



**OBSERVANCE AND VIOLATION OF CO-OPERATIVE PRINCIPLE
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO HAROLD PINTER'S
THE BIRTHDAY PARTY**

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ABSTRACT

The Co-operative Principle is a crucial concept in Pragmatics which describes how people interact with one another. It is the theory coined by Hebert Paul Gricce, a British philosopher which is assumed as the basic concept in Pragmatics guiding communication. The Co-operative Principle is based on the assumption that people cooperate with one other normally while communicating. In a communication, when we say something and next interlocuter makes a response, we assume that response is maximally cooperative. Conversational partners in arguments, delectate deception, lying, fiction, hypothesizing and making errors are still cooperating in the Pragmatic sense. Gricce defines CP as, 'Make your contromution such as required, as the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged.' For this, he identified four maxims: The Maxim of Quality, The Maxim of Quantity, The Maxim of Relation and The Maxim of Manner. Speakers normalytry to satisfy four maxims of CP in order to observe it. Respose is the core part in the conversation. So through the present research paper, the researcher tried to explore the nature and function of CP with its maxims in the light of their violation and observation with special reference to Harold Pinter's The Birthday Party. The researcher analyzed Pinter's core dramatic innovations in terms of his use of language. The characters often communicate using incomplete sentences, using utter illogical statements, repeating the same words, sentences and taking pauses for no apparent reasons. So at certain instances, some characters have violeted and observed maxim of relation and manner in order to fulfil their interactional purposes.

II. Introduction:

The Co-operative Principle is a crucial concept in Pragmatics which describes how people interact with one another. It is supposed that the listeners and speakers must speak cooperatively and mutually accept one another to be understood in a particular way. Hebert Paul Gricce, a British philosopher, who coined the term the Co-operative Principle which describes how effective communication in conversation is achieved in common social situations. The term CP clearly states that make your contribution such as it is required, at the stage it is occurs, by the accepted purpose or the direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged. The Co-operative Principle (CP) can be divided into four maxims, called the Grician Maxims, which are a way to explain the coherence between utterances and what is



understood from them. (Grieece proposed these four conversational maxims which arise from the pragmatics of natural language.)

III. Aims and Objectives:

The four conversational maxims of CP proposed by H. Paul Grieece, arised from the Pragmatics of natural language. Hence the Co-operative Principle is intended as a description of how people normally behave in conversation. Therefore, through this research paper, the researcher attempts to analyze and interpreted the Co-operative Principle with the following aims and objectives.

1. To examine the concept 'The Co-operative Principle' critically with its maxims.
2. To bring out the significance of the Co-operative Principle as a theory of Pragmatics of natural language.
3. To analyze the observance and violation of the CP with the special reference to Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party*.

IV. Methodology:

Through this research paper, the researcher attempts to analyze the concept the Co-operative Principle critically with the special reference to Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party*. Hence, he has collected the related data at two levels: i) primary and ii) secondary. Primary data includes some conversational exchanges from Pinter's *The Birthday Party* where as secondary data compress with the reference books, critical resources, journals and web references.

As the researcher tries to analyze the concept The Co-operative Principle with the special reference to Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party*, he has selected some conversational passages which have been analyzed in the light of CP. Hence, he has used interpretative methodology. A data is generated from various reference books and analyzed with the help of perception, observation and logic.

V. Keywords(with their meanings) from the research paper:

- CP : Co-operative Principle
Implicature : the act of showing that someone is involved in a crime or partly responsible for something bad
Entailment : the act of involving something

VI. The Co-operative Principle Theory:

The Co-operative Principle, coined by Herbert Paul Grice (1913- 1988), a British Philosopher, is assumed as the basic concept in Pragmatics, guiding communication. During 1960's he undertook an investigation of the way people behave in conversation. He invented the fundamental conclusion as conversational exchanges are governed by an overarching principle, which he labelled as CP. This principle is based on the assumption that people cooperate with one other normally while communicating. He explains it as, when we say something and next interlocutor makes a response, we assume that response is maximally



cooperative. He used this term practically not ideologically. Conversational partners in arguments, deliberate deception, lying, fiction, hypothesizing and making errors are still 'cooperating' in the pragmatic sense. Observing as well as violating CP proves to be helpful for people to improve the flexibility and accuracy in language communication. This principle is the base of Conversational Implicatures. Grice defines CP as, *Make your contribution such as required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged.* (1975:45-46) Grice proposed this key concept in Pragmatics, in the *William James Lecture Series*, delivered at Harvard, in 1967. According to Grice, CP refers to how people interact with each other and it aims at normal behaviour of speakers through effective and efficient use of language in conversation to cooperative ends. Grice identified four principles, which are called as the maxims of conversation too, underlying the effective use of language. These maxims can be stated as follows.

The Maxim of Quality

(Try to make your contribution one that is true, specifically)

Do not say what you believe to be false.

Do not say for which you lack adequate evidence.

The Maxim of Quantity

(Concerning the amount of information to be conveyed)

Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange).

Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

The Maxim of Relation

(Make your contribution relevant)

Make your contribution relevant to the aims of the ongoing conversation.

The Maxim of Manner

(Concerning not so much what is said as how it is said, be perspicuous)

Avoid ambiguity

Avoid obscurity of expression.

Be brief (Avoid unnecessary prolixity).

Be orderly.

VII. Observance and Violation of CP

Speakers normally try to satisfy four maxims of CP in order to observe it. Response is the core part in the conversation. A compliment should be politely accepted or tactfully rejected, a question should be answered and an invitation should be accepted or declined. The listener, in this way is expected to observe CP. If he does not do so, he seems to be uncooperative and in this sense, he violates CP. Communication can be seen as broken if speakers do not adhere to these maxims, which are the violations of CP. A maxim can be observed or violated for the communicative purposes. Grice calls the violation of maxim as 'flouting' or 'exploitation' of maxim. Let us see how maxim can be observed or violated. The sentence 'Manish has two cars' implicate that the speaker believes as Manish has two cars and has the adequate



evidence for it. This is an example of the observance of the Maxim of Quality. On the contrary, 'Manish flies aeroplane in water' is an example of violation of the Maxim of Quality, as it is a false statement and nobody has the adequate evidence for it. In the following dialogue, we can note that Maxim of Quantity has been observed.

A: Where were you yesterday night?

B: In the clubhouse.

On the contrary, if the speaker B gives the answer like 'I was in college in the beginning but moved to cinema in the afternoon and then came to clubhouse at night'. It can be said that the speaker B has violated Maxim of Quantity.

We can note observance of the Maxim of Manner in the following dialogue.

A: What are you reading?

B: I am reading a novel.

In this dialogue, speaker B has given answer to question of speaker A in brief which can be seen as unambiguous. Therefore, he has followed Maxim of Manner. However, in the following dialogue, violation of Maxim of Manner can be noted.

A: What are you reading?

B: I am reading a face.

Speaker B has given the ambiguous answer and has violated Maxim of Manner.

Maxim of Relation can also be seen as observed and violated which can be illustrated through following example.

For example:

A: Where is my pocket?

B: On your table.

Speaker B in above dialogue has given relevant answer to question of speaker A and has observed Maxim of Relation. On the contrary, if he would have given answer like, 'I have taken my lunch' or any other irrelevant answer, it would be a violation of Maxim of Manner. It is said that conversation would be most successful if CP with its maxims, would be complied with. However, people always violate this principle with its maxims, which make the conversation partially successful or simply a failure. To sum up, this chapter serves the purpose of theoretical background which is a prerequisite of present research. In this chapter, the researcher has briefly discussed key concepts within the umbrella of Pragmatics to which CP is mainly related with. In an application of CP theory to the selected absurd plays, there are references to the terms like Speech Situation, Speech Event, Sentence and Utterance etc. Terms like, Presupposition, Implicature, Entailment as well as The Politeness Principle etc. are very important to comprehend and analyze CP by Grice. It is clear that we need to be cooperative in conversation. In the next chapter, the researcher has analyzed selected conversational exchanges from *The Birthday Party* in the light of CP with its observance and violation of maxims.

VIII. Analysis of CP in *The Birthday Party*

On the basis of theoretical background provided above, the researcher attempts to analyze selected significant conversational exchanges from *The Birthday Party* in the light of Grice's



CP. Interlocutors are expected to follow rules laid down for correct use of language. However, in actual conversation, those rules may or may not be followed by them, which mean they may observe or violate conversational principles. Observance and violation of CP is a deliberate act having some intentions in the mind of speaker. Conversation is a collaborative act as it consists of different strategies used by the interlocutors. Those are dependent on various factors such as context of utterance, relationship between speaker and listener, psychological condition of interlocutors, socio-religious background etc. CP is concerned with study of language exchange and language behaviour. The interlocutors are made to observe and violate normal conversational activity due to above mentioned factors indicating deeper meaning of an utterance. It can be identified with the application of CP. The outcomes of present analysis are meant to examine character's conversational behaviour and investigate meaning behind what they say, how they say, where they observe and violate conversational maxim and the possible reasons behind it. Analysis is focused on character's observance and violation of maxim and inquires about way in which characters observe as well as violate maxim. The conversational passages are selected on the basis of individual perception and varied treatment of the CP, as it is not feasible as well as practicable to analyze each and every utterance in a play. This research paper provides results yielded from the analysis of selected conversational exchanges in Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party*.

IX. Analysis of Conversational Exchanges:

Conversational Exchange 1

Contextual Background

Setting of the play is a living room of a house in a seaside town. A door is leading to hall down left and back door and small window up left. There is a scene of kitchen hatch and door of kitchen is up at right. Some chairs and a table are at centre of living room. Play begins with Petey, who enters from door on the left, with a paper and sits down at table and he begins to read newspaper. His wife Meg is in kitchen. She calls him through a kitchen hatch. The following conversational exchange shows their first communicative encounter.

Conversation

MEG. Is that you, Petey?

Pause.

Petey, is that you?

Pause.

Petey?

PETEY. What?76

MEG. Is that you?

PETEY. Yes, it's me.(BP: 09)

Interpretation of Conversation and CP Analysis

This is a brief conversation between Meg and Petey, who are husband and wife, almost of the same age. On hearing her husband's footsteps, Meg asks through kitchen hatch whether he has come back. She asks this question thrice before he speaks. In this way, she has violated maxim of quantity. Her husband gives a vague reply 'what' violating maxim of manner,



though he has heard her question thrice before. Meg expresses a little surprise and asks again if he has come back. Possible reason behind violation of maxim of quantity is the superfluous nature of Meg, who tries to show over consciousness towards her husband though she is not. Actually, Meg knows that it is Petey who is in, as there is no one to come inside house except Petey. Still, she reveals her over affection towards her husband by asking same question thrice. Dialogue between them reveals their nature and relation. Meg is really a foolish woman and Petey is uninterested in conversation with her. Still he gives an answer, as it is he. In this way, he follows maxim of quality giving an appropriate answer to her repeated question. Pinter uses repetition as a device to create laughter and also to ease tension of the scene and divert audience's response slightly from action. In above conversational passage, Meg repeatedly asks a question which creates laughter. It indicates the feeling of hollowness in Meg and Petey's married life.

Conversational Exchange 2

Contextual Background

Petey is reading the newspaper while eating cornflakes served by his wife, Meg. In the following conversational exchange, Meg and Petey talk about newspaper.

Conversation

MEG. You read me out some nice bits yesterday.

PETEY. Yes, well, I haven't finished this one yet.

(BP: 10)

Interpretation of Conversation and CP Analysis

In this dialogue, Meg is expecting Petey to read out some nice bits from newspaper for her, as on previous day he has read out those. Petey's reply contains both observance of maxim of quality and relation. He replies positively, by saying 'yes' to her indirect suggestion. In this way, he follows maxim of quality. Reason behind his observance of this maxim is his habit of reading bits from newspaper, for his wife. He adds something more and indicates that he has not finished reading today's newspaper. Therefore, he cannot read some bits now for her. He violates maxim of quantity with this addition but speaks in concern with Meg's question only. Hence, he observes maxim of relation for purpose that he could complete reading of newspaper in hand and then he can turn towards Meg's demand of reading out bits from it.

Conversational Exchange 3

Contextual Background

It seems that two visitors, Goldberg and McCann are going to visit Mr. and Mrs. Boles' house. So, it is obvious that rooms for visitors should be ready with all necessities. Following exchange exposes Meg's habit of talking unnecessarily and reveals her talkativeness.

Conversation

PETEY. You've got a room ready?

MEG. I've got the room with the armchair all ready for the visitors. (BP: 13)

**Interpretation of Conversation and CP Analysis**

Meg and Petey are expecting two guests as they think their house as approved boarding-house. They are supposed to give good services to their guests. Petey has prior information about arrival of guests and he conveys it to Meg and asks whether she has made provision of a room for guests. Instead of giving answer 'yes' which would have been brief and appropriate answer but she adds that she has got the room ready with the armchair, for visitors, which is not necessarily required. In other words, she gives information more than required. Hence, she has violated maxim of quantity which reveals her talkative nature. She might wish to assure her husband about her arrangement with violation of maxim of quantity.

Conversational Exchange 4**Contextual Background**

Meg and Petey talk about expected visitors and arrangement of room for them. Petey tells that he has definite answer that guests would come. Petey questions if it would be possible for them to accommodate the guests and if she has room ready. Meg replies that she has already got a room ready with armchairs and she can comfortably accommodate the guests. However, suddenly, Petey changes topic, which reveals that characters in BP frequently violate maxim of relation and talk vaguely.

Conversation

MEG. I'm going to wake that boy.

PETEY. There's a new show coming to the palace.

MEG. On the pier?

PETEY. No. The Palace, in the town.

MEG. Stanley could have been in it, if it was on the pier.

PETEY. This is a straight show.

MEG. What do you mean?

PETEY. No dancing or singing.

MEG. What do they do then?

PETEY. They just talk.

(BP: 13)

Interpretation of Conversation and CP Analysis

While talking about guests, suddenly, Meg remembers Stanley and tells to Petey that she is going to wake him up. Irrelevant to her statement, Petey answers as there is a new show coming to the Palace. These statements seem irrelevant with each other, as they do not have any relation in between. These two statements cannot be called as logical as it seems that Petey has not paid any concern to Meg's talk. In this way, he has violated maxim of relation. On the other hand, with observance of maxim of relation, Meg continues conversation, and she asks Petey whether show is coming on the pier. Petey observes maxim of quality this time and gives appropriate reply as show is coming to the palace. In the subsequent utterance Meg is seen as dreaming about Stanley performing in the show if it would have been on pier which can be investigated as ambiguous utterance as we do not get evidence about Stanley as a pianist. Hence, it can be seen as violation of maxim of manner. In the subsequent conversation, Petey clarifies that it's a straight



show and hence there isn't any singing and dancing. When Meg seems to be incomprehensible Petey makes it clear that characters in the straight show just talk while performing. Maxims of quality and quantity are seen as observed in above utterances as both characters give appropriate answers to each others' questions with required information. Petey and Meg show their incoherent nature which is the possible reason behind this violation and observance of various maxims. Meg's affection towards Stanley would be very reason behind her violation of maxim of manner when she dreams Stanley performing in show. Lastly, both are seemed to concern about same topic which makes them to observe maxim of quality and quantity.

Conversational Exchange 5

Contextual Background

Meg prepares cornflakes for Stanley's breakfast. She enters with a bowl of cornflakes and puts it on the table. She says that Stanley has come for the sake of breakfast which he doesn't deserve. She offers him cornflakes and seeks compliment but she gets adverse comment.

Conversation

MEG. What are the cornflakes like, Stan?

STANLEY. Horrible.

MEG. Those flakes? Those lovely flakes? You're a liar, a little liar. They're refreshing. It says so. For people when they get up late. (BP: 14)

Interpretation of Conversation and CP Analysis

Meg interrupts Stanley while he is having breakfast. She asks how cornflakes are and Meg expects compliment from Stanley by offering him a bowl of cornflakes. Stanley, in disgust, replies as cornflakes are horrible. Instead of this adverse comment, he could have given a praising comment though he did not like cornflakes. Still he gives harsh reply and in this way violates maxim of manner. His immaturity is the main reason behind this violation. He does not know how to speak, whom to speak and what to speak. Second reason behind his violation of maxim of manner is his relation with Meg. Their relation is ambivalent as Meg plays roles of mother and mistress simultaneously. So, Stanley would have been in a mood of teasing her while using word 'horrible'. At the same time, it's quite noticing that he has followed maxim of quantity with using required length of information. Additionally, if cornflakes are really not eatable he must have observed the maxim of quality too by giving appropriate reply.

X. Conclusion:

The present research paper is an application oriented study deriving some concrete observations emerged from it. This research paper concludes implications of the theory of CP and its application to selected conversational passages from *The Birthday Party*. The present study has successfully attempted to observe Pinter's core dramatic innovations in terms of his use of language. The characters often communicate using incomplete sentences, using utter illogical statements, repeating the same words, sentences and taking pauses for no apparent reasons. The characters change their use of language, attitude and mind-set as per the



situation in which they are placed. They have not fully violated or entirely observed all the maxim of CP. At certain instances, some characters have violated and observed either maxim of quality or quantity and at another, some characters have violated and observed maxim of relation or manner in order to fulfill their interactional purposes. The present research paper focuses on main findings of the study and makes the conclusion crystal clear, which have been derived from the analysis of some selected conversational passages.

This research paper intensifies the truth that words, when used in context, become significant and alive through conversational activities. It even projects that words can express meaning beyond the lines when uttered in context. It has been perceived that CP is an influential pragmatic concept which enables the way to arrive at exact meanings conveyed through the seeming absurd conversational activities. The major conclusions derived from present research are as under.

1. Conversational activities become more comprehensive as well as interesting with application and analysis of CP in an absurd drama which reflects significance of CP as a theory of language use.
2. CP is observed and violated intentionally as well as accidentally through absurd communicative activities.
3. Conversational purposes of the interlocutors are fulfilled even when CP is observed or violated.
4. Conversational activities are found enhanced with interest when CP is violated.
5. CP is violated as a necessity of ongoing communicative activity and for purpose of creating menace, hiding identity and so on.
6. Occurrence of violation of conversational maxim is more frequent than the observance.
7. Characters' intentions and attitudes towards each other plays an important role in their observance or violation of conversational maxim.
8. Relationship of characters with each other is revealed through the analysis of absurd conversational activities.
9. It is an intricate task to investigate characters' past whereabouts in absurd plays due to their failure in producing valid and convincing evidences about themselves. For example, we can't get valid information concerning past whereabouts of Stanley in *The Birthday Party*.
10. Silences, pauses and gaps between the conversation in an absurd play reveals characters' insecurity, unknown threat resulting into their inefficiency in the use of language and disturbed relations.
11. The way in which characters observe and violate the maxim of conversation explore their mental, physical state, relations with each other, struggle for survival, efforts to acquire control over the situation.
12. Maxims of CP reveal obscurity in the use of language, burden of outside reality on the characters and their behaviour in absurd plays.
13. Characters' pose of act is reflected through their utterance in absurd plays.
14. Character's observance of CP shows their agreement of views and violation shows disagreement which expresses their relationship.



15. Quantity maxim is violated due to creation of image by certain characters in the ongoing conversational activities.
16. Characters' desperate struggle to find the correct expression for communication is noted in Pinter's plays.
17. Unknown threat is the basic reason of each character's behaviour resulting into broken communication surviving them from more attempts of menace.
18. The motives, fears, strengths and weaknesses of characters are revealed through the treatment of CP in Pinter's plays.
19. Isolation from the world and escape from reality are striking features of absurd plays. It is reflected in *The Birthday Party* where Stanley violates the maxim of CP to hide his identity from Meg and makes an attempt to escape from reality.
20. Goldberg in *The Birthday Party* violates maxims of quantity and manner to create impact on the ongoing conversational activity.
21. Meg violates quantity maxim in *The Birthday Party* with a repetition of a question about her husband's presence. Meg repeatedly asks a question which creates laughter. It indicates the feeling of hollowness in Meg and Petey's married life. Here, Pinter uses repetition as a device to create laughter and also to ease tension of the scene.

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