The Analysis of Humor in the Film Never Say Die Based on Cooperative Principle

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Keywords: Cooperative principle; Never Say Die; Humor.

Abstract. In recent years, the research about humor is increasingly explored from various perspectives. This paper mainly analyzes how actor's lines violate the cooperative principle to produce humor in the film Never Say Die by applying the cooperative principle and its four maxims. According to the Grice's principle of cooperation, the two parties should abide by certain rules in communication. Otherwise it will result in unexpected effects. The main characters in Never Say Die violate the maxim of quantity, quality, relation and manner in Grice's cooperative principle, causing a strongly humorous effect. Through the combination of film and theoretical knowledge, students can improve their interest in English learning and broaden their learning ways. Therefore, in our daily life and language teaching we should pay more attention to the cultivation of communicative competence. In addition, we must combine the context, cooperative principle and its four maxims to understand connotative meaning.

Introduction

The study of humor has made great progress during the past few years. Humor has been playing a significant role in our daily life. Therefore, the researches about humor of comedy also naturally become a hot topic, such as American comedy Big Bang [1], Friends [2], and Good Luck Charlie [3]. Humor studies involved many disciplines so that it is a multidisciplinary study such as philosophy, sociology, linguistics, literature, anthropology and so on.

The sitcoms, originating from America, are very popular all over the world. With the development of sitcom in Chinese, the films also become more and more humorous and funny, attracting more and more audience. For example, the film Never Say Die, as one of the most popular Chinese comedy movies, has drawn much attention from the young to the old and has been hit for a long time. In the film Never Say Die, there are quantities of verbal and nonverbal humor examples. Significantly, it is deemed to be one of the best resources of the corpus for humor study. Based on the Grice's Cooperative Principle [4], this thesis is trying to explore the relationship between the humor generation and the violation of Grice's CP in the film Never Say Die, further discloses the reasons why the actors are inclined to breach CP, and then summarizes the enlightenment.

This paper has both theoretical and practical significance. In practice, the paper provides a different perspective for understanding why the speakers will produce humor in reality, providing a new way to learn language.

The previous studies on humor, including both the overseas studies and domestic studies, will be reviewed so as to provide the enlightenment of the present studies as well as suggestions for further research.

Cooperative principle, firstly put forward by Grice [4], was defined as "make your conversational contribution such as required, at the stage at which it occurs, by accepted purpose or direction in which you are engaged." While Grice was developing his views on language, work by other philosophers such as Austin [5] and Searle [6] was largely concerned with the relationship between direct and indirect speech acts, and the concept that you could ‘do’ things with words: language was seen to be as much of an action as opening a door or closing a window. Furthermore, in our daily...
life both sides have a common goal or direction, making conversation meaningful and mutual understanding, which is the famous Grice's principle—Cooperative principle.

Since the 20th century, there has been a growing interest in humor and cooperative principle at home and abroad [7, 8, 9]. Studies estimated that the understanding of Cooperative Principle was very important for daily communication and language teaching [10, 11]. In the other hand, some researchers analyzed the conversational implicature of humorous jokes based on cooperative principle [12].

**Violation of Cooperative Principle**

**Conversational Implicature**

The conversational implicature is produced through breaching cooperative principle. When the speaker violates the four maxims of cooperative principle the listener needs to combine the relevant context and the speaker's intention to deduce the true meaning of the speaker's spoken language, which is called conversational implicature [4]. In our daily communication, there are often such phenomena: in order to express the speaker's intentions, sometimes the speaker often deliberately violates a certain maxim of the cooperative principle. If the listener wants to understand the conversational implicature of the speaker quickly, he needs to deduce from the understanding of the utterance. At the same time, the speaker, when delivering some conversational implicature, also assumes that the listener is able to conjecture the true meaning of his own language according to his background knowledge and analytical level.

**Cooperative Principle and Its Maxims**

Grice was the first one to put forward cooperative principle in his speech logic and conversation at Harvard University in 1975, who is an American linguistic philosopher. He defined Cooperative Principle as: Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged [13]. Grice breaks down the cooperative principle into four maxims: quantity, quality, relation and manner. Quantity refers to the amount of information expected by the speaker. Quality looks at the speaker's efforts to make his contribution a truthful one. Relation refers to relevance, and manner ensures the clarity of one's utterances. Specifically, the cooperative principle includes four maxims [13]. First one is the maxim of quantity: make your contribution as more informative as is required; do not make your contribution more informative than is required. Second one is the maxim of quality: try to make your contribution one that is true; do not say what you believe to be false. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence. In particular, do not think that you are false. The third is the maxim of relation: be relevant. The last is the maxim of manner: avoid obscurity of expression; avoid ambiguity; be brief; be orderly.

**Violation of Four Maxims**

The examples in the thesis are from characters' dialogues in the film Never Say Die. According to repeated appreciation of the film, dozens of the most humorous fragments are summed up, and some of which are selected as cases. The selected figures will be analyzed according to the four maxims to analyze how these dialogues violate the principle of cooperation to produce humor.

**Violation of Quantity.** Maxim of quality: i: Make your contribution as informative as is required. (for the current purpose of the exchange) ii: Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

Example1:
- Ma Dong: Xiao Xiao did you hear everything we just said?
- Ma Xiao: Yes, I did. And I recorded it too.
- Ma Dong: The part about me brings 4 fighters. You recorded that part as well?
- Ma Xiao: It's still recording.
Ma Dong is discussing the matter of buying boxers to make false fist with his apprentice Edison. It happened that Ma Xiao ran across this scene. And she recorded the dialogue just now. However, at this time, Ma Xiao's phone rang and the tape recorder was left in Edison's hand. Ma Xiao pretended to take the recording pen calmly. Later Ma Dong asked her in alarm: "Did you hear everything we said just now?" It is enough for Ma Xiao to answer yes or no. Nevertheless, she added another sentence to it-I recorded it too. Here Ma Xiao's answer is beyond the amount of information for the purpose of communication, violating the maxim of quantity and indirectly showing that the secret is to be exposed.

Example 2:
Ma Xiao: So we are here for nothing. Let’s go back.
Mr. Zhang: Wait. I know everything the master knows. I know even more than the master. I should have been the master at the beginning. Why does he get to be the Master? Answer me that. Can you find a reason?

When Ma Xiao learned the truth that Wu Liang cheated her, she decided to learn boxing. Therefore, Ma Xiao and Edison found Mr. Zhang, who was just a vice Chairman while the master was lost. At this time, Mr. Zhang said the lost master again. Actually, it is enough for him to say that he had something to teach, but he added a sentence. He inadvertently violates the maxim of quantity, making his answer become somewhat abrupt. Humor or jokes are produced in this inconsistency.

Violation of Quality. Maxim of quality: Try to make your contribution one that is true. i: Do not say what you believe to be false. ii: Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

Example 3:
Wu Liang: Edison!
Edison (Ma Xiao): Liang. It's me. Ma Xiao.
Wu Liang: The hell you are. (He gave her a slap on the cheek)
Ma Xiao is Wu Liang's fiancée. Occasionally, Ma Xiao and Edison exchanged their bodies. Edison said: "It's me. Ma Xiao" to Wu Liang. While Wu Liang answered "The hell you are!" Obviously, Wu Liang said false words. According to the Grice's cooperative principle, the maxim of quality requires that people do not say what you believe to be false and say that for which you lack adequate evidence. Wu Liang's answer violated the maxim of quality. The listener identified the deception and the satire in the process of solving the contradiction so that a strong sense of humor arises spontaneously.

Violation of Relation.
Example 4:
Mr. Zhang: It has been 30 years. Did you expect that I would be more gorgeous than ever before?
Ma Dong: Dude. Let's not go there.
Mr. Zhang: Eat.
Edison and Ma Xiao plan to learn the skill of boxing, but Mr. Zhang was reluctant to teach them. At that time, Ma Dong appeared. It was surprising that Ma Dong and Mr. Zhang are brothers of the master. At the dinner table, Mr. Zhang said: "it has been 30 years". Did you expect that I would be more gorgeous than ever before. Ma Dong just said:" Dude, let's not go there". Mr. Zhang replied helplessly: "Eat". It is obvious that it has nothing to do with the previous conversation and violates the maxim of relation. We know that Grice's cooperative principle requires that the information of the speaker should be related to the purpose of communication. And it also requires that speakers should provide appropriate information in specific situations and do not deliberately change or avoid topics, but Mr. Zhang inadvertently violated the maxim of relation, making his answer become somewhat abrupt. Humor or jokes arises in such incompatibility or antagonism.

Violation of Manner.
Example 5:
Wu Liang: Xiao Xiao you are awake. Lie down.
Xiao Xiao: Wu Liang. I'm not Xiao Xiao. Let me explain.
Wu Liang: Calm down. Xiao Xiao.
Xiao Xiao: You listen to me. I'm not Xiao Xiao. And who you calling small (Xiao=small) you are small. Every part of you is small.
Wu Liang: Hey! You said you wouldn't mention that again.
In English, it is not common to violate maxim of manner than other maxims. When flouting the maxim of manner, the speaker may speak in an unnatural and unusual way to achieve special purpose. In this dialogue, after Edison and Ma exchanged their bodies, Ma Xiao (Edison) was very impulsive and surprised. At this time, Wu Liang came in to pacify Ma Xiao, Ma Xiao impulsively said this sentence, causing the ambiguity and making Wu Liang very embarrassed at that time so that a sense of humor produced spontaneously.

Conclusion
Humor is such a common phenomenon that it exists in almost everywhere in social reality. The present study focuses on verbal humor in the humorous film Never Say Die to put the emphasis on the relationship between humor generation and the violation of Grice's cooperative principle. It is concluded that humor is produced because of the violation of Grice's CP and its four maxims. The CP and its four maxims can be regarded as the language foundation of humor generation. In our daily life, we often encounter such phenomenon that the speakers have to breach the CP and its maxims deliberately and unconsciously. Therefore, teachers should also attach more importance to the teaching of communicative competence. In addition, in order to improve language teaching, we should take culture into consideration, understand the influencing factors of intercultural communication, and pay attention to the cultivation of intercultural communicative competence in language teaching.

Acknowledgement
This research was financially supported by the Fundamental Research Funds for the Central Universities (Grant No: 195217006 and 195217008) and Hubei Provincial Department of Education Social Science Research Fund (Grant No: 17G015).

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