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Analysis to the Violation of Cooperative Principles in Daily Conversation and the Production of Humor

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ABSTRACT

Humor is the flash of one's knowledge, talent, wisdom, and inspiration in language expression as well as the ability to grasp "funny or witty imagination." Humorous language, like a lubricant, can effectively reduce the "coefficient of friction" between people. The principle of Cooperation was put forward by Grice, a famous American language philosopher, in a speech at Harvard University in 1967. Grice believes that in the process of people's communication, the two sides of the dialogue seem to follow a certain principle intentionally or unintentionally in order to complete the communicative task effectively. To make the communication activities go smoothly, the communicative parties always follow the cooperative principle in the process of language communication; But sometimes, in order to achieve some kind of communicative purpose, people usually break the cooperative principles and then complete the conversation in a humorous way. This paper will analyze how daily conversation can achieve humor by violating the cooperative principle. Furthermore, it is proved that the violation of the four maxims has a strong explanatory power to the emergence of humorous language.

Keywords: Cooperative principle; Humorous; Conversation

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1. Theoretical background of the Cooperative Principle and Humor

1.1 Cooperative Principle and Its Four Maxims

Cooperative principle was introduced by philosopher H. Paul Grice in his article "Logic and Conversation". In that article, Grice argued that "conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange." (Grice, 1975) That means, when you participate in a conversation, you should make what you say conforms to the accepted purpose or direction of the conversation you are participating in, and delete words that are not suitable for the purpose or direction of the conversation. Grice fleshed out the cooperative principle in four conversational 'maxims,' which are commandments that people tacitly follow (or should follow) to further the conversation efficiently:

- a. Quantity: Say no less than the conversation requires; Say no more than the conversation requires.
- b. Quality: Don't say what you believe to be false; Don't say things for which you lack evidence.
- c. Manner: Don't be obscure; Don't be ambiguous; Be brief; Be orderly.
- d. Relevance: Be relevant.

The maxim of quantity means that speakers should say something appropriate in account--not too much or less. If you say something with less information than you want to express, the hearer may not understand the meaning what you said. Or you say something in a wordy way, the hearer may not get the key information. Quality maxim means that you say something which is definite. Do not say what you are uncertain, not to say what you believe to be false. Manner maxim has four sub-maxims. It requires speakers' statement be clear and brief. It may be puzzling the hearer when the information provided is ambiguous and unclear. So in order to make the communication can be carried on successfully, speakers should express themselves orderly and briefly. Relevant

maxim means what the speaker say should be related with the conversation's situation.

The cooperative principle is the first prerequisite for a conversation to proceed normally and smoothly, but this does not mean that people always adhere to these principles in communication. For reasons, the principle of cooperation will be deliberately violated. Grice called this implicature, which appears to be a deliberate violation of the principle of cooperation, "special conversational implicature." "Special conversational implicature" explains how the hearer understands the meaning of the speaker through the superficial meaning of the speaker's words, thus expressing another meaning, and humor is often produced at this time. People always violate these principles intentionally or unintentionally. Unintentional violation of the above principles (such as ambiguity) can lead to misunderstandings and even "jokes". If it is intended to violate these principles in order to achieve a particular effect, it is genuine humor. (Liu Fuzhang, 1987: 32)

1.2 Literature of Humor

Humor can be divided into situation humor and language humor. In this paper, we focus on the language humor. Humor conversation is a common form of language communication. Humorous speech can not only create a pleasant atmosphere, but also ease conflicts and improve interpersonal relations. The complete process of humor communication involves not only the issuer of humor, but also the participation of the receiver. (Fang Chuanyu, 2007) The study of humor was first carried out from an aesthetic point of view. Later, with the deepening of cognition, more and more subjects such as philosophy, psychology, sociology and so on began to discuss humor, and has gradually formed a multi-interdisciplinary research field. (Jing Hui, 2011) In recent 30 years, western linguistics applied pragmatics theory, cognitive science's concept synthesis theory and so on, such as conversational cooperative principle, relevance theory, politeness principle, speech act theory as well as context, presupposition, deixis-

s, etc, to analyze humorous utterance and obtain abundant research results. For example, Attardo (1990), explains the generation of humorous jokes from the angle of violating Grice's conversational principle; Zhang Shujing (1998), Yan Weihua (2002), Zuo Zuming (2003), Zhao Yingke (2006) and so on have used a large number of living examples to demonstrate the humorous effect of seemingly violating the principle of cooperation. Based on Grice's cooperative principle, this paper analyzes the causes of humor through the example of conversational implicature in violation of the principle of cooperation, in order to make readers can understand and master the language better.

2. The Violation of the Cooperative Principle and the Production of Humor

Humor is produced in language communication. But unlike daily conversation, humorous language contain wisdom. The characteristic of humorous language is to make people laugh. Humor shows a relaxed and positive attitude, it can also express opinions, comments, and critical advice in a euphemistic way. Next, this article will analyze some examples of humor caused by the violation of the cooperative principle.

2.1 Violations of the Maxim of Quantity

Quantity maxim means that speakers should say something appropriate in account. If speaker say something less in information, the hearer may not understand the meaning of what he said. On the contrary, the information should be appropriate but not nonsense, or the heard may be hard to get the key information.

Example 1:

Uncle pan: my daughter-in-law, I am penniless now, I am a poor man. Let's get divorced. Well, now I'm a wimp.

Aunt Tsai: don't say that. You were the same. Uncle Pan said he lost money in his business and is a loser now. Aunt Tsai: don't say that. You were the same. The omission here is, "it was a wimp, too." Aunt Tsai did not intentionally say the whole thing and violated the quantita-

tive principle, but the implication was very obvious, and the audience produced humorous effect in the experience of utterance.

Example2:

Uncle pan: but I don't have any money

Aunt Tsai: Oh, the money is gone and the people are still there. The next time we fight for money, people are gone.

Uncle Pan said he had lost money in business and had no money now. Aunt Tsai was supposed to comfort him that he is still here, although the money has gone. But then she went on to say that the next time he was fighting for the money, there was no one left. It is more than the amount of information needed for communication and violates the quantity principle. The exchange of relationship between money and uncle Pan seems to have come out carelessly, but he further information revealed that Aunt Tsai's aversion to Uncle Pan which made the audience laugh.

Example3:

A situation in *Friends*.

RACHEL: So uh, what are you guys doing for dinner tonight?

JOEY: Well I guess I gotta start savin' up for Ross's birthday,

so I guess I'll just stay home and eat dust bunnies.

Because Ross was going to celebrate his birthday, people had to buy some presents to him. Joe Rachel and Phoebe all have low income, that means they have to save money for Ross birthday. So when Rachel asked them "what are guys for dinner tonight?", Joe said that he started saving for Ross' birthday, so he should stay at home and eat dust bunnies. What he wanted to express was just he would eat nothing. He offered over-information which violated the quantity maxim. The hearer could understand the implicature meaning and the humor appeared.

2.2 The Violation of the Maxim of Quality

The quality principle requires that what is said must be true. This principle includes two rules: Don't say what you believe to be false; Don't

say things for which you lack evidence. In a conversation, what is discussed is not always true and reliable for various reasons, which also leads to the humor of the conversation.

Example4:

Traffic cop: Where were you speeding, madam?

Madam: Well, officer, my brakes are bad and I wanted to get home before I had an accident. In the above conversation, the woman is very clear that what she said is not true. She deliberately said that her car brake had broken down as an excuse for speeding. The answer sounds ridiculous. She violated the rule of the quality principle, and humor came into being.

Example5:

Customer: Waiter, my lobster is without a claw. How is that?

Waiter: Well, sir, they are so fresh that they fight with each other in the kitchen.

Customer: Take this one way, and bring me one of the winners.

In order to give a good reply to the customer, the waiter was quick to explain why the lobster lacked claws: Lobster is so fresh that they fight each other in the kitchen and break the claws. Apparently, the waiter provided false information. He had thought he could pass, but did not think of the customer but followed his words and asked him to exchange a shrimp for victory in the duel. The customer's words are also false information. In a brief conversation, there were two violations of "quality principle," and a sense of humor arose.

Example6:

A: Why are you so sleepy?

B: My bed doesn't like me.

According to the dialogue we know that B didn't have a good sleep yesterday. He looks very sleepy. When A asks the reason why he looked so sleep. He should have told to A that he didn't sleep well. But B said that his bed didn't like him. We know the bed can not have motion, so B's answer violated the maxim of quality. When A thought about the implicature meaning of this sentence, the humor came into being.

2.3 The Violation of the Maxim of Relation

Grice believes that the words used in people's conversation must be related to the topic. Violation of relational principle means that discourse is irrelevant to context. That is, the topic of the answer or response is irrelevant or the information provided is not relevant to the topic.

Example7.

After a two weeks' vacation, a man returns to his office and says to one of his fellow workers that he spends the whole two weeks helping his wife print the rooms in their house. His colleague asks: "does she do that often?" The man answers: "Well, when we moved in a few years ago, the guest room was nine by twelve. Now it is eight by eleven."

In this case, the man brags that he helped his wife paint the house. When a colleague asked him if his wife often painted the house, his answer was unexpected. He did not give a positive or negative answer, but said changes of the thickness of the wall. Although a man does not produce an directly answer to a colleague's question, we can know from his answer that his wife is very fond of painting the house. This way of speaking is very interesting.

Example8:

Fiona: is my new dress beautiful?

Jack: The quality of this dress is pretty good
Fiona bought a new dress and she asked Jack if her dress is beautiful. Jack didn't answer this question directly but talked about its quality. The answer is not related to the question, but we can understand the implicature meaning of Jack, that is, the dress is not beautiful. This answer is more humorous than "No".

2.4 The Violation of the Maxim of Manner

The the maxim of manner means that the speaker's language should be concise and organized, so as to avoid language ambiguity and obscurity. The the maxim of manner provides the corresponding criteria for the speaker's utterance. When the speaker's language is vague and the logic is confused, he violates the maxim of manner in Grice's principle of coopera-

tion. A lot of humor is caused by ambiguous or lengthy and confusing language of the conversation which is deliberately offered by speakers .

Example9:

Teacher: Your typing is improving, Mary. There are only seventeen mistakes here.

Mary: That's great!

Teacher: And now I'll look at the second sentence... (Dong LI.1992.)

In the above example, instead of telling the student that his typing was full of errors, the teacher expressed it in sarcastic, obscure language. At the beginning of the conversation, 17 mistakes in the first sentence were not mentioned thus giving rise to ambiguity. She told the students that his typing skills needed to be improved in a euphemistic way. His expression was in violation of the rules of manner, but the teacher's words made the conversation lively and interesting.

Example10:

Son: Mom, can I play outside with Jack?

Mom: Have you finished your homework?

Son: Um...yes, then no or yes.

The boy wants to play with his friend and he asks her mom if he can play outside with Jack. But when his mom asks him if he had finished his homework, the boy uses an uncertain way to express that he doesn't finish his homework. This expression can not only withdraw the psychology that the boy wants to play, but also show that he is afraid of being rejected by his mother because he has not finished his homework.

3. Conclusion

This paper is based on Cooperation Principles, and make a detailed analysis of the humor caused by a violation of a maxim in the principle of cooperation. It is proved that the violation of the four maxims has a strong explanation for the mechanism of linguistic humor. What we should know is that there is no clear demarcation line amount the four maxims. In our daily life, we always obey these four maxims when we talk to others. But sometimes we may violate these maxims for a certain reason. For example, if

someone asks you if her skirt looks beautiful. You can express your dislike in a kind way, that is, a humorous way, to avoid direct injury to each other.

Humor is a good lubricant in interpersonal communication. Humorous words can make the relationship between people more intimate; it can also active discourse atmosphere and even resolve embarrassment. The communicative parties always follow the cooperative principle in the process of language communication to make the conversation goes smoothly, But in the aspect of active atmosphere, increasing humorous effect and defusing embarrassment, it is inevitably stereotypical that speakers always obey the principle of cooperation. From the perspective of violating the principle of cooperation, this paper analyses the conversation expectation of daily life so as to help people understand and use language better and achieve the effect of humor.

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