FLOUTING OF GRICEANS MAXIMS IN COMEDY DRAMAS

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Abstract

The only way to be successful now days in every field of life is the effective use of verbal expression. Language serves as a toolkit to inform, reveal, explore, expose, explain, manipulate, exaggerate, intensify, mitigate and what not. It has every hidden potential to serve its users. Significance of this toolkit of language can also be a bravura feature in gaining comic and/or tragic effects in media. The language of the media violates its few communicative principles which can be termed as Gricean cooperative principle, to serve the specific interests via playing upon the common use of language. The present study explores the intricacies involved in any communication to achieve comic effects. For this purpose, Gricean maxims have been investigated thoroughly with the help of Pakistani comedy show "Bulbulay" which is a famous TV series all over the country. The TV series is considered to be popular among the masses due to its different and unique language that is achieved by flouting the maxims in Gricean's terminology. The study explains the inimitable ways of achieving comic effects in series and also suggests further work on other areas regarding the unusual use of language to achieve desired results.

Keywords: Grice; cooperative principle; Flouting of Maxims; comedy dramas

Introduction

Multiplicity of meaning has made meaning a complex notion. Cruise (2000) took philosophy, neurology, semiotics, and psychology as such disciplines which can have academic contribution to meaning. Meaning is often studied within two specialized branches in linguistics-semantics and pragmatics whereas the former deals with meaning in isolation and the latter deals with meaning in context. Though Semantics contributes enormously to pragmatics yet semantics cannot also be studied thoroughly without its relation to pragmatics.

Marmaridou(2000)[1] illustrates pragmatics within the boundaries of Neo-Gricean, cognitive, philosophical, and social potentials. Cummings(2005)[2] describe three major categories of meaning: meaning in mind, meaning in the world, and meaning in action,and all these three theories of meaning are closely related to the understanding of meaning in context semantics and pragmatics are inseparable.

Pragmatics makes its connection to meaning in use and meaning in context. The two different schools of thought in this field have divided the concept of Pragmatics into speaker meaning and utterance interpretation. The camp focusing on speaker meaning puts more emphasis on speakers of the utterances whereas the notion of utterance interpretations is more closely related to the cognitive processes by which a hearer interprets the utterances as made by a speaker (Thomas, 1995)[3]. Further, there are three different levels of meanings: abstract, utterance, and force. Abstract refers to meanings of words, phrases, and clauses, utterance emphasizes on what can be communicated by the person who is involved in the process of making utterances, and force implies the intentions of the person while making any utterances (Thomas, 1995).[4]

There have been multiple theories regarding the use of language. Austin's view of constatives and performatives (Austin, 1962),[5] has been more influential where he took constative as statements and performatives as acts which are performed via the usage of language[6]. This distinction was later divided into the concepts of: locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary where locutionary conveys the conventional sense of the meaning, illocutionary has got the sense and references both, and perlocutionary refers to achieving something by saying something.[7]

Austin's performatives led to the discussion of Searle's idea of constitutive rules where he defined the concept of any statements as possessing dual or multiple meanings in a single context. For example, "I want you to come early", is a simple statement of reflecting illocutionary act of stating as well as a request. Similarly, in an example, "can you tell me the time", person is certain of listener's ability of telling the time as well as considering it as a request (Cumings, 2005).[8]

Additionally, conventional meaning cannot be separated from the contextual meaning as meaning set by different institutions always play the role of underlying assumptions behind the account of various language theories related to meaning and context. The literal meaning remains attached to contextual meaning in any situations. Since Austin too, believes that meaning conveyed by the utterances are basically set patterns of various institutions existing in a society which are understood by the people in communication. Hence Austin placed the emphasis of speech act theory on commonsensical and logical interpretations in the recognition of any communicative intentions. Grice(1975)[9] explained this account of meaning as equal to saying something to achieve certain effect on others. For instance, meaning cannot be necessarily conveyed directly, yet there are

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[3] Thomas, Jenny A. *Meaning in interaction: An introduction to pragmatics*. (London: Longman, 1995).

[4] *Ibid*.

[5] Austin, Jane "How to Do Things with Words", *The William James lectures delivered at Harvard University,* (Clarendon Press, 1962).

[6] Cummings, 2005, The utterance of the sentence is part of or doing of an action which would not normally be described as just saying something, "She promised to do her homework" is constative whereas "I promise to be home early" is a performative.

[7] *Ibid*., "*The Dangerous Dog in a Garden*" is a locutionary act but it has also illocutionary act I itself as it conveys the alarming situations to others i.e conveyance of sense and reference both and when it forbids people from going to garden is perlocutionary act.

[8] *Ibid*.

[9] Grice, H. Paul. "*Logic and Conversation*" (NY: Academic Press, 1975): pp.41-58

numerous other ways for their indirect conveyance such as consider the following example:

A: Will you go to Sana's birthday party tonight.

B: My sister is visiting me this evening.

Meanings are conveyed, more often than not, through context. This above mentioned communication is the depiction of the various speech acts. It may be taken as an act of informing the speaker about the arrival of the sister. It might be the invitation to visit the home in the presence of sister. It can also be considering sister as an unpleasant personality which could be a hurdle in going to the party.

Yet, in all these possibilities, the denial has been expressed but indirectly. The precise meaning can be derived from the context not entirely with the help of the words by the hearer. Grice concept of conversational implicature is, in fact, an illustration of different communication features which are more speakers oriented and less hearer oriented. It is for this reason,

Lavinson(2003)[10] classifies these speech acts as active, logical, efficient, relevant and loyal while providing specific and relevant information. The word manage can have more than one meaning depending on the situation in which it is used: For instance look at the following example:

- She managed to speak well. (The meaning implied is: she tried to speak well)

- She didn't manage to speak well. (The meaning implied is: she tried to speak well)

In both the above mentioned sentences, the word "managed" conveyed the same meaning in both assertive and negative sentences due to the complex involvement of the context. This feature of constant under negation has been proposed by Levinson in 1983. The word "manage" is not an exact replacement of the word "try" as in negative sentence, manage doesn't convey the sense of "didn't try" and communicates the same aspect as exists in assertive sentence. Such sentences in pragmatics have essential and crucial role to identify presuppositions. Pragmatic approach has got much potential to deal with the study of presuppositions.

Searl(1965)[11] considers speech acts as logical presuppositions since many illocutionary acts have so much in common with each other. The following examples will clearly communicate different speech acts with the help of the same content words such as: John, Leave, and Room, yet way of using words, is different. The meaning conveyed could be amazement, information, declaration, seeking answer and also reveal consequences. For instance:

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[10] Levinson, Stephen C. *Space in Language and Cognition: Explorations in Cognitive Diversity.* Vol.5.
(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003)
[11] Searle, John. *What is a Speech Act?* (na, 1965)

- Will John leave the room
- John will leave the room.
- John, leave the room!
- Would that John left the room?
- If John will leave the room, I will leave also (Searle, 1965).[12]

Searle follows Austin's philosophy while describing speech acts since he believes sentences do not express any statement for thought and meaning cannot be derived in the absence of the context. He also points out many ways of describing the same speech act. There are two types of rules regulated and constitutive in order to explain semantics rules that govern the use of expressions. He believes that when the speaker meant something then he also intended to mean the same thing in order to achieve the desired effect on the listener after having recognized the listener's intention.

According to Searle (1965), meaning cannot be fully realized in terms of its classification into the various speechs at as described by the various theories and linguist. He considers the most important notion in this regard as intention. In order to understand the intention of any speaker there is a need to understand the felicity condition it is for this reason that he proposed many felicity conditions. An act can be done intentionally or unintentionally, logically or voluntarily, sincerely or insincerely in different situations. Searle's notion of felicity conditions created rather complex situation to understand the speech acts. His felicity conditions were the source of classification of illocutionary acts such as: assertive, directives, commissive, expressive and declarative. To be brief, the purpose of language is not only to describe a social reality or phenomena\ but also to perform various acts.

Grice's Cooperative Principle

Cooperative Principle of Grice is the central concept in pragmatics that has grasped the attention of various linguists and researchers due to its perplexing nature. Cooperation is a concept that is frequently used in linguistic and literature to typify human behaviour in conversation. Occasionally it is used in the context of Grice's Cooperative Principle (Grice, 1975).[13]

One of the foremost things to note down about Grice's work may appear very palpable. He is a philosopher, not a linguist. Linguistics as a discipline is quite effective at integrating approaches from various other academic areas and the readiness to accept and apply new approaches has been very productive, but there are always potential problems in negotiating the conventions of a new discipline. This is possibly more evident problem in the field of philosophy, as its academic standards distinguishes it from the other disciplines such as discourse analysis, conversation analysis, psychology, sociology etc. So the way Grice uses the term Cooperative Principle (CP) may be different the way

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[12] *Ibid.*
[13] Grice, H. Paul, *Op.cit.*

linguists have understood it rather what he presented it to be(Davies, 2000).[14] In order to investigate and examine the intricacies involved in the notion of cooperative principle, one needs to develop the understanding of few basic terms as lying underneath this perplexing notion.

Grice (1975)[15] does not say that interaction is 'cooperative' in its literal sense. In fact, as it has been suggested in Davies' work in 1997 that the existence of this pattern of behaviour enables the speaker to make the task of the hearer more difficult. Speakers can communicate their intentions by an unlimited number of utterances. It is up to the hearer solely to analyze the speaker's intention. It permits the speaker to construct their utterances harder, rather than easier. The hearers can interpret or get the information that is omitted or exist in a non-literal sense, and then in turn the speaker expects the hearer to do the additional work as essential to interpret.

Before Grice, the focus of the researchers had been on direct and indirect speech acts and speech acts or linguistics acts-doing things with the help of words for example the major works by Austin (1962)[16] and Searle (1969)[17]. They perceived language as much as action as any other notion can be observed such as running or playing. They relied on sense and reference of the words to describe their meanings like Frege and Russell (Davies, 2000)[18]. It has been noticed that in dialogic conversation or in discourse form there is no such direct relationship between form and its meaning so a particular hidden meaning has to be found in case of indirect speech acts.

However, Grice's main concern had been with saying and meaning. He was more concerned with conveying particular meanings to the listeners by the speakers so he presented four maxims under CP as given below (Grice, 1975)[19]:

1. **Quantity**

   Make your contribution as informative as is required

   Do not make your contribution more informative than is required

2. **Quality**

   Do not say what you believe to be false

   Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence

3. **Relation**

   Be relevant

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[14] Davies, Bethan. "Grice's Cooperative Principle: Getting the Meaning Across." *Leeds Working Papers in Linguistics and Phonetics*, 8 (2000): 1-26
[15] Grice, H. Paul, *Op.cit.*
[16] Austin, Jane *How to Do Things with Words.* (*The William James lectures delivered at Harvard University:* Clarendon Press, 1962).
[17] Searle, John. *What is a Speech Act?* (na, 1965)
[18] Davies, Bethan, *Op.cit.*
[19] Grice, H. Paul, *Op.cit.*

4. **Manner**

   Avoid obscurity of expression

   Avoid ambiguity

   Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity)

   Be orderly[20]

Flouting of Maxims

The only factor that is available to being ironic is related to violation of the maxim of quality as Brown and Levinson deem irony simply to violate the Maxim of Quality with their observation of irony as meaning the contradictory of what is said literally. This way it is evidently seen that an individual is not making a true contribution. Brown and Levinson's perspective of irony is in fact proposition-oriented. This would take account of archetypal examples of irony such as "John's a fine friend" or "John's a genius," meaning "he's not a good friend" and "he's stupid" respectively, where the literal meaning of the proposition is not true. But in most cases irony enfolds a wider scope of verbal phenomena. Consequently it gives the impression that to use verbal irony one also goes beyond the flouting of the Quality Maxim.

Flouting of Maxims and Comedy Shows

The researchers in the past have also located humour via observing flouting of the maxims such as Maria Savkanicova (2013)[21] explained the violation of maxims in British situational comedy "Black Book" and took several dialogues as means of analysis. Similarly, Brumark (2006)[22] studied the flouting of the maxims by parents about their children and the study discovered that children were the centre of flouts in the families, where the parents used flouts in order to comment on utterances made by their children (Brumark 2006:1235).

Consider the following examples and flouting of maxims one by one and it can also be noticed that rather than the use of irony as Brown and Levinson presented responsible for achieving comic effects in the dramas, there is use of violation of the maxims of manner, relevance and quantity to create ambiguity and obscurity of expression which hence aims at achieving comic effects.

These utterances are selected from the recent episodes of the Television comedy serial "Bulbulay" as got on aired in the month of April. The comedy show is selected due to its immense popularity among Pakistani audience. Bulbulay has four major characters: Momo (known as *Maa ji* by her son Nabeel and daughter in law *Khoobsoorat*),

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[20] *Ibid*., pp.45-46
[21] Savkaničová, Mária. "Pragmatic Analysis of Ironic Humour in Black Books." (Masarykova Univerzita, Filozofická fakulta, 2013).
[22] Brumark, Åsa. Non-observance of Gricean Maxims in Family Dinner Table Conversation. *Journal of Pragmatics* (2006) 38: 1206–1238

Mehmood (Momo's husband), Nabeel (Momo's son), and Khboosoorat (Nabeel's Wife). The most important character is Momo so other characters are described in term of their relation with her. It can also be the area of interests that the most important character is more involved in flouting of the maxims as compared to other characters and what character traits of the major character add to the flouting of maxims more frequently. For example, Momo's forgetful nature is often considered responsible for lack of understanding on part of listeners and it can also be observed that which maxim is more likely to be flouted to achieve comic effect. Selected utterances from three episodes (446, 447, and 448) as part of dialogic conversation are numbered from 1 to 10 and then the violation has been explained which is assumed to be contributed to the popularity of the serial:

> Momo: Chaiti chaiti haath Chula Nasreen(Do the work quickly Nasreen).
>
> Khoobsoorat: Khoobsoorat maan ji!
>
> Momo: Who said you are khoobsoorat (who said you are beautiful)?

In this utterance there is violation of the maxim of quantity as khoobsorrat did not make the utterance as informative as required as she simply "Khoobsoorat" that refers to state of being pretty in Urdu language rather than saying that "my name is Khoobsoorat" so it created ambiguity for Momo who has been shown in the disease of forgetfulness and hence takes the names of the people differently every time when she addresses them. Secondly there is violation of the maxim of manner as khoobsoorat didn't utter the complete sentence and the utterance of just two words "Khoobsoorat Maan ji" violates the sub maxims (as mentioned above) as part of the super maxim of manner since the expression is ambiguous and obscure and too brief to convey the meaning properly. This is also the violation of the maxim of relevance as Momo's answers are not in accordance with Khoobsoorat's answer. Hence such intentional violation by the script writer makes the participants in the conversation to contribute to the verbal irony.

> Khoobsoorat: *Apko warzish ki zaroorat hay* (you need to work out).
>
> Momo: *Mujhay sirf aalo k paratho ki zaroorat hay* (I only need potato rolls).
>
> Khoobsoorat: *Aap itna khaati rahin tu buhat jald ooper jayengi* (if you keep up with this pace you will die soon).
>
> Momo: *Me itni dhoop me ooper kiu jayugi*? (why shall I go upstairs in such scorching heat)
>
> Khoobsoorat: *Me ooper chut pa jaanay ki baat nahi kr rahi* (I am not asking you to go upstairs).
>
> Momo: *Han tu phir* (Then?).
>
> Khoobsoorat: *Mera mutlub ha aap jaldi intiqaal kar jayegi* (I mean to say that you will die soon).

This lengthy dialogue is the explicit portrayal of violations of maxim for comic effects to be achieved in the drama. It effectively and explicitly elaborates the violation of the two

maxims relation and manner as the responses of Momo are not perspicuous only but they are irrelevant too, further Khoobsoorat has to make the utterances explicit at the end of the dialogue by overtly stating her intentions behind the utterance that she produced.

> Khoobsoorat: ok fine
>
> Momo: *Kis cheez ka fine?Mena kia kiya hay*?(fine for what? What did I do?)

In this case, maxim of relation has been violated as hearer's response is not in accordance with speaker's utterance.

> Momo: *Apko bell ki awaaz sunai nahi day rahi*?(Don't you hear the bell?)
>
> Mehmood: *Han sunai day rahi hay. Jao ja k darwaaza kholo* (Yes I do. Go and open the door)
>
> Momo: *Kon hay bhai too*? (Who are you?)
>
> Stranger: *Me kaalia huu*.[I am Kaalia(Kala refers to Black in Urdu)]
>
> Momo: *Tu too chunga bhula chitta hay*(You are very much fair).
>
> Stranger: *Mera naam kaalia hay*.(My name is Kaalia)

In the above mentioned dialogue the maxim of relevance seems evident to be violated. None of the responses have been produced by the hearer in accordance with speaker's utterances and it has been seen the source to create comic effects in the drama.

> Momo: *Ye kon ha*? *Tera burha bhai hay*?(who is this> is he your elder brother?)
>
> Stranger: *Police waala hay*.(he is a policeman)
>
> Momo: *Tera bhai police me hay*?(Your brother is in police)
>
> *Phir tu too burhay araam sa chorian krta huga*?(then you must be stealing without any fear).

The above conversation aims at exploring the incomplete utterances as produced by the speaker like instead of adding the word "No" before stating that "he is a policeman" could avoid ambiguity and could also provide as much information as required so maxim of manner and quantity are flouted. At the same time the hearer intentionally flouts the maxim of relevance and misinterprets the utterance to achieve comic effects.

> Stranger: *Tum dono phaansi pa lutko gay*.(You both will be hanged)
>
> Mehmood: *Mujhay tu lutkana nahi aata* (I do not know how to be hanged).
>
> Momo: *Koi baat nahi 2, 3 baar practice kar laina*(doesn't matter, practice 2 or 3 times).

The mere violation of the maxim of relevance as both the hearers (Momo and her husband Mehmood) misinterpret the actual meaning underneath the word "Hang"i.e likely to give death to somebody and used figuratively but they produce their own

interpretation by taking the owrd hang as similar to hanging the clothes or hanging the painting on the wall which becomes the source to bring humour to the drama.

> Stranger: *chulo jaldi sa butao* "Masoom" *kahan hay wrna bhoon k rukh dooga*(tell me quickly where is "Masoom" otherwise I will roast you).
>
> Momo: *Putar achi tarah bhoon'na kahin masala kucha na reh jaye*.(Dear son! roast very well until no chances of spices for not to be mixed well).

In this dialogue too, there is more violation of the maxim of manner as speaker uses the words idiomatically and speakers interpret the words literally.

> Nabeel: *Asa idea ha k saanp bhi mur jaye or laathi bhi na tootay*.(It's such an idea that snake gets killed but the stick doesn't break).
>
> Momo: *kidher ha saanp, kidhar hay saanp*?(where is the snake? Where is the snake?)

Again the use of idiomatic expression has given rise to obscurity of expression and hearer takes it in the literal sense and asks about the presence of snake which is violation of the maxim of relevance.

> Momo: *Aik baat tu tah ha k jo shabana ha wo buhat kanjoos ha*.(It is now confirmed that Shabana is really stingy)
>
> Nabeel: *Shabana kon maa ji*?(Who is shabaana?)
>
> Momo: *Tere biwi*!(Your wife!)
>
> Nabeel: *Mere biwi tu khoobsorrat ha*.(My wife's name is khoobsorrat)
>
> Momo: *Huh.. joro ka ghulam*(huh tied to wife's apron strings)

This conversation emphasizes the violation of all the four maxims of manner, relevance, quantity, and quality since Momo takes the wrong name of Nabeel's wife and Nabeel does not interpret what Momo intends to communicate and when he gets able to communicate then he does not make the intelligible utterance that could develop the understanding of meaning as his wife's name is "Khoobsoorat" which is usually not the name rather related to description of the physical appearance of females.

> Khoobsoorat: *Ye kia hay*? (What is this?)
>
> Nabeel: *Ye kitchen hay*. (It is kitchen)
>
> Khoobsoorat: *Me lurki ka pooch rahi hu*.(I am asking about the girl)

In this utterance by '*Khoobsoorat*', she actually wants to refer to the strange lady (as entered in the house and inquired about her husband Nabeel) but she takes Nabeel to kitchen and then asks this question so Nabeel misinterprets the utterance as refers to "What's this" to the current location of their conversation.

Conclusion

The aim in this paper has been to express explicitly the exploitation of the maxims in famous Pakistani comedy drama "*Bulbulay*" to highlight the process of comedy as a result of violation of the maxims. Violation of the maxims as presented by Grice can lead to intentional misinterpretation in case of the comedy shows where these utterance acts as a source to achieve comic effects and hence to make the audience laugh and enjoy the show. Grice was in search of an ideal language but interesting element is to find concepts associated with the use of natural language or talk as part of the comedy shows since they flout the maxims to grasp people's attention for the rating of their shows. This study can further be expanded to scripts of the written dramas to elaborate the various dimensions attached to people's discourse for gaining certain agendas lying underneath the discourses. This study can also be replicated with few more Pakistani dramas where there can be found maxims of quality violated as not given much prominence in this study.

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