

A Comparison between Two Approaches to Discourse analysis - Gricean Pragmatics Theory and Politeness Theory

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Abstract

This study compares between two common approaches to discourse analysis: Gricean pragmatics theory and politeness theory. Data have been collected from a daily conversation between two speakers. The data have been analysed by using the framework of Gricean theory, which was established by Grice (1975), and also politeness theory, which was proposed by Brown and Levinson (1978) along with Leech (1983). The results show that politeness theory is more suitable than Grice's theory for analysing daily conversation; this is because both Brown and Levinson's (1978) and Leech's (1983) frameworks can explain the reasons why speakers use indirect ways to convey certain messages to the hearer, for example to avoid Face-Threatening Acts (FTA). In addition, indirect conveyance makes the listener feel comfortable, but Grice's model does not explain the reasons for this indirectness.

Key words: Politeness and pragmatics, politeness theory, Face-Threatening.

المخلص

تهدف هذه الدراسة للمقارنة بين نوعين شائعين من مناهج (نظريات) الحوار: النظرية البراغماتية الغريسية و نظرية الأدب. تم جمع البيانات من محادثة يومية بين اثنين من المتحدثين. البيانات تم تحليلها باستخدام إطار نظرية غريسيان ، التي أنشأها جريس (1975) ، وكذلك نظرية الأدب ، التي اقترحها براون و ليفنسون (1978) وكذلك ليتش (1983).

أظهرت النتائج أن نظرية الأدب هي أكثر ملائمة من نظرية جريس لتحليل المحادثة اليومية. وذلك لأن نظرية براون و ليفنسون (1978) وليتش (1983) يمكن أن تشرح الأسباب التي تجعل المتحدثين يستخدمون طرقاً غير مباشرة لنقل رسائل معينة إلى المستمع ، على سبيل المثال لتجنب أعمال التهديد بالوجه (FTA). بالإضافة إلى ذلك ، فإن النقل غير المباشر يجعل المستمع يشعر بالراحة ، لكن نموذج جريس لا يشرح أسباب هذا الوضع الغير المباشر .

1. Introduction

Discourse analysis is considered the field for providing approaches to deal with the analysis of the use of language (Brown and Yule, 1983). In other words, discourse analysis examines ways in which language is used in terms of various views of the world and various ways of understanding. In particular, discourse analysis concentrates on the 'knowledge about language beyond the word, clause, phrase and sentence that is needed for successful communication' (Paltridge, 2006: 2).

1.1. Focus and purpose of the study

The objective of this study is to make a comparison between two approaches to discourse - Gricean pragmatics theory and politeness theory - in order to analyse the transcribed recording of a real conversation between two speakers. The data were analysed using the framework of Gricean theory, which was established by Grice (1975), and also politeness theory, which was proposed by Brown and Levinson (1978) along with Leech (1983).

1.2. The research question of the study

Taking the study purpose into account, the research question of this study is as follow:

1. Which approach to discourse is applicable for analysing daily conversations - Gricean pragmatics theory or politeness theory?

1.3. Methodology

The details on the background information of the participants and instrument will be described in order to apply the politeness and Gricean approaches and study it in informal conversation.

1.3.1. Participants of the study

The participants in this study consist of 2 Libyan undergraduate students. These students met in room 15 in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences Kasr Khair, Elmergib University. They were asked to record their conversation. The participants were asked to discuss various topics in order to create a relaxed atmosphere. Copy of this transcription is attached in the appendix.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Gricean Pragmatics

In this section, a brief explanation of Gricean pragmatics theory and the various kinds of implicature and cooperative principles will be discussed. However, it is useful to define the term of pragmatics in order to expand this section. According to Grundy (2008) 'pragmatics is about explaining how we produce and understand such everyday but apparently rather peculiar uses of language' (Grundy, 2008: 3). This definition means that pragmatics can show how people create utterances and understand them in their conversation even though they may be using unfamiliar languages.

Gricean pragmatics theory is indicated as 'an attempt at explaining how a hearer gets from what is said to what is meant, from the level of expressed meaning to the level of implied meaning' (Thomas, 1995:56). Therefore, the different meanings or implied meanings are called the implicature; this is divided into two types by Grice, and these types are explained in the next section.

2.1.1. Types of implicature

Implicature is divided into conversational implicature and conventional implicature. A conversational implicature is defined as ‘something which is implied in conversation, that is, something which is left implicit in actual language use’ (Mey, 2001: 45). In other words, conversational implicature deals with the ways that help one to understand the speech in conversation in accordance with what one is expecting to hear from the speaker.

On the other hand, conventional implicature is explained as the ‘pragmatic implications which are derived directly from the meanings of words, rather than via conversational principles’ (Leech, 1983: 11). Furthermore, Levinson (1983) argues that conventional implicature is associated with specific words; for instance, ‘but, even, therefore, yet and for’.

Thomas (1995) indicates that both conversational and conventional implicatures express the semantic meaning of the spoken words, but the difference between them is that conversational implicature conveys the various implications that are dependent on the context of speech, whereas conventional implicature carries out the same implicature. However, the dark side of the issue of implicature is that it is difficult for the hearer to understand what the speaker means by the words that s/he uses.

2.1.2. Cooperative Principle

Grice (1975) explains the cooperative principle as follows: ‘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’ (Grice, 1975: 45). In other words, the cooperative principle illustrates how people communicate with each other in a conversation.

According to Grice, the cooperative principle has four maxims: the maxims of quantity, quality, relation and manner.

Quantity Make your contribution as informative as is required.

Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

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

Relation Be relevant.

Manner Avoid obscurity of expression.

Avoid ambiguity.

Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).

Be orderly.

(Grice, 1975:

45-46).

The question to be raised at this point is whether all of the above maxims are observed by the speaker or not. The answer to this question is indicated by Thomas (1995) who states the ways of failing to observe the four maxims:

Flouting a maxim

Violating a maxim

Infringing a maxim

Opting out of a maxim

Suspending a maxim

(Thomas, 1995:

64).

However, because discussion of all the above-mentioned ways would go far beyond the scope of this paper, only the flouting and violating of a maxim will be explored. The flouting of a maxim is explained by Thomas (1995) as follows:

A speaker blatantly fails to observe a maxim, not with any intention of deceiving or misleading, but because the speaker wishes to prompt the hearer to look for a meaning which is different from, or in addition to, the expressed meaning.

(Thomas, 1995: 65)

According to Grice (1975), the violation, on the other hand, is defined as 'the unostentatious non-observance of a maxim'; furthermore, the speaker 'will be liable to mislead' if s/he violates a maxim (Grice, 1975: 49). Additionally, violating a maxim is explained when 'the speaker deliberately supplies insufficient information, says something that is insincere, irrelevant or ambiguous, and the hearer wrongly assumes that they are cooperating' (Cutting, 2002: 40).

Thomas (1995) sums up the reasons why speakers fail to recognize these maxims as follows: 'people may fail to observe a maxim because, for example, they are incapable of speaking clearly or because they deliberately choose to lie' (Thomas, 1995: 64). In addition, Grice indicates that the speaker sometimes does not observe the maxims, but this view does not imply that s/he is not cooperative.

However, Grice's maxims attract the following criticism. It is difficult to make a distinction between the four maxims, as indicated by Cutting (2002), who claims that 'there is often an overlap between the four maxims. It can be difficult to say which one is operating and it would be more precise to say that there are two or more operating at once' (Cutting, 2002: 42). Additionally, cutting (2002) claims that Grice's model will differ from one culture to another because each culture has its own view on observing these maxims in certain circumstances.

However, this theory does not help us to understand the reason why people talk in an indirect way when they communicate with each other. As mentioned above, in order to exemplify the

previous view by concentrating on the issues discussed earlier, the researchers will apply these issues to some examples chosen from real conversation in the section (3.1).

2.2. Politeness Theory

This approach is based on the strategy engaged in by people to attain various different goals, for example promotion. This was established by Brown and Levinson, and by Leech. It looks at the notion of face which is defined as ‘the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself’ (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 61). According to them, there are two aspects of face: firstly, negative face, which is explained as ‘the wants of every “competent adult member” that his actions be unimpeded by others’; and secondly, on the other hand, the positive face which is defined as ‘the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others’ (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 62). The above two types of face are considered important wants in social communication. Politeness is indicated as the best way to avoid Face-Threatening Acts (FTA). Face-threatening acts are explained as ‘...those acts that by their nature run contrary to the face wants of the addressee and/or of the speaker’ (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 65).

It is worth mentioning at this point that, because the researchers will apply the model of Brown and Levinson and that of Leech as frameworks in order to analyse their data, they will discuss these models briefly in the following sections.

2.2.1 Strategies of politeness

According to Brown and Levinson (1978), there are four strategies of politeness that are used by speakers in their communication. These strategies are used to create a message to save the listener's face whilst FTAs are inescapable or coveted. These strategies are as follows:

1. Bald on-record strategy which is considered an imperative strategy. However, this is commonly used by speakers who are familiar with each other, for example friends or family.
2. Negative politeness which is 'essentially avoidance-based and consist(s)...in assurances that the speaker ...will not interfere with the addressee's freedom of action' (Brown and Levinson, 1978: 75).
3. Positive politeness which is explained as that which 'anoints the face of the addressee by indicating that in some respects, S[peaker] wants H[earer]'s wants' (Brown and Levinson, 1978: 75). This type is found in people who are not familiar with each other.
4. Off-record strategy which is the use of indirect words in order to remove any possibility of the speaker appearing imposing (Brown and Levinson, 1978: 75).

2.2.2. Principle of Politeness

The politeness principle suggests how to generate and recognize language derived from politeness. The principle of politeness aims to create a feeling of society and social association. In other words, it focuses on how to make the listener feel at ease. Therefore, it concentrates on the procedure of understanding that the core of the study is to focus on the effect on the listener to a greater extent than the effect on the speaker (Leech, 1983). According to Leech (1983), the definition of principle of politeness is to 'Minimize (other things being equal) the expression of impolite beliefs'; there is also a corresponding positive version: 'Maximize (other things being equal) the expression of polite beliefs, which is somewhat less important' (Leech, 1983: 81).

Leech (1983) explains that there are six maxims of politeness, and these maxims are arranged in pairs as below:

1. Tact maxim (in impositives and commissives)

- a. Minimize cost to *other* [(b) Maximize benefit to *other*]
 2. Generosity maxim (in impositives and commissives)
 - a. Minimize benefit to *self* [(b) Maximize cost to *self*]
 3. Approbation maxim (in expressives and assertives)
 - a. Minimize dispraise of *other* [(b) Maximize dispraise of *other*]
 4. Modesty maxim (in expressives and assertives)
 - a. Minimize praise of *self* [(b) Maximize dispraise of *self*]
 5. Agreement maxim (in assertives)
 - a. Minimize disagreement between *self* and *other*
 - b. [(b) Maximize agreement between *self* and *other*]
 6. Sympathy maxim (in assertives)
 - a. Minimize antipathy between *self* and *other*
 - b. [(b) Maximize sympathy between *self* and *other*]
- (Leech, 1983: 132).

Since both tact and generosity maxims are important for analysing our data in this paper, they will be briefly explained below.

According to Leech (1983), both tact and generosity maxims are applied in impositives which are 'intended to produce some effect through action by the hearer: ordering, commanding, requesting, advising, and recommending are examples' (Leech, 1983: 106). These maxims are also applied in commissives which are defined as the 'commitment (to a greater or lesser degree) to some future action; e.g. promising, vowing, offering' (Leech, 1983: 106). As shown in Leech's words above, the first maxim claims to 'minimize cost to other and maximize benefit to other' and the generosity maxim claims to 'minimize benefit to self and maximize cost to self' (Leech, 1983: 132). In addition, the word

'self' in these maxims is applied to the speaker while the word 'other' is the listener.

However, there is some criticism of both Brown and Levinson's model and Leech's maxims. Cutting (2002) shows that there is an overlap between Brown and Levinson's strategies; for example, an utterance can consist of positive and also negative politeness. In other words, the speaker can produce a successful mixture of both positive and negative politeness in the same utterance. A similar overlap is also found in Leech's maxims; for instance, there are more than two maxims in an utterance.

It may be relevant to point out that this theory is not difficult to apply because the maxims and strategies of this approach help us to understand some examples of indirectness that are used by the speakers.

3.1. Data analysis of Gricean pragmatics

In this section, the researchers will consider the examples they have found in which the speakers observe the four maxims mentioned by Grice; then an example of conventional and conversational implicatures and some examples of speakers failing to observe these maxims will be provided.

The following examples show that the speaker is observing the four maxims (lines 5-6).

A: What course are you on?

B: I'm studying English language in the second year at Faculty of Arts and Sciences Kasr Khair.

B shows a truthful answer (quality), a clear sentence (manner), and has indicated the particular information (quantity) which is conveyed in a direct way (relation). In this example, the speaker expressed accurately what she meant with her answer and also has created no implicature.

The following example shows the conventional implicature (lines 37-38).

B: How is your grandmother who was sick when I met you last time?

A: She um (.) to be honest, I haven't seen her for two months. My mother told me that she is sad but fine.

It can be seen from the given example that, although the words '*sad* and *fine*' are not compatible, their use implies that A's grandmother is still fine. The conventional translation of 'but' indicates the implicature of contrast. Therefore, '*she is sad but fine*' implies 'surprisingly, she is fine in spite of being sad'.

The next example shows that the speaker generates the conversational implicature in an indirect way (lines 11-12).

A: I thought you were studying for your exams.

B: I need to take a rest.

The above example shows that A's statement is indirect and this sentence generates the conversational implicature that B should be studying for her exams. Therefore, this is considered an indirect directive to study. However, in Grice's model, the underlying motivations for the indirect statement would not be made clear.

Nevertheless, there are some examples that illustrate the speakers failing to observe the maxims. The following instance illustrates that the speaker is failing to observe the maxim of quantity (lines 51-52).

B: Her daughter is really intelligent, isn't she?

A: Is she? She failed her exams, though, didn't she?

In the given instance, the implicature is generated by A answering B's question in an indirect way. A could have simply answered 'No' and this would have specified the accurate amount of information needed in this circumstance. Instead, when B asks A to confirm her view, A answers in an indirect way. What A wants to say is that B's daughter is not intelligent. However, the essential motivation for this indirectness is not explained by Grice's maxims.

The following example shows a flouting of the maxim of relation (lines 26-27).

B: Is it good for shopping?

A: Hhh, I think, it is good for buying food.

The implicature in this example is generated by A saying that something is untrue. Because A is not shown to be trying to mislead B in any way, B is encouraged to seek another place. It is false to say that City Mall is only good for buying food, because there are a lot of shopping centres there. The speaker implies that City Mall is not a good place for the hearer to do her shopping, but she wants to indicate that it is just good for buying food. Again, as mentioned in the introduction, Grice's maxims do not explain the reason why A answers B's question in an indirect way.

The following is an instance of the speaker violating the maxim of quantity (lines 15-16).

A: Did you celebrate at home?

B: Yeah, we celebrated with all of my family at home. The party was interesting. We ate lots of sweets and also took some pictures. After that we had our lunch. But we missed my uncle in this celebration because he was in hospital.

In this example, B gives more information than needed. In other words, it is enough for B to simply answer 'Yes' to this question but she continued to talk about other things which were not required in the answer; for example, she explained that she celebrated with her family, having sweets and lunch. Therefore, it can be seen that the speaker is violating the maxim of quantity by giving irrelevant and surplus information to A.

3.1.1. Summary of findings of the above conversation analysis

It can be noticed from the above examples that speakers use Grice's maxims and also fail to observe most of these maxims in their daily language. Furthermore, speakers can reply to the

questions addressed to them by other speakers and provide a great deal of information or less information than required. However, if we look at indirect sentences, the results indicate that Grice's maxims do not help us to determine the reasons for indirectness in this conversation.

3.2. Data analysis of politeness sentences

To demonstrate that the speakers use politeness in order to avoid face-threatening acts along with some of the strategies and maxims detailed above, the following examples will be used to illustrate these issues in this section.

The following example illustrates the off-record strategy and also explains why the speaker uses an indirect question (line 31).

B: Oh, it's hot in here.

This example has been intended as an indirect question. According to Brown and Levinson's strategies, this example has been formed under the off-record strategy: the speaker B wants A to switch on the air condition or to open the windows. Because A says that she will open the windows or switch on the air condition, she is replying to the possibility of a threatening act by providing a favour to B who, in turn, avoids the possibility of appearing to order A about; meanwhile, A obtains an acknowledgment for being kind or helpful. Therefore, the reason why B uses an indirect question in this example is clear.

The next example illustrates the same strategy (lines 21-22).

A: Um, how does she look?

B: Her hairstyle is so beautiful.

It can be noticed from this instance that the speaker uses the off-record strategy. Therefore, the indirectness in this example enables A to address B in a polite way by giving her options and moving back behind the exact meaning of the expressions. B is threatening the listener's face and sending negative judgements on her dress, for example, or her shoes. Thus, the reason for the indirectness that

takes place in this example would clearly be seen by using Brown and Levinson's (1978) model.

Again, the off-record strategy is used in this example (line 28).

A: I'm really hungry; I haven't eaten anything [today].

In this example, A asks B in an indirect way to give her some food, because B has already eaten some chips. Therefore, in order to render a negative face pleasant to others, the off-record strategy makes A's request easier for B to accept by the use of indirectness. Brown and Levinson's (1978) strategy provides a clear analysis of the indirect nature of this example.

The following instance illustrates the use of positive politeness (line 35).

B: Is it OK if I borrow this ring from you?

In this example, the speaker uses a positive politeness strategy in order to reduce the threat to the listener's positive face (A). B recognizes that A wishes to be respected. She has recognized that A will give her the ring. Also, this example shows that there is a relationship between the speakers and that they know each other. However, this relationship is friendship.

The next example shows the speaker using more than one strategy of politeness in the same utterance.

A: Could you give me a Dinar? Don't bother if you do not have change (line 48).

In this situation, the example has been identified as positive and negative politeness. In other words, the speaker mixes a positive strategy in the first part with a negative strategy in the second part of the sentence at the same time. She recognizes that her friend has a desire to be appreciated on the one hand but, on the other hand, she also realizes that she sometimes imposes on her.

The following instance shows the speaker using the maxim of generosity (line 41).

A: I don't know exactly where, but (.) I wonder if I can find someone who would like to go with me.

In the given example, the speaker asks B in an indirect way to go with her; therefore, A is trying to influence B to accept A's invitation to go to the shop. According to Leech (1983), this utterance is considered a type of impositive as it seeks to influence B to go with A. This example is identified as a generosity maxim. A is minimizing benefit to herself and maximize cost to herself. A's expression makes it obvious that the cost to her is bigger than the benefit. Thus, the reason for this indirectness in the use of the generosity maxim is to cause B to feel pleased. However, although B does not agree to go with A, B will not ultimately reject this invitation. It can be seen from the analysis of this example that the maxim of generosity provides us with a clear explanation of why A uses an indirect request to B.

The following instance illustrates the speaker using the tact maxim (line 8).

B: Could you give me some paper please to write it down?

This utterance has been recognized as a command. B's statement communicates what B means; therefore, A gives her some paper in order for B to write down her mobile number for her. According to politeness principles, B is minimizing cost to A and maximising benefit for herself. So, the maxim used in this example is the tact maxim. B's expression is superior politeness because it gives us an idea of the indirect way in which A is not allowed to disregard her order.

3.2.1. Summary of findings of the politeness examples

The aforementioned politeness examples show that speakers use examples of both maxims and strategies of politeness in their conversation. Brown and Levinson's and Leech's frameworks of politeness provided ways of understanding how the speakers use polite sentences and why they sometimes use indirect sentences in

their conversation. As mentioned earlier, the reason for this indirectness is sometimes to avoid face-threatening situations or to make the listener feel satisfied.

4. Conclusion

To sum up, this paper has discussed two approaches to discourse analysis: Gricean Pragmatics and Politeness Theory. The first approach looks at the notion of implicature, and also discusses the four maxims of cooperative principles - quality, quantity, relation and manner - in order to show how speakers can convey meaning with their words when they speak. It shows that speakers in most examples fail to observe these maxims because they wish to engage the listener in order to seek the implicit meaning of their expressions. Having applied these maxims to the real recorded conversation, the researchers have found that Grice's maxims are considered less suitable in daily conversation because they do not analyse the indirect nature of the statements used by people in daily interaction.

Politeness theory, on the other hand, looks at the notion of face. It briefly mentions the types of face and then discusses the four strategies of politeness by Brown and Levinson which are used to save the listener's face: bald on-record strategy, negative politeness, positive politeness and off-record strategy. In addition, this theory uses Leech's maxims to analyse data with the aforementioned strategies. By analysing the real conversation with Brown and Levinson's and Leech's frameworks, it has been noticed that these strategies and maxims are not difficult to apply to the data in spite of the fact that some examples are used in an indirect way. This theory covers some examples in daily language and this result makes it more appropriate for everyday communication.

On balance, these two approaches adopt certain maxims and strategies (politeness) which are applicable to a greater or lesser extent in the process of social interaction.

However, from the above analysis, it can be ascertained that politeness theory would seem to be the more versatile approach and gives more scope for flexibility.

5. References

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Appendix

The full conversation between the participants

- A: Aslamu Aliakum
B: Waliakum Asalam
A: How are you?
B: I am fine.
A: What course are you on?

B: I'm studying English language in the second year at Faculty of Arts and Sciences Kasr Khiar.

A: That is good. By the way, I lost your mobile number.

B: Could you give me some paper please to write it down?

A: Of course, here you are.

B: Thanks. Um....last week I went with my family to our relative in Tripoli.

A: I thought you were studying for your exams.

B: I need to take a rest.

A: Hhhhhh. How was Ramadan with you?

B: Well, to be honest it was difficult for me because of studying but on Eid I was so happy.

A: Did you celebrate at home?

B: Yeah, we celebrated with all of my family at home. The party was interesting. We ate lots of sweets and also took some pictures. After that we had our lunch. But we missed my uncle in this celebration because he was in hospital.

A: Oh. Is he OK now?

B: Yes.

A: I haven't seen your young sister for two years.

B: She is studying at secondary school.

A: Um, how does she look?

B: Her hairstyle is so beautiful.

A: Really!

B: Yes.

A: I was busy yesterday. I went to City Mall in Alkhoms.

B: Is it good for shopping?

A: Hhh, I think, it is good for buying food.

A: I'm really hungry; I haven't eaten anything [today].

B: I have some chips. You can eat with me.

A: Thank you.

B: Oh, it's hot in here.

A: Yes, you are right. I will open the windows or switch on the air conditions.

B: Thanks.

A: I will be back to my home at 2:00.

B: Is it OK if I borrow this ring from you?

A: Um. Yes.

B: How is your grandmother who was sick when I met you last time?

A: She um (.) to be honest, I haven't seen her for two months. My mother told me that she is sad but fine.

B: Your watch is very nice. I like it.

A: I don't know exactly where, but (.) I wonder if I can find someone who would like to go with me.

B: Is the shop near to the Faculty?

A: Yes, not too far.

B: Um, let me think.

A: I lost my pen.

B: Oh.

A: Could you give me a Dinar? Don't bother if you do not have change.

B: Don't worry, I have it.

A: Look! That is Sarah.

B: Her daughter is really intelligent, isn't she?

A: Is she? She failed her exams, though, didn't she?

B: I must go now.

A: See you.

B: Bye.