

**CONVERSATIONAL IMPLICATURES
IN “LA FEMME NIKITA” MOVIE SERIES
ENTITLED “*PLAYING WITH FIRE*”**

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Abstract

The purpose of analysing conversational implicature in La Femme Nikita movie series entitled ‘Playing with Fire’ is to find out how conversational implicature is made by flouting a maxim and giving prominence to context in the recognition of such implicatures. The conversations in this movie have some interesting characteristics worthy to investigate. The conversational implicatures are categorized on the basis on flouting quantity maxim, quality maxim, relation maxim and manner maxim. The flouting of the maxims that are mostly found is maxim of quantity.

Keywords: conversational implicature, flouting, quantity maxim, quality maxim, relation maxim and manner maxim

A. Introduction

Language is used to build social relation among people who share the same languages in order to create mutual intelligibility in which people will understand each other in transferring information. As a means of communication, language has various functions. Halliday (1989) classifies language functions into two big groups. The first is pragmatics, in which this function is the further divided into narrative and active. In this case, the main function of language is as a means of communication. The second is magical, in which language is used in ceremonial or religious activities in the culture.

In order to construct a good communication between a speaker and a hearer, a mutual understanding of the utterance is essentially needed since the meaning of the utterance is not only stated but also it is implied. People who involve in a conversation will understand each other if they know not only syntactically or semantically of the utterance but also the implied meaning behind the speaker's utterance. Implicature becomes unavoidably essential to comprehend the implied meaning of an utterance. Implicature is a proposition that is implied by the utterance in a context even though that proposition is not a part of or an entailment of what is actually said (Gazdar, 1979). Grice (1975) classifies implicature into conventional and conversational. Conventional implicature is an implicature which arise solely because of the conventional feature of the words employed in an utterance. On the other hand, the second refers to the implicature which derives from general conversational principles and not just from the lexical entry of the verb concerned (Gazdar, 1979).

Grice (1975) outlines an approach to what he termed conversational implicature that is how hearers manage to work out the complete message when speakers

mean more than they say. An example of what Grice meant by conversational implicature is the utterance: “*Have you got any cash on you?*” where the speaker really wants the hearer to understand the meaning: “*Can you lend me some money? I don't have much on me.*”

The conversational implicature is a message that is not found in the plain sense of the sentence. The speaker implies it. The hearer is able to infer this message in the utterance, by appealing to the rules governing successful conversational interaction. Grice (1975) proposes that implicatures like the second sentence can be calculated from the first, by understanding three things:

1. The usual linguistic meaning of what is said.
2. Contextual information (shared or general knowledge).
3. The assumption that the speaker is obeying what Grice calls the cooperative principle.

Grice (1975) says that one of the causes of conversational implicature is the flouting or exploitation of his cooperative principles. Cooperative principles proposed by Grice mentions that a speaker makes his conversational contribution such as is required at the stage in which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which he is engaged (Levinsons, 1995: 101). He, then, further divides the cooperative principles into four maxims: maxim of quality, maxim of quantity, maxim of relevance, and maxim of manner. To understand the notion of communication, context is important since speaker and hearer have to know the context in which the conversation takes place. Therefore, understanding context can be a helpful way to know the speaker and hearer's intention.

Conversational implicatures are also found in some dialogs in a movie. One of the movies is *La Femme Nikita*

written by Peter M. Lenkov which has an interesting story about a kind of secret operation to save the country from any dangerous activities done by terrorists. Here the main character is Nikita, as one of the operatives, who has to do some missions and have nothing to choose but to obey to her commandants' orders. The commandants calling operation has authority to send them to any places by using implied utterances or instruction in order to avoid the revelation of important information.

From the above illustration, the writer is interested in conducting a research on the conversational implicatures found in *La Femme Nikita* movie series entitled of "Playing with Fire". Good movies have good stories, good actors and actresses and good language and give their audience a visual but real life to experience. Usually, learners of English are suggested watching movies in English, because those movies generally show daily life of people from English speaking countries. When their scripts are normative but oral, those movies can work as a great help for learners of English to improve their language competence from the point of pragmatics. *La Femme Nikita* is just one of them, in which instances of conversational implicature are found.

In order to specify the topic, the researcher formulates a problem statement of the research that is how conversational implicature is made by flouting a maxim and giving prominence to context in the recognition of such implicatures in *La Femme Nikita* movie series entitled "Playing with Fire".

B. Literature Review

The theories reviewed here are related to implicature, conversational implicature, cooperative principle and four maxims, and flouting a maxim.

1. Implicature

Implicature is a component of speaker meaning that constitutes an aspect of what is meant in a speaker's utterance without being part of what is said (Horn, 2006). Grice (1975) distinguishes two different sorts of implicature: conventional implicature and conversational implicature. The former refers to implicature that derives from the conventional feature of the word used in utterance. The latter arises from the flouting of the general conversational principles. They differ in that in the case of conventional implicature the same implicature is always conveyed, regardless of context, whereas in the case of conversational implicature, what is implied varies according to the context of utterance.

It can be assumed that conventional implicature is more general than conversational implicature since everyone knows that the meaning of words that constitute an utterance is based on the convention of the community which uses the language itself.

Implicature can be resulted from the flouting of maxim of the cooperative principles. When a speaker exploits those maxims, he or she tries to hide something. The 'hidden' thing is the implied meaning of the conversation, Therefore this implied meaning is the conversational implicature.

2. Conversational Implicature

Grice (1975) identifies three types of general conversational implicature:

- a. The speaker deliberately flouts a conversational maxim to convey an additional meaning not expressed literally. For instance, a speaker

responds to the question "How did you like the guest speaker?" with the following utterance:

Well, I'm sure he was speaking English.

If the speaker is assumed to be following the cooperative principle, in spite of flouting the Maxim of Quantity, then the utterance must have an additional nonliteral meaning, such as: "The content of the speaker's speech was confusing."

- b. The speaker's desire to fulfil two conflicting maxims results in his or her flouting one maxim to invoke the other. For instance, a speaker responds to the question "Where is Sandra?" with the following utterance:

She's either in the cafeteria or in his office.

In this case, the Maxim of Quantity and the Maxim of Quality are in conflict. A cooperative speaker does not want to be ambiguous but also does not want to give false information by giving a specific answer in spite of his uncertainty. By flouting the Maxim of Quantity, the speaker invokes the Maxim of Quality, leading to the implicature that the speaker does not have the evidence to give a certain answer to where Sandra is.

- c. The speaker invokes a maxim as a basis for interpreting the utterance. In the following exchange:

Do you know where I can get some gas? *There's a gas station around the corner.*

The second speaker invokes the Maxim of Relevance, resulting in the implicature that "the

gas station is open and one can probably get gas there”

3. Cooperative Principle and Four Maxims

Grice (1975) observes that conversations, like other human interactions, are governed by the Cooperative Principle, telling that you should “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”.

The cooperative principle goes both ways: speakers observe the cooperative principle, and listeners assume that speakers are observing it. This allows for the possibility of implicatures, which are meanings that are not explicitly conveyed in what is said, but that can nonetheless be inferred.

The four conversational maxims by Grice (1975) are as follows:

- a. Maxims of Quantity, which covers:
 - 1) Make your contribution as informative as required (for the current purposes of the exchange).
 - 2) Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.
- b. Maxims of Quality: Try to make your contribution one that is true.
 - 1) Do not say what you believe to be false.
 - 2) Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.
- a. Maxim of Relation: be relevant.

- d. Maxims of Manner: be perspicuous.
 - 1) Avoid obscurity of expression.
 - 2) Avoid ambiguity.
 - 3) Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).
 - 4) Be orderly.
- 4. Flouting a Maxim

Grice (1975) states the situation in which 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 the expressed meaning. This additional meaning he called conversational implicature and he termed the process by which it is generated 'flouting a maxim'. A flout occurs when a speaker blatantly fails to observe a maxim at the level of what is said, with deliberate intention of generating an implicature (Thomas, 1995: 65).

C. Method of Investigation

This research is a descriptive qualitative research since it tries to describe the language phenomenon descriptively without using statistics. The data are taken from the conversation occurred in the film *La Femme Nikita*.

The techniques of data collection are observing and note taking. Observing is done by watching and observing the features of language used in the movie. After observing the language, note taking is then made. The conversations which are indicated having the conversational implicatures are noted and collected. Data

are then analysed. Testing is then done by checking and comparing the meaning of the implicature and the context. In case, if the implicature is supported by the context, further interpretation can be made. If it fails, on the other hand, it must be started from the beginning.

The analysis of this research is divided into four parts based on the maxims of cooperative principles which are flouted by each speaker.

D. Discussion

The discussion here comprises the implicature from the floating of quantity maxim, from the floating of quantity maxim, and from the floating of relation maxim.

1. Implicature from the Flouting of Quantity Maxim

The maxim of quantity consists of two kinds of information: to make their contribution as informative as required and not to make their contribution more informative than it is required. The flouting of maxim of quantity results the conversational implicature ‘refusing’ as shown by below dialogue.

- a. Context: A friend of Nikita knocked on the door of her apartment; she opened the door and asked him that he never stopped annoying her to ask for her help since Nikita does not want to help Mick.

Nikita: You just never quit. (*Opens the door*) Yes, Mick?

Mick: Picture this. Venice, it’s five in the morning, I’m just walking back to my hotel - from where, you don’t have to know - and I see this in a window (*he*

shows off a silver brooch) and I say to myself “Nikita”. Here, look at it, it is fun, isn’t it? Look at it, look at it!

Nikita: I can’t take gifts from you, Mick.

Mick: Pity. Still, I do need a favour. (*He walks in*)

Mick’s utterance: *Picture this. Venice, it’s five in the morning, I’m just walking back to my hotel - from where, you don’t have to know - and I see this in a window (he shows off a silver brooch) and I say to myself “Nikita”. Here, look at it, it’s fun, isn’t it? Look at it, look at it!* is said to flout the maxim of quantity. This maxim states that a speaker must give their contribution as informative as is required and not to make their contribution more informative than is required. Mick’s utterance is too much since Nikita’s question is only asking what his intention coming to her apartment. In fact, Mick gives a long answer by showing her a picture and explaining how he took the picture as well as a gift for her and explaining where he saw it as it is suitable for Nikita. His long answer gives more informative contribution than is required. Therefore his utterance is flouting the maxim of quantity. Since he flouts the maxim of quantity, he hides something. This hidden message is the conversational implicature. His intention actually, is asking Nikita’s favour. He tried to make her pleased by showing her a nice picture and a silver brooch as gifts for Nikita in order she was able to help him. Looking to Nikita’s previous utterance when she said that Mick just never quitted, it gives a meaning that Mick had already asked Nikita’s help many times but Nikita refused it,

therefore, Mick kept trying to ask her in many ways including giving her gifts. When Nikita said that she could not take his gifts, she also flouts the maxim of quantity since she should give an answer that she cannot help Mick. Nikita refused to help Mick by saying that she could not take the gifts since she knew what Mick's intention by giving her the gifts. By giving a long answer of showing some gifts, it can be concluded that Mick tried to persuade Nikita by giving her the gifts in order Nikita is willing to help him. On the other hand, Nikita's answer that she could not take the gifts signed that she refused to help Mick.

- b. Context: Michael, a senior operative, asked Davenport's existence in the main area of Section One.

Davenport: You're on the bench for this one.

Michael: What are you doing?

Davenport: Snow's out. I'm in.

Michael: Under whose authority?

Davenport: Operations.

A flout of the maxim of quantity occurs when a speaker blatantly gives more or less information than the situation requires. Davenport's answer of Michael's question gives less information. Michael does not need information about Snow who is replaced by Davenport but why he is here. In fact, Davenport just answers the reason why he was there. From Michael's utterance, he has an implied message that he does not like Davenport's existence there. He, then, found out who sent him anyway by asking him.

c. Context: Michael asked Nikita about Birkoff.

Michael: Where's Birkoff?

Nikita: Operations has him troubleshooting in data.

Nikita's answer of Michael's question flouts a maxim of quantity since she implies a message in which she does not mention exactly the place where Birkoff is. Nikita actually should only mention the name of the place but Nikita's utterance *Operations has him troubleshooting in data* gives a sign to Michael about the place since he knows already the place where Birkoff does something under operation's order. In fact, she hides information about the place but both of them have a common sense of the place that Nikita intends. It is concluded that Nikita's utterance creates a conversational implicature.

d. Context: After returning from the mission, the Operation asked Michael about the target of the mission and he does not exactly answer the Operation's question.

Operations: How many?

Michael : Three, but they had contingency.

Operations: They escaped?

Michael : Birkoff's tracing the location.

(They move off; Operations looks suspicious)

When Operation asked Michael whether the target escaped, Michael answered by uttering *Birkoff's tracing the location*. Michael's utterance flouts the maxim of quantity since he should

answer by saying yes or no; instead he gives more information than is required by informing that Birkoff traced the location of the target. It has implied message that Michael's intention is the target escaped.

2. Implicature from the Flouting of Quality Maxim

The maxim of quality contains an advice for the speaker to give their contribution one that is true. The flouting of maxim of quality occurs when the speaker says something which is untrue or for which he or she lacks adequate evidence. The floating of this maxim results the conversational implicature 'mocking' as shown by below dialogue.

- a. Context: Madeline asked Walter's reason why he helped Michael and Nikita to meet each other and gave them time to express their love. She mocked him by calling him teenager who did a silly thing.

Madeline: Did you really think you could get away with this?

Walter: It doesn't matter. It's what they wanted. It's called living.

Madeline: Living.

Walter: Look it up, it's in the dictionary.

Madeline: Walter, you're a 60 year old teenager. (Walter smiles and takes a bow) By helping them, you're only jeopardizing their future.

Madeline's utterance *Walter, you're a 60 year old teenager* is said to flout the maxim of quality. This maxim states that a speaker must give their contribution one that is true. Madeline's utterance is said to flout the maxim of quality since she

does not give true contribution, specifically she says something that she believes to be false. By giving the false contribution, Madeline flouts the maxim of quality that result the conversational implicature, which is ‘mocking’. By calling Walter teenager is false since Walter is no longer young, he is 60 years old. In fact, Madeline should give a true statement based on the evidence that Walter is an old man not a teenager. By calling him teenager, Madeline has an implied message that only teenager does a silly thing by helping two operatives (Michael and Nikita) to meet each other and help them to express their love which can make them both in danger. Madeline reminded Walter that what he did will jeopardize their future. Therefore, it is not necessary for Walter, as an old man, to do such a silly thing that cause Michael and Nikita in danger.

- b. Context: When Nikita and Michael returned to Section One, Operation asked question to Nikita but she gave untrue statement.

Operations: What happened?

Nikita: I um...um...they grabbed me.
Everything just went black... I...

Michael: She was drugged.

Operations: Was she interrogated?

Michael: No. I got there before they started.

Nikita’s utterance flouts the maxim of quality since she did not give true contribution and lack of evidence. By saying *I um...um...they grabbed me. Everything just went black...I...* it seems that Nikita tried to hide something about what exactly

happened to her. She felt hesitated in answering the question. At earlier scene, it can be seen that actually Nikita wasn't grabbed by the enemy but she went together with Michael to a certain place where they could meet each other to express their love. She said something that she believed to be false.

- c. Context: Mick as Nikita's help to be pretending of his wife to make his mother impressed on him.

Mick: Well she's got a certain - what can I say - impression of who I am.

Nikita: What does she think you do?

Mick: She thinks I'm a dentist.

Nikita: A dentist?

Mick: An oral surgeon, actually.

Nikita: Who's married to...

Mick: A gorgeous leggy blue-eyed blonde chirpy. That'd be you.

Nikita: No way, Mick, no, I can't do it.

Mick's utterances flout the maxim of quality. He said that he's a dentist or an oral surgery but actually not, just to make her mother impressed on him. He also does not give true contribution by saying that he married to Nikita but he did not. Mick's utterances is said to flout the maxim of quality since he lacks adequate evidence. He does not tell the truth of his real condition to his mother in order to make her happy seeing how life is so good for his beloved son.

3. Implicature from the Flouting of Relation Maxim

The maxim of relevance consists of an instruction to the speaker to be relevant. It means the speaker must give relevant contribution in conversation. The flouting of maxim of relevant results the conversational implicature ‘reminding something’ as shown by below dialogue.

a. Context: Nikita talked to Michael what she’d do if Birkoff told the truth to Madeline.

Nikita: What are we going to do?

Michael: Nothing.

Nikita: And if Birkoff tells Madeline?

Michael: Deny everything.

Nikita: Michael, we’re playing with fire.
(He kisses her hand)

Michael: I know.

By saying ‘*we’re playing with fire*’, Nikita has implied message to tell Michael that they make themselves in danger. The maxim of relation consists of an advice to the speaker that he or she gives relevant contribution in the conversation. At that time, Nikita and Michael tried to take a chance to meet each other to express their love in the middle of the mission with the help of Walter; they could get dark approach granted in order not to be detected for a while about their existences by the Operations. However, the Operations took their panels and had Birkoff to check everything under the wire too see personal communication between these two operatives. Nikita felt worried about that, so she asked what she would do if Birkoff revealed it to Operation Madeline.

Michael convinced her to deny everything and Nikita said that they're playing with fire means they made themselves in danger. In fact, Nikita wanted to say that they're in danger if they did such a thing but she says *we're playing with fire*. In short, we can say that Nikita's utterance is flouting the maxim of relation that causes conversational implicature which is giving a sign of danger.

- b. Context: Walter helped Nikita and Michael to meet each other by borrowing a little time during their mission but Birkoff disagreed with Walter.

Walter: I was helping two friends.

Birkoff: Being a messenger for Nikita and Michael is not helping them. It's digging their graves, and yours.

Walter knows that helping Nikita and Michael as operatives to have a relationship jeopardizes their lives but he keeps helping them since he thinks that what friends for. However, Birkoff disagrees with Walter but his utterance literally irrelevant with his suggestion for not being a messenger for Nikita and Michael, but they are conveying a message that the speaker reminds the hearer that they make themselves in danger, although it is likely that he only wants to be polite. By saying *It's digging their graves, and yours* implies a meaning that what Walter did endanger all of them including himself. In speech turns, discourses that are literally irrelevant are often produced but a rational listener can still capture the speaker's intention.

4. Implicature from the Flouting of Manner Maxim

The maxim of manner contains suggestion for the speaker to avoid obscurity expression, avoid ambiguity, be brief and be orderly. The flouting of maxim of manner results in the conversational implicature as shown by below dialogue.

- a. Context: Operation asked the condition of the target arrested by Section One and he wished that the man could not die since he needed important information from him.

Operations: His condition?

Michael: Barely alive.

Operations: This man cannot die.

The conversational implicature arises from the flouting of maxim manner in Operation's utterance *This man cannot die*. In fact, when a man is barely alive means he almost dies and there is a great chance to die since his condition is very bad. By saying *This man cannot die*, Operation's answer is incorrectly since it is ambiguous. Surely he does not want to save the enemy but he has a plan to the man to give information he needs. He implies a message that Michael and the medical team have to save the man and let him alive since the man is the key for the Operation to know the existence of the main target that is Crimson Storm. When the man can be saved, the Operation will take something as the return and after that, he will be killed by the Operation.

- b. Context: Davenport is asked by Operations to kill Michael and Nikita in a mission because the operations have already known their close

relationship and it is prohibited in Section One to have a relationship between operatives.

Davenport: Sir, Nikita and Michael will resist capture.

Operations: You're cleared for extreme force.

Davenport: I'm sorry, sir. I'll need you to be more explicit.

Operations: They are not to escape. Kill them if necessary.

Operation's utterance to Davenport *You are cleared for extreme force* arises conversational implicature that flouts the maxim of manner. Operation gives ambiguous answer that make Davenport doesn't understand what he means. For Davenport, Operation's utterance means something making either him or Nikita and Michael to be killed. Operation implies a meaning that Davenport is under his authority and is free for extreme force toward Nikita and Michael even cause them killed in the mission if they both resist capture. In fact, Operation says '*Kill Nikita and Michael*' that sounds clearer for Davenport to do his order without asking him a clearer statement. What Operation said is an order to kill Nikita and Michael in the mission.

E. Conclusion

The examples above are good indications that the speakers are not only aware of the maxims, but also want to show that they are trying to observe them. Such awareness also means that the speakers are concerned whether their listeners judge them to be cooperative

conversational partners or not. However, these maxims are not always fulfilled and sometimes even blatantly suspended. A speaker may quietly violate a maxim or he may explicitly “opt out”, he may be faced with a clash between different maxims or he may flout a maxim in such a way that the listener can be assumed to understand that such is being done. The result shows that flouting the maxim of quantity, quality, relation and manner are found in the dialogs in this movie.

To conclude, we can say that with recognition of Cooperative Principle and conversational implicatures and the inferential model which explains how the hearer infers the speaker’s meaning on the basis of the evidence provided, communicative participants might prove the accuracy and efficiency of information exchanged.

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