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## A new method of teaching drama: the pragmatic approach

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### Abstract

Pragmatics is defined in Jack Richards, *et al.*, *Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics* (London, Longman, 1985) as follows:

The study of the use of language in communication, particularly the relationship between sentences and the contexts and situations in which they are used. Pragmatics includes the study of:

- (a) how the interpretation and use of utterances depends on knowledge of the real world
- (b) how speakers use and understand speech acts
- (c) how the structure of sentences is influenced by the relationship between the speaker and the hearer.

Accordingly, this paper aims at applying a pragmatic analysis to dramatic texts to find out whether it is possible for teachers to teach, and students to learn, dramatic texts more effectively by using pragmatic approaches.

The pragmatic model used in this study is Leech's Cooperative Principle (CP), together with its maxims and sub-maxims (*Principles of Pragmatics*, 1983). This model is applied to Oscar Wilde's play *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1980) to understand how language is used and understood in communication.

The model proves to be a satisfactory mechanism for a pragmatic analysis of dramatic texts. It proves that there is a relation between the linguistic structures of utterances and their intended meanings. It is also responsible for indirectness of utterances.

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### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1 The Cooperative Principle

The Cooperative Principle (CP) is essentially associated with the philosopher Paul Grice (1975), and is adopted by Leech (1983) in his pragmatic approach to verbal communication. Grice's basic idea is that participants in a conversation try to maintain certain standards in their communicative behaviour; therefore, utterances are interpreted with those standards in mind. He argues that to be able to account for certain aspects of conversational behaviour, we assume that (i) people are cooperative and (ii) people assume that other people are cooperative, i.e., they conform to certain conventions in speaking. Thus, Grice proposes the Cooperative Principle with its regulative conventions which he calls maxims. The Cooperative Principle (CP) is expressed by Grice (1975: 45) as follows:

Make your conversational contribution such as required, at the stage at which it occurs by the expected purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged.

The CP has led to the formulation of four basic maxims with their sub-maxims, which jointly express the efficient cooperative use of language in conversation. These maxims are:

**THE MAXIM OF QUANTITY (QNM):**

Give the right amount of information, specifically:

1. Make your contribution as informative as is required.
2. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

**THE MAXIM OF QUALITY (QLM):**

Try to make your contribution one that is true, specifically:

1. Do not say what you believe to be false.
2. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

**THE MAXIM OF RELATION (RLM):**

Make your contribution relevant.

**THE MAXIM OF MANNER (MNM):**

Be perspicuous, and specifically:

1. Avoid obscurity.
2. Avoid ambiguity.
3. Be brief.
4. Be orderly.

Accordingly, the CP views communicators as active, goal-seeking agents in understanding the production of conversation. It refers to “a kind of directive to the speaker to formulate all aspects of his or her utterance in a way that permits participants of a conversation to facilitate to the utmost the achievement of the tacitly agreed upon aims of the conversation” (Coulthard, 1977:103). Speakers, therefore, attempt to cooperate with each other when they communicate by trying to be informative, truthful, relevant and clear.

## 1.2 Implicature

However, when conversation behaviours are not in line with these maxims, the situation indicates that the CP is not being applied. This results in “the notion of conversational implicature, requiring interpretive procedures to understand the discrepant behaviours” (Zimmermann, 1987: 10). For instance, if we take B’s contribution in (1) below literally, we find that B fails to answer A’s question.

- (1) A: Where’s Tom?  
B: There’s a red Maxima outside Helen’s house.

B’s utterance, therefore, might be considered as a non-cooperative response which violates at least QNM and RLM. Nevertheless, in spite of its apparent failure, B’s utterance can be interpreted as cooperative at some deeper level. This can be done by assuming that it is in fact cooperative, and trying to find out a possible connection between the location of Tom and the location of red Maxima, thereby arriving at the proposition which B means to convey, viz., if Tom has red Maxima, then he may be in Helen’s house. This sort of inferences gives rise to the assumption of cooperation and is called conversational implicature. There are two there are two types of implicature.

### 1.2.1 Standard Implicature

The first type of implicature is standard implicature in which S observes the CP maxims in a direct way; nonetheless, he may depend on H to amplify his utterance by some straightforward inferences based on the assumption that S is observing the maxims.

### 1.2.2 Flouting

The second type of implicature is the flouting or exploitation in which S is “overtly and blatantly *not* following some maxims, in order to exploit it for communicative purposes” (Levinson, 1983: 109). This type is based on the assumption that S is still underlying cooperative, even though his utterances deviate from maxim-type behaviour.

## 2. The Aim of the Study

This study aims at applying the pragmatic model to the analysis of a dramatic text, namely *Lady Windermere's Fan*

(LWF) (1980) by Oscar Wilde, to arrive at the implied meanings which go beyond the literal meanings of the words characters speak. Pragmatic analysis of drama is needed because it provides dramatic criticism with a means of explicating how the embedded meanings are arrived at, thereby “rescuing dramatic criticism from the variability of performance analysis on the one hand and the inadequacy of traditional textual analysis on the other” (Short, 1989:143). This pragmatic model is hoped to be an effective approach for teaching dramatic texts.

## 3. The Analysis

### 3.1 *The Quantity Maxim (QNM)*

In analysing the data pragmatically, we start with standard implicature which arises directly from observing the CP maxims followed by flouting of the maxims. To begin with the QNM, it is generally observed in the four acts of LWF. For instance, in the opening scene of Act One of LWF, both Parker, the butler, and Lady Windermere, the mistress, seem to observe QNM, as illustrated in (2) below:

- (2) PARKER  
 Is your ladyship at home this afternoon?  
 LADY WINDERMERE  
 Yes -- who has called?  
 PARKER  
 Lord Darlington, my lady.  
 LADY WINDERMERE  
 Show him up -- and I'm at home to anyone who calls.  
 (LWF I: 5-6)

Since servants would usually announce visitors without further enquiry, Parker's opening utterance “intimates that he knows of some coldness in Lady Windermere's attitude” (Notes: 5). Lady Windermere, therefore clearly insists that her interview with Lord Darlington is not private. With regard to the second type of implicature, i.e., the QNM exploitation in which S deliberately violates the maxim for communicative purposes, LWF is full of this type of implicature. One significant feature which dominates the dialogue of this play is that it is unexpected and thus absurd. For instance, in Act Two of LWF, Cecil gives us an instance of flouting QNM by uttering an absurd proposition: more informative than required, as illustrated in (3).

- (3) CECIL GRAHAM  
 Good evening, Arthur. Why don't you ask me how I am? I like people to ask me how I am. It shows a widespread interest in my health. Now, tonight I am not at all well. Been dining with my people. Wonder why it is one's people are always so tedious? My father would talk morality after dinner. I told him he was old enough to know better. But my experience is that as soon as people are old enough to know better, they don't know anything at all.  
 (LWF II: 34)

Cecil's turn may be considered a case of QNM exploitation with the aim of creating a comic atmosphere.

### 3.2 *The Quality Maxim (QLM)*

According to QLM and under cooperative circumstances, “when one asserts something one implicates that one believes it, when one asks a question one implicates that one sincerely desires an answer and, by extension, when one promises to do *x*, one implicates that one sincerely intends to do *x*, and so on” (Levinson, 1983: 105-6).

Accordingly, Lady Windermere in (4) observes QLM through asking a question, while the Duchess observes it through asserting what she believes. Let us consider this exchange.

- (4) LADY WINDERMERE  
 Are *all* men bad?  
 DUCHESS OF BERWICK  
 Oh, all of them, my dear, all of them, without any exception. And they never grow any better.  
 Men become old, but they never become good. (LWF I: 19)

The Duchess tells Lady Windermere all about her husband's giving away large sums of money to Mrs. Erlynne. Lady Windermere could not believe it because they have been married for two years and for love; therefore, she asks the question out of her sudden shock. It is to be noticed that QLM and QNM "frequently work in competition with one another" (Leech, 1983: 84). The application of QLM usually leads to the application of QNM since the information S gives is determined by his wish to avoid telling an untruth. The opposite is also true, i.e., breaching QLM usually leads to the violation of QNM, as illustrated in (5) below.

- (5) LADY JEDBURGH  
 Goodnight, Lady Windermere. What a fascinating woman Mrs Erlynne is! She is coming to lunch on Thursday, won't you come too? I expect the Bishop and Lady Merton.  
 LADY WINDERMERE  
 I am afraid I am engaged, Lady Jedburgh.  
 (LWF II: 46)

Lady Windermere pretends to have another engagement to decline Lady Jedburgh's invitation; thus, telling white lies might be justifiable at the expense of QLM. Another case of QLM exploitation is the use of metaphor. Accordingly, there is "a sense of 'metaphor' that belongs to 'pragmatics' rather than to 'semantics' -- and this sense may be the one most deserving of attention" (Black 1981: 67). For instance, in LWF, the word 'mask' is used metaphorically by Mrs Erlynne as illustrated in (6) below.

- (6) MRS ERLYNNE  
 . . . You don't know what is it to fall into the pit, . . . to find the door shut against one, to have to creep in by hideous byways, afraid every moment lest the mask should be stripped from one's face.  
 (LWF III: 57)

Here 'mask' is used to refer to Mrs Erlynne's real identity which is considered a secret. Mrs. Erlynne is treated as an outcast by Society for having abandoned her husband and infant daughter in order to run off with her lover. This secret is withheld from her daughter, Lady Windermere.

### 3.3 The Relation Maxim (RLM)

Like informativeness and truthfulness, relevance is a matter of degree. Therefore, its application in some cases is very strong and clear, while in other cases it is unclear and indirect. Smith and Wilson (1979: 177) treat RLM as 'a special kind of informativeness', and define it informally as follows "A remark *P* is relevant to another remark *Q* if *P* and *Q*, together with background knowledge, yield new information not derivable from either *P* or *Q*, together with background knowledge, alone". Accordingly, the relevance of Lord Darlington's utterance in (7) is very strong, clear and direct.

- (7) LADY WINDERMERE  
 . . . My hands are wet with these roses. Aren't they lovely? They came from Selby this morning.  
 LORD DARLINGTON  
 They are quite perfect.  
 (LWF I: 6)

RLM is also observed in some cases a little more indirectly. For instance, Hopper's turn in (8) below is relevant to the situation but not directly.

- (8) DUCHESS OF BERWICK  
 . . . What a curious shape it is. Just like a large packing case. However, it is a very young country, isn't it?

HOPPER

Wasn't it made at the same time as the other, Duchess?

(LWF II: 30)

Instead of replying to the Duchess' enquiry about Australia, Hopper uses a rhetorical question, which is considered a kind of QLM exploitation, to help the Duchess know the answer by herself. However, his utterance may be considered as a case of observing RLM in a less direct way.

Exploitation of RLM, is hard to find because it may be hard to interpret an utterance as irrelevant. Wilson and Sperber (1986: 34) state that RLM "is never deliberately violated" because it is "the single property that human beings look for in the propositional information they process, whatever its source". Nonetheless, there are some cases in which RLM is superficially violated with the purpose of changing the topic of the conversation, as illustrated in the following exchange.

- (9) LADY WINDERMERE  
 Duchess, Duchess, it's impossible! (. . .) We are only married two years. Our child is but six months old.  
 DUCHESS OF BERWICK  
 Ah, the dear pretty baby! How is the little darling? Is it a boy or a girl? I hope a girl -- Ah, no, I remember it's a boy! . . . Boys are so wicked. . .

(LWF I: 19)

The Duchess feels embarrassed and reluctant to talk about Lord Windermere and Mrs Eryllynne's illicit relationship, of which Lady Windermere was totally ignorant; therefore, she flouts RLM.

### 3.4 *The Manner Maxim (MNM)*

This maxim is different from the other maxims in that it deals not with what is said but rather with "how what is said it to be said" (Grice 1975: 46). When MNM is observed, together with RLM, the interpretation of an utterance will be quite direct as in (10).

- (10) MRS ERLYNNE  
 . . . And so that is your little boy! What is he called?  
 LADY WINDERMERE  
 Gerard, after my father.

(LWF IV: 83)

Clearly, Lady Windermere observes the CP maxims; thus her utterance is considered cooperative. However, different applications of MNM may elicit different interpretations and inferences. We can notice that Lady Windermere in (11) observes QNM, QLM and RLM; however, she applies MNM in an abrupt way that indicates her jealousy and anger.

- (11) LADY PLYMDALE  
 . . . what a handsome woman your husband has been dancing with! I shall be quite jealous if I were you!  
 Is she a great friend of yours?  
 LADY WINDERMERE  
 No!

(LWF II: 46)

In (12) below, Lord Darlington, on the contrary, avoids the short answer 'no' favouring the longer one to show his sadness and regret since Lady Windermere does not share in his adulterous love.

- (12) DUMBY  
 She doesn't really love you then?  
 LORD DARLINGTON  
 No, she does not!

(LWF III: 66)

Although MNM and RLM work together and their functions may overlap, MNM has an independent role to play in interpreting negative sentences. Negative propositions "are, in pragmatic terms, denials of positive propositions which are in some sense present in the context". Thus, S will use a negative sentence to deny a positive proposition which may be put forward by H or someone else in the context. Another purpose of negative use of sentences is

“politeness or simply euphemistic reticence in the expression of opinion and attitudes” (Leech, 1983: 101-2). In urging Lady Windermere to leave Lord Darlington’s house and to go back to her own house, in (13), Mrs. Erlynne presupposes that Lady Windermere loves her husband. Lady Windermere, therefore, denies this positive proposition, i.e., that she loves her husband -- which is put forward by Mrs. Erlynne.

- (13) MRS ERLYNNE  
 Think as you like about me -- . . . but go back to the husband you love.  
 LADY WINDERMERE  
 I do *not* love him!

(LWF III: 55)

In his reply to Mrs. Erlynne, in (14), Lord Windermere observes politeness by using a negative expression.

- (14) MRS ERLYNNE  
 If I said to you that I cared for her, perhaps loved her even -- you would sneer at me, wouldn’t you.  
 LORD WINDERMERE  
 I should feel it was not true.

(LWF IV: 82)

The flouting of MNM is intended to convey other information indirectly. For example, Lord Darlington exploits the sub-maxims ‘be brief’ and ‘be clear’ for the purpose of implicating that he is afraid to talk so openly about Lord Windermere’s relationship with Mrs. Erlynne; thus he causes misunderstanding, as illustrated in (15) below.

- (15) LORD DARLINGTON  
 Do you think then -- of course I am putting an imaginary instance -- do you think that in the case of a young married couple, say about two years married, if the husband suddenly becomes the intimate friend of a woman of -- well, more than doubtful character, is always calling upon her, lunching with her, and probably paying her bills -- do you think that the wife should not console herself?  
 LADY WINDERMERE (*Frowning*)  
 Console herself?

(LWF I: 10)

#### 4. Conclusion

The CP and its maxims are one of the pragmatic principles which explain how speakers mean more than what they say. It enables us to communicate with others on the assumption that conversants are cooperative members of a conversation. This assumption, together with the content of what has been said, can help us to derive the conversational implicatures of utterances. Thus, the CP maxims can generate inferences beyond the semantic content of the utterances, even though one of the maxims may be violated, for the violation of maxims often adds an extra implicature force to the utterance.

Applying a pragmatic analysis of dramatic texts will, therefore, allow us to draw conclusions concerning the period and genre of a play, its stylistic orientation and structure of its action.

Accordingly, the pragmatic approach is recommended for teaching dramatic texts (dialogues) since it helps students to reach at the intended meanings of characters’ utterances; thus, ruling out unrelated interpretations. Additionally, it helps students to achieve a better understanding of literary texts, in general, and dramatic texts, in particular.

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