by this maxim, people should increase the benefit and decrease the cost of others, speakers should consider more for the hearer rather than himself when they are in communication. And actually the generosity maxim is not need to be distinguished from the tact maxim. Because they all deal with the question of benefit and cost, and they just differ in whether other-centered or self-centered. The generosity maxim pays much attention to the self and it demands the speakers increase the cost and decrease the benefit of himself but consider much for the hearer.

[9]:

"The book-stall keeper, sir!" said Oliver.

"My poor boy, this is disappointment enough for one day," said the doctor. "Quite enough for both of us." (Dickens, 2000, p.221)

This dialogue takes place between Oliver and the doctor when he is hurt badly and looked after by the family he "stole". He and the kind family will leave to the countryside for a life, and Oliver goes to Mr. Brownlow's home at which he was rescued once before he leaves here. But the fact that Mr. Brownlow and his family have left here depressed Oliver very much. When it comes to go to the book-stall keeper's home, the doctor refuses to bring him to, because he considers it is likely that the keeper has not been here, neither. This reflects the application of tact maxim, because the doctor thinks of Oliver's feeling and he does not want him feel sad again.

[10]:

"Good-night!" replied Oliver softly.

.....

"Take heed, Oliver, take heed!" said the old man, "Whatever falls out, say nothing; and do what he bids you. Mind!" (Dickens, 2000, p.137)

This dialogue happens between Oliver and the old Fagin before Oliver is brought to the cruel gang Bill to do some dangerous things. When they have said good night to each other and decided to have a rest, Fagin says something about Bill and warns him to mind. Although the old Fagin is also a gang, he has some kind of mercy on Oliver. He wants Oliver to be obedient to Bill and then he will be safe, because Bill is really cruel and rough. By employing the maxim of tact, we can see clearly that Fagin likes Oliver very much and this will pave the way for the ending of the novel.

2. Application of Approbation Maxim

The approbation maxim is other-centered which demands the speakers try their best to say some pleasant and beautiful words to the hearer in order to establish a harmonious atmosphere or maintain a friendly social relation or out of polite to others.

[11]:

"Here it is, sir," said Oliver,

"You're a clever boy, my dear," said the playful old gentleman, "If you go on in this way, you'll be the greatest man of the time". (Dickens, 2000, p.60-61)

This conversation has been discussed in 3.1.2 which violates the maxim of quality. And here it employs the approbation maxim. Fagin praises that Oliver is clever and he will be the greatest man of the time, these kind words please Oliver very much absolutely and create a positive effect in Oliver. Maybe Oliver will do the train better and make a lot of money for Fain, and they will be more friendly and intimate.

3. Application of Modesty Maxim

The modesty maxim is self-centered which demands the speakers dispraise themselves and do not self-boast in order to maintain a peaceful atmosphere with the hearer.

[12]:

"..... How should you like to grow up a clever man, and write books, eh?"

"I think I would rather read them, sir," replied Oliver. (Dickens, 2000, p.90)

This conversation happens between Oliver and Mr. Brownlow. Oliver is looked after by Mr. Brownlow's family after he is rescued from the prison. Now they are talking about some beautiful books. And when Mr. Brownlow asks if Oliver wants to be a clever man to write books, Oliver just says he'd rather read books. This utterance accords of the modesty maxim. Oliver does not think he is so clever to write these beautiful books, so he'd better to read books. Maybe in his heart, he does not think he could be a greater man in the future, and he is satisfied with his life just like this. This reflects the miserable experiences which he has suffered bring him so much pain and influence.

[13]:

"You can write well now?" said Harry, laying his head upon his arm.

"I hope so, sir," replied Oliver. (Dickens, 2000, p.249)

This dialogue occurs between Oliver and Harry will leave far from here but he is worried about Miss Rose, so he asks Oliver for help and hopes Oliver can write to him, every alternate Monday to the General Post Office in London. When is asked whether he can write well, Oliver just answered "I hope so, sir," which employed the maxim of modesty. Actually, Oliver has made great progress in reading and writing recently. His utterance is accordant with people's daily communication and means that he is willing to do it and is proud to do it, and he is greatly delighted with the commission, whether he can write well or not.

4. The Application of Agreement Maxim

The agreement maxim deals with the relationship between self and other which means that the hearer should always agree with the speaker's ideas rather than disagree with them. It can help to create a more harmonious atmosphere between the hearer and the speaker.

[14]:

"Send Oliver with them," said Mr. Grimwig.....

"Yes, do let me take them, if you please, sir," said Oliver. "I'll run all the way, sir."

.....

"You shall go, my dear," said the old gentleman. (Dickens, 2000, p.96)

This dialogue occurs between Oliver, Mr. Brownlow and Mr. Grimwig. Oliver stays at Mr. Brownlow's home and is looked after by the family. One day, Mr. Grimwig comes here and he does not trust Oliver is a good boy. So he persists in letting Oliver return the books back to the book stall. Oliver believes himself will be an honest boy and seems wants to prove this. So he prays Mr. Brownlow let him go. Mr. Brownlow employs the agreement maxim agrees with him. Because Mr. Brownlow is so kind and he also believes Oliver is a good boy. Therefore, he makes a bet with Mr. Grimwig that Oliver will go and back.

5. The Application of Sympathy Maxim

The sympathy maxim also copes with the agreement maxim which suggests that people should express same feeling or emotion to the speaker. That is, to congratulate him when he is happy and to comfort him when he is sad. By doing that, a more harmonious atmosphere or a more intimate relation is created.

[15]:

"So what?" inquired Mr. Bumble in amazement.

"So lonely, sir! So very lonely!" cried the child. "Everybody hates me. Oh! Sir, don't, don't pray be cross to me!" (Dickens, 2000, p.25)

This dialogue takes place between Mr. Bumble and Oliver. And it is discussed in 4.1.1 which violates the maxim of quantity. Here it employs the sympathy maxim. Oliver says he is so lonely and prays Mr. Bumble doesn't send him away. By observing the sympathy maxim he wants to get the beadle's pity. This reflects the small Oliver's helplessness.

[16]:

"So what?" inquired Mr. Bumble in amazement.

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This dialogue takes place between Mr. Bumble and Oliver which employs the sympathy maxim. Oliver says he is so lonely and prays Mr. Bumble doesn't send him away. By observing the sympathy maxim he wants to get the beadle's pity. This reflects the small Oliver's helplessness again which is closely related to the theme of the novel.

[17]:

"And consider, ma'am," said Oliver "..... I am sure-certain-quite certain-that, she will not die. Heaven will never let her die so young.

"Hush!" said Mrs. Maylie (Dickens, 2000, p.227)

This utterance occurs between Oliver and the old lady Mrs. Maylie who is still worried about Miss Rose's state of illness. Oliver's utterance employs the maxim of sympathy, he also feels depressed and has the same emotion with the old lady. So Oliver says so much to comfort her as well as prays for the beautiful girl who is so young and kind-hearted.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The paper selects 17 conversations from the novel *Oliver Twist*, then classifies and analyzes them on the basis of Grice's Cooperative Principle and Leech's Politeness Principle in Pragmatics. Although there is deficiency in selecting examples, they are selected on a relatively scientific method, which guarantees the scientificity of the study. Part 3 case study makes us come to the conclusion that the Cooperative Principle as an influential theory of explaining conversational implicatures has its shortcomings, then Politeness Principle as a supplement to it has great importance. The CP explains the speakers' implied meaning when they violate the CP, but does not give the reason why people always violate the CP and its maxims. Actually, out of politeness, people always violate the Cooperative Principles to observe the Politeness Principle in their actual communication. Generally, the CP and the PP make a great role in appreciating literary works, they help to provide a more comprehensive understanding of characters' conversational implicatures as well as the their literary images.

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Min Lian was born in Lianfen, China in 1992. She received her Bachelor's degree in English from Lvliang University, China in 2016.

She is currently an undergraduate in Shanxi Normal University, Linfen, China. Her research interests include English and American literature.