

Grice's Cooperative Principle in Empirical Teaching: A Comparative Analysis of Fortress Besieged in Chinese and English

Xian Zhou

The University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh EH8 9YL, the United Kingdom.

Abstract: Guided by Grice's cooperative principle, this paper studies the English translation of *Fortress Besieged* by contrasting the original version, in order to give practical advices in interpretation classes. As personal preferences and various other factors influence the priority of maxims and translators' choices of violating or obeying the maxims, it is important that educators and learners make according alternation in translation activities.

Keywords: Language Education; Pragmatics; Cooperative Principle; Translation

1. Introduction

Grice's cooperative principle (CP) has been considered an important contribution to the area of pragmatics. This concept has greatly influenced the study of languages in the past decades.

This paper, based on the reflections of CP, is a further discussion of the application of CP and its four associated maxims in translation, which is considered a cross-cultural communicative event. *Fortress Besieged*, written by Qian Zhongshu, is a classic and representative Chinese literature, and its English version, translated by Jeanne Kelly and Nathan K. Mao, has been reprinted many times. Through comparing the original Chinese text with the English version of *Fortress Besieged*, this assignment aims to evaluate the equivalence in the process of translating in the light of CP, and also to explore the application of CP in translation area.

2. Cooperative Principle and Criticisms

2.1 Overview of Grice's Cooperative principle

Grice believes that human beings are supposed to follow certain rules of interaction to achieve successful conversations. Based on the ordinary language philosophy, he developed the concept of CP along with four maxims.

In the book *Logic and Conversation*, Grice defined CP as principle that "Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of talk exchange in which you are engaged" (1975, p.45), and classified the four maxims into (1975, p.45-46):

- 1) Maxim of Quality: Try to make your contribution one that is true.
 - 1.1) Do not say what you believe to be false.
 - 1.2) Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.
- 2) Maxim of Quantity:
 - 2.1) Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of exchange).
 - 2.2) Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.
- 3) Maxim of Relation: Be relevant.
- 4) Maxim of Manner: Be perspicuous.
 - 4.1) Avoid obscurity of expression.

- 4.2) Avoid ambiguity.
- 4.3) Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).
- 4.4) Be orderly.

Additionally, Grice clearly distinguished that the interlocutors can fail to fulfil the maxim(s) in various ways, for example, flouting a maxim or violating a maxim, which are two typical kinds of non-fulfilment of CP's maxims. By flouting the maxim(s), the interlocutor fails to observe the maxim(s) and leads to the conversational implicature (Grice, 1975, p.71). The interlocutors may, as Grice states "quietly and unostentatiously" violate a maxim, and in some cases they will be "liable to mislead" (Grice, 1989, p.30).

2.2 Criticisms of cooperative principle

Since the emergence of CP, many researchers have developed critical arguments against this concept. The universality of CP theory from the cross-cultural perspective is one of the most commonly concerned criticisms. It is also addressed as the overgeneralization of CP. Some researchers like Green (1996) hold the opinion that cooperativeness and logical framework are common pursuits for all the interlocutors over the world. Hence CP and its maxims should be universal. However, Hadi (2013) states that Grice himself never clarify that CP can be applied universally. Furthermore, some researches have been conducted to analyze the suitability of CP theory in different linguistic and cultural contexts, and the results showed that CP and its maxims performed differently in different cultures from what Grice suggested. For example, Pham (2010) investigated the CP in Vietnamese language culture and finally concluded that the situations of maxim of Quantity and maxim of Manner weren't aligned with Gricean theory. Another research conducted by Herawati (2013) in the context of Indonesia showed the identical results. As the authors explained in their researches, the inconsistency is possibly because of the different discourse patterns in comparison with English language culture(s) theoretically implied by Grice. Hence, along with many other researchers, I believe that there is a point of acknowledging the possible intercultural influences on CP as the nature of cooperative communication is a social behaviour (Keenan, 1976; Sarangi & Slembrouck, 1992; Clyne, 1994; Zierler & Murad, 2019). In this case, analysing intercommunicative activities between two cultures, such as translation, under the framework of CP can be enlightening. Another major criticism is about the overlook of CP's applicability and practicality in "real language use" (Leech, 1983). To specify, it is believed that in real life language context, there are many other influential factors of cooperativeness. Firstly, Larkin & O'Malley (1973) and Fairclough (1985) pointed out that the majority of Grice's examples are declarative sentences, and hence they are not representative enough, which means the application of the four maxims might be observed differently in other sentence types. Secondly, Grice has only discussed some forms of communication in his work. Some other conversational types like soliloquy and intercultural interaction like translation (Elinor, 1976) are not discussed. Also, the influence of social and psychological conditions and the intention of the speakers (Levinson, 1979; Ladegaard, 2008) were neglected in the discussion of CP and its maxims.

There are also other criticisms of CP and its maxims regarding to its ambiguous definition of "cooperation", the causes of "violation" and etc (Euiyon & Sookhee, 2018; A. Al-zubeiry, 2020). Although the limitations exist, it is undeniable that CP and the four maxims has formed a framework of studying pragmatics and offered an approach to explain the discourses in communicative interactions.

3. Application of Cooperative Principle in Translation

The implementation of CP in the process of translating helps the translators to better reproduce the content with the respect of both cultural metaphors and implied meanings of original texts, which can hardly be discovered without the contexts. Also, the translators have to consider the readers' cultural background to guarantee a successful transfer of information (Malmkjaer, 1998). This paper compares *Fortress Besieged* with its English translation to analyse translators' acceptance and rejection of maxims under the influence of Chinese and English language cultural differences.

Example 1 : 说他调戏汪太太，把她气坏了。还说她自己早看破赵叔叔这个人不好，所以不理他。*She says he flirted with Mrs.Wang and got her upset. She also says that she herself*

had long ago realized that Uncle Chao was no good, so was going to ignore him.

These sentences are extracted from the scene that Miss.Sun repeats Mrs.Fan's complaints about Chao Hsin-mei. Here, the translators translated “调戏” word-by-word literally into “flirt with”. The phrase “flirt with” implies an interactive behaviour, however, in context, it is only Chao who acts indecorously and disrespectfully. Therefore, this translation is slightly wrong. The translation of “was going to ignore him” is also inappropriate, as according to context, Mrs.Wang had been ignoring Chao quite a long time. For the reasons that the translators did not fully comprehend the original text, and did not choose carefully the correspondent expressions, the maxim of quality is flouted, which makes the English version unable to retain the implicature and can not faithfully convey author's intention.

There are many other examples can be illustrated flouting or violating the maxim of quality, such as literally translating 龙眼 (longan) to “dragon's eyes”; “掌柜” (shopkeeper, which is a term no longer in use after modernization) to “cashier” and so on.

To conclude, Grice's theory of CP can be used to reason out the translation. But of course, as discussed in the first part of this paper, in actual situations, it is not necessary and unlikely to make the translation align with all four maxims of CP. Moreover, due to the language cultural differences, it becomes the translators' mission to take both the authors' original meaning and the readers' cognition into consideration, to achieve a more effective communication between authors and readers (Sun, 1995; Malmkjaer, 1998; Zhang & Li, 2020).

4. Applications in Language Education

As a dynamic communicative activity going between two languages, translation varies with “communicative context, the mental, cognitive, cultural, social and linguistic factors related to both participants” (Zhou, 2009, p. 43). Because of the significant differences between China and English-speaking countries in all these aspects, both translating from Chinese to English and from English to Chinese are challenging. It is important for both the educators and the learners to realize that the fulfilment of all maxims is not necessary in translation. The ultimate goal of introducing and employing CP to translation teaching is to help maximize the accuracy of message delivering and to minimize misunderstanding (Sun, 1995).

For the teachers and lecturers, CP can be considered as a ruler, to measure the quality of translation works by evaluating the flouting and violation of maxims. For example, it is feasible and effective to correct and mark students' translation works with CP's framework, and giving advices accordingly. It can also be useful in selecting and explaining course materials. Teachers can analyze the texts and explain how they are able to meet the expectations of translation while the translation script might flout or violate maxims.

For both the teachers and the learners, besides considering CP and the maxim of quality, quantity, relation and manner as a general guideline to reproduce thoroughly the implicature, it is also practical to constantly and consciously use it in order to discover and self-correct the mistranslations. Some activities can be designed to enhance the translating ability. For instance, teachers can ask students to apply CP to their own work after finishing individual translating exercises and then analyze their works. The self-correcting process can make students more confident and also, the reflective discussion of the reasons why flouting some maxims to better ensure some other maxims can help strengthen the ability of critical thinking.

5. Conclusion

To summarize, Grice's Cooperative Principle has made great contribution to pragmatics but also has been criticised for its limitations. This concept can be used to develop and analyze the translation process to achieve better communication of implicature among the authors, translators and the targeted readers. Hence the application of Cooperative Principle in translation teaching and learning can have positive effects.

References

[1] Clyne M. (1994). *Inter-cultural communication at work : Cultural values in discourse*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- [2] Euiyon C & Sookhee C.(2018). Grice's Maxims of Conversation and their Usefulness in Translation Studies. *The Journal of Translation Studies*(5).
- [3] Fairclough NL. (1985). Critical and descriptive goals in discourse analysis. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 9(6), 739-763.