

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

This chapter provides the background of the study. It states the problems in the analysis of film dialogues in which conversational implicature and Grice's cooperative principle and maxims are applied. The purposes of the study, delimitation of the study, and definition of terms are also included.

People engage in communication in several kinds of situations or communication contexts. The outstanding role of communication in transactional and interactional contexts reveals its transactional and interactional function. The transactional function is concerned with the exchange of information or passing on information in order to get things or business done. On the other hand, the primary purpose of the interactional function is to create and maintain social relationship (Brown & Yule, 1983, pp. 1-2). With respect to the interactional function, we can say that communication serves social needs through human interaction. By interacting with others, people use communication as a means of establishing relationships. In other words, communication is a means of conducting human affairs. This is why people need to study communication in the first place.

Tubbs and Moss (1994) propose six communication contexts: two-person, interviewing, small-group, public, organizational, and mass communication. In many countries, although English has been promoted as a foreign language widely in schools and workplaces, there are not many communicative contexts available for learners of English as a foreign language and those who use English as a means of communication. Significantly, mass communication messages are “intended for masses of individuals rather than for only a small number of individuals” (Tubbs & Moss, 1994, p. 17), mass communication offers language learners a great deal of data.

Among the primary channels of mass communication, such as newspapers, films, radio, and television, one effective channel of mass communication aimed mainly at entertaining a wide range of audiences is film. Film is an important corpus of conversations as it provides many examples for language learners who are interested in studying spoken language or conversation. Motion pictures and feature films have been suggested as tangible models for human communication (Tubbs & Moss, 1994, p. 6). In the same way, film dialogue can represent a model conversation that represents the way people actually use language. This is because the script writer’s raw material is people, and the main way to represent human beings is through their speech (Maloney and Rubenstein, 1980, p. 149).

Film dialogues are usually artificially constructed by a script writer. The writer may make up dialogue or modify people’s real talk into meaningful sequences for dramatic purposes. With regard to language

learning, characters in films are engaged in conversation without intention of displaying or teaching language to audiences, so non-native speakers of English often have difficulty determining the purpose of conversation and understanding the intended meaning communicated by characters in films. In addition to linguistic and grammatical features that are usually employed for the analysis of language in general, language learners may also employ pragmatic explanation for the interpretation of spoken language in conversation. Furthermore, knowledge of context is necessary to help determine what is intended or meant by a speaker of an utterance.

Conversational implicature is a notion in pragmatics that accounts for the interpretation of spoken language in conversation. Herbert Paul Grice, a philosopher of linguistics, coined the term “conversational implicature” in 1975 to refer to the meaning that implies more than what is being said. Conversational implicature can be drawn from an utterance or part of an utterance by employing Grice’s cooperative principle and maxims, in accordance with the assumption that participants usually observe the maxims of conversation in order to fulfill the conversational purpose (Brown & Yule, 1983, pp. 31-33).

Statement of the Problems

Apart from naturally occurring conversations, humorous and attractive dialogues of romantic comedy films are of the researcher’s interest. This is

because they share in common pragmatic features of language, particularly language in conversation.

The researcher, therefore, conducted this research to seek the answers of the key questions: firstly, what conversational implicatures are generated in utterances produced by film characters and whether the maxims are observed, violated, or flouted to generate conversational implicatures; secondly, how the speakers of the utterances convey their intended meanings via conversational implicature and how the hearers recognize the intended meanings; and lastly, what kinds of contextual knowledge contribute to the interpretation of the utterances and the calculation of the conversational implicatures. Significantly, the frequent violation of conversational principles by film characters to convey their intended meanings or additional meanings enables the researcher to build a conceptual framework of this study. The analysis and interpretation of the data in this study, however, will be based on the notion of conversational principles, which is associated with the assumption that speakers and listeners involved in conversation are generally cooperating with each other.

This study is conducted to explore English language film dialogues to discover conversational implicatures in utterances by characters. The researcher will identify the conversational implicatures and interpret the speakers' intended meaning by illustrating how the hearer of the utterances makes inferences from what being said. The researcher uses the application of Grice's cooperative principle and its maxims in the interpretation of utterances produced in films to reveal the pragmatic features of the utterances.

To illustrate how the cooperative principle (CP) and conversational maxims (CM) give rise to conversational implicature, we may consider the following example from *Sweet Home Alabama*:

Melanie: Well, for starters, you can get your stubborn ass down here ... and give me a divorce.

[Jake drops a tool on the floor]

Melanie: Come on, Jake, I mean it. The joke's over. Let's just finish this. I've got a plane to catch.

Jake: **You're shittin' me, right?**

Jake's utterance is ambiguous and can be interpreted in two ways. Melanie, then, can assume that Jake is not being cooperative and is violating the maxim of manner, "avoid ambiguity." The similarity between the pronunciation of the word "shitting" and "cheating" creates the ambiguity in Jake's response to Melanie. By saying the slang "shitting," which means telling a lie or nonsense instead of saying "cheating," which means having an affair, Jake intends to make fun of Melanie. Jake's utterance "You're shittin' me, right?" thus implies that Jake pretends not to understand Melanie's request.

Purposes of the Study

This study is conducted with four specific purposes: firstly, to examine film dialogues to discover conversational implicatures produced by film

characters and identify them; secondly, to analyze the conversational implicatures based on the four conversational maxims, i.e., whether the conversational maxims are observed, flouted, or violated; thirdly, to illustrate how the speakers of the utterances convey their intended meaning via conversational implicatures and how the hearers recognize their intended meanings; lastly, to look for the kinds of contextual knowledge that contribute to utterance interpretation, particularly in the calculation of the conversational implicature.

Research Questions

- RQ1. What are the conversational implicatures found in utterances produced by characters in films?
- RQ2. What gives rise to the conversational implicatures: the conversational maxims being observed, flouted, or violated?
- RQ3. How do the speakers of the utterances convey their intended meaning via conversational implicature and how do the hearers recognize the intended meanings?
- RQ4. What kinds of contextual knowledge contribute to utterance interpretation, particularly in the calculation of the conversational implicature?

Delimitation of the Study

Dialogues of American and British films are selected as a case study. Three romantic comedy feature films released between 2001 and 2005- *Bridget Jones's Diary*, *Sweet Home Alabama*, and *Two Weeks Notice*-are selected for the study. This study limits its scope to conversational implicatures that arise from the violation of the cooperative principle and the four maxims. Implicatures to be found in this study will be analyzed according to Grice's maxims: maxim of quality, maxim of quantity, maxim of relation, and maxim of manner. In addition, the context in which the participants communicate or interact with each other will account for the interpretation of the language, as the researcher will have to use knowledge of the context to predict what is intended by the speaker if needed. Prosodic features such as intonation, speed, stress, sound, volume, silence or laughter, for example, can be described and indicated in brackets if needed, as they might assist in interpreting utterances. Conversations in scenes of sex, violence, taboo words, and profanity are skipped.

Significance of the Study

This research has been written for language learners who have little or no prior background in pragmatics in an attempt to develop language learners' understanding of how pragmatic explanation accounts for the study of conversation or language in conversation.

By using film dialogues as a model conversation, English language learners will learn how to interpret language in conversation employing the notion of conversational implicature. This will provide readers with ideas and guidance for carrying out further research projects involving pragmatic analysis.

Furthermore, the study will provide guidelines for the proper and effective use of language in conversation that will be beneficial to non-native speakers of English as they may apply this knowledge to improve their conversational skill.

Definitions of Terms

Significant terms related to the study are defined below:

Conversational implicature refers to “an additional unstated meaning that has to be assumed in order to maintain the cooperative principle, i.e. if someone says ‘The President is a mouse’, something that is literally false, the hearer must assume the speaker means to convey more than is being said” (Yule, 1996, p. 128).

The cooperative principle is “a basic assumption in conversation that each participant will attempt to contribute appropriately, at the required time, to the current exchange of talk”.

Conversational maxims are the four sub-principles of the cooperative principle: the maxim of quality, the maxim of quantity, the maxim of relevance, and the maxim of manner.

Generalized conversational implicature refers to “an additional unstated meaning that does not depend on special or local knowledge” (Yule, 1996, p. 130).

Particularized conversational implicature refers to “conversational implicature as an additional unstated meaning that depends on special or local knowledge” (Yule, 1996, p. 132).

Feature film refers to a film that is usually 90 or more minutes long (Cambridge online dictionary).

Physical context refers to “where the conversation is taking place, what objects are present, what actions are occurring, and so forth” (Geffen, 2002).

Epistemic context refers to “what speakers know about the world.” Therefore, the shared background knowledge by speakers and hearers is a crucial part of epistemic knowledge (Geffen, 2002).

Linguistic context refers to the “text” in which the utterance is situated (Schiffrin, 1994, p. 367).

Social context refers to “the social relationship among speakers and hearers” (Geffen, 2002).

Flouting of the maxims refers to a moment when a speaker deliberately or ostentatiously breaches or fails to observe one or more maxims, i.e., the apparent violation of the maxims (Schiffrin, 1994, p. 195).

Violation of the maxims refers to a situation in which a speaker intentionally, quietly, or unostentatiously fails to observe one or more maxims (Schiffrin, 1994, p. 195).

Observation of the maxims refers to a situation in which a speaker simply observes or follows one or more maxims in a straightforward way (Schiffrin, 1994, p. 195).

Summary

Chapter 1 provides the background of the study, the statement of the problems, the purposes of the study, the research questions, delimitation of the study, importance of the study, and definition of terms. The background of the study reveals the necessary information and ideas related to the data of the study, which is useful for the analysis of the data to be conducted in the proceeding chapters. Moreover, the notion of conversational implicature and other related ideas are also presented in the background of the study. The important parts of this chapter, however, are the statement of the problems, the purposes of the study and the research questions, which shape and organize the content and structure of this research.