

A Pragmatic Analysis of Some Qur'anic Verses: A Gricean Approach

Ansam Ghazal

Dept. of Humanities, Amman Engineering Technology College, Al-Balqa' Applied
University, P.O. Box 15008, Amman 11134, Jordan

E-mail: ghazalansam@yahoo.com

Received: Jan. 31, 2016

Accepted: Feb. 7, 2016

Published: February 23, 2017

doi:10.5296/ijl.v9i1.10818

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5296/ijl.v9i1.10818>

Abstract

The study highlights the implicature in the *Holy Qur'an* that mainly leads to misconception. To achieve the purpose of this study, seven Qur'anic verses are analyzed adopting Grice's theory of implicature. Undoubtedly, using metaphorical language has been difficult to be understood, as what it is metaphorically said is different from what it is intentionally meant. Consequently, the study tries to shed light on the importance of the Qur'anic rhetorical style when addressing people. The study has shown that floating one or more of Grice's maxims does mean that these verses are misunderstandable; however, it reflects the highly elevated style of the Holy Qur'an's eloquence. The study has also found that floating more than one maxim enriches the Qur'anic verse and enables the reader figures out the implied meaning.

Keywords: The Qur'anic discourse, CP (Cooperative Principle), Grice's maxims, Conversational implicature

1. Statement of the Problem

Some Qur'anic expressions contain implicature. Consequently, they should be analyzed within pragmatic theories. So, this study comes to examine the role of flouting Grice's maxims in creating an implicature in some verses of the *Holy Qur'an*. It tries to clarify this implicature (the implied meaning) by investigating renowned exegeses. The study comes to highlight the linguistic and rhetorical style since the Qur'anic discourse often flouts Grice's maxims; hence, it constitutes a challenge to those who belong to different cultures and identities even if they are Muslims. Because there are a few studies that tackle metonymy and implicature from theoretical perspectives, the study throws light on this phenomena in order to reach logical interpretations to such Qur'anic implicatures.

2. Research Questions

The study has attempted to answer the following questions:

1. How do some Qur'anic expressions flout Grice's maxims of implicature?
2. Does implicature reflect the rhetorical style of the Qur'anic discourse?
3. Do readers face difficulties while interpreting implicatures?

3. Significance of the study

The *Holy Qur'an* is the greatest book that was revealed to Muslims through the Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him). It is the book that shows peoples' rules, laws, and most religious matters; consequently, it is considered a reference to all Muslims over the world. In this vein, the *Holy Qur'an* is the only way of having a thorough understanding of Islam as a divine religion. Consequently, this study helps the reader understand the implied meanings resulted from flouting Grice's maxims. More specifically, the study attempts to pinpoint the floating of Grice's maxims in conveying the pragmatic implicature in some Qur'anic verses. Furthermore, it focuses on clarifying the intended meaning as well as the message rather than the literal meaning. It also deals with analyzing some selected verses so as to explain how flouting maxims make the reader confused about the implicit meaning.

4. Hypotheses

The following hypotheses will be tested in this research:

1. The selected verses of the *Holy Qur'an* of this study flout the Grice's maxims to create the implied meaning.
2. It is hypothesized that flouting one or more than one maxim may lead to misunderstanding the Qur'anic expression unless the reader consults renowned exegeses.

5. Introduction

The *Holy Qur'an* is considered the greatest miracle that was revealed to the Prophet Mohammad (pbuh). It is undeniable that the miracle of the *Holy Qur'an* is related to its

eloquence as well as a rhetorical style in a time when poetry and oration were abundantly common among the people of that epoch. The Prophet spread the words of Allah and faced many obstacles at the beginning of Islamic Call. However, Allah has challenged people to compose even if a verse. In fact, poetry, oration, and rhetoric were common at that time, but the Prophet (pbuh) sermonized people, putting an end to their claims on rhetoric.

Mehawesh and Jaradat (2015) conducted study on the meaning of the Arabic expression *inshallah*. The researchers pointed out that “the expression has various non-literal meanings besides the literal one which is an invocation to Allah to enable the speaker to achieve a positive or a negative action” (p. 319). In this vein, they assumed that the non-literal meaning of any expression often flouts the maxim of quality because the speaker does not mean the literal meaning. It is clear that the addressee can figure out the message intended by the speaker. It is an urgent necessity for anyone interested in the *Holy Qur'an* to examine different authentic resources to pick up the exact meaning. There are two meanings in some cases: the explicit meaning and the implicit meaning. In other words, the contextual meaning is difficult to be comprehended by ordinary readers unless they consult several authentic exegeses. This means that the miraculous aspect of this holy book is associated with the meaning of its verses. Therefore, it is necessary to look beyond the meanings of these verses in order to understand more about the exact meanings. It is worth mentioning that the existence of implicit meanings is something inevitable, as the *Holy Qur'an* is the word of Allah.

Yule (1996) defines pragmatics as “the study of meaning as communicated by a speaker (or writer) and interpreted by a listener (or reader).” (p. 3) Consequently, in the case of the Qur'anic discourse, the Qur'anic words and expressions need deep analyses since the surface meaning does not sometimes reflect the implied meaning. Since pragmatics is considered a branch of linguistics that basically deals with the implied meaning(s) of an utterance. Thomas (1995) classifies meanings into three types: abstract, contextual, and speaker's meaning. The first type deals with the meanings of sentences without the consideration of the context in which they are occurred. The second one concerns the relationship between the abstract meaning of an utterance and its context. The third type represents what the speaker comprehends through the context. In this vein, people vary in communicating and conveying their messages, depending on certain social, cultural or linguistic norms.

Grice (1975) assumes that people in the conversations follow whether consciously or unconsciously four main maxims; namely, relevance, quality, manner, and quantity. In fact, these maxims successfully cooperate with each other to create a rhetorical discourse. According to him, it is thought that people have ability to understand each other regardless of flouting maxims. In other words, his theory violates the cohesion in the surface level of the written words to the coherence between the ideas of the written conversations. Grice assumes in this theory that in order to cooperate with people successfully, one should produce relevant, true and enough information far away from ambiguity. He admits that people's speech is often dominated by four principle, supporting his argument by several examples (1975, p. 45-47) as follows:

1. The principle of the quantity that requires conveying the message using an appropriate number of words and utterances neither more nor less.

E.g: If he asks somebody for help to mend his car, he assumes that this person will give him four screws neither two nor six.

2. The principle of quality which requires providing true information while speaking, avoiding false one and that for which one lacks evidence.

E.g: If he needs a sugar to make a cake, he does not expect the second person to give him a salt.

3. 3. The principle of relevance that focuses on giving information which has to do with the main topic of the conversation.

E.g: If he is mixing the ingredients of the cake, he expects to be handed neither a book nor an oven cloth. However, these things could be appropriate in the later stages.

4. The principle of manner which requires speaking clearly, briefly and orderly.

These principles according to Grice can be broken in four ways. The first is the intentional flouting to convey a certain message that can be understood according to a specific contextual information; violating the maxims to mislead the listener; opting out these rules to indicate indirectly the desire of the speaker to finish his/her speech with the addressee and making unintentional infringement for the maxims because of either an imperfect linguistic performance or a mental problem (Archer et al, 2012, p. 52).

Implicature can be identified as a branch of the language applications, which studies the utterances that we cannot control their meanings of their words, but rather deals with, how we can use certain rules to guess the meanings of them. In other words, implicature focuses on the speech in specific cases, time, place, and circumstances. "To imply is to hint, suggest or convey some meaning indirectly by means of language" (Thomas, 1995, p. 58). In his explanation of implied or additional meaning, Grice distinguishes between two kinds of implicature: conventional implicature which conveys the same extra meaning regardless of context, and it is always lexicalized and easily known to people. The second kind is conversational implicature which transmits different meanings according to different texts; hence, the meanings are still negotiable between both the speaker and the hearer through their interaction.

6. Grice's Maxims

Thomas (1995) points out that "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"(p. 65). Mey (1996) reinforces Thomas's claim by providing a more concise yet comprehensive definition of 'flouting', understood as a case of verbal communication when "we can make a blatant show of breaking one of the maxims in order to lead the addressee to look for a covert, implied meaning" (p. 58).

The cooperative principle describes how people interact with one another. As phrased by Paul Grice, who introduced it, it states, "Make your contribution such as it 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, p. 48). Though phrased as a perspective command, the principle is

intended as a description of how people normally behave in general conversations. Listeners and speakers must speak cooperatively and mutually accept one another to be understood in a particular way. The cooperative principle describes how effective communication in conversation is achieved in common social situations.

Potts (2014: 7) mentions that the cooperative principles of Grice govern the "information exchange" in the normal situations. Grice clarifies that the cooperative principles (relevance, quality, manner and quantity) require providing relevant, enough and true information far away from ambiguity. He classified these principles into four maxims (p. 7) as follows:

1. **Relevance:** providing pertinent information about the topic while talking.
2. **Quality:** the speaker's contribution should be true and based on evidence.
3. **Manner:** providing clear, concise, and accurate information while speaking.
4. **Quantity:** introducing an appropriate number of words neither less nor more.

Chuanpipatpong (2011) explains that "implicature (the implied meaning) is generated from flouting Grice's maxims (the cooperative principles)" (p. 6). In this vein, Capkova (2012) introduces two kinds of implicature: the conventional implicature that uses certain lexical items like (and, but, so and etc), and the conversational implicature that focuses on the speaker's meaning. He adds that one can understand the conversational implicature through studying the context (p. 1). Grice (1975) argues that the hearer should know the cooperative principles so as to establish assumption and exploit the linguistic context as well as the background knowledge to grasp the intended meaning. However, the speaker previously believes that the hearer is able to get the message in light of the shared background knowledge between them. Grice gives an example:

"A asks B how C is getting on with his job, and B replies, Oh, quite well, I think; he likes his colleagues, and he hasn't been to prison yet" (1975, p. 43).

Grice expounds that the implicature in the underlined part that A reaches an irrefutable conclusion that B flouts the maxim of relevance. Furthermore, A presumes that B thinks that C is insincere (this needs a shared background between both A and B about C). Nevertheless, B believes in the ability of A to get the message according to their shared background about C (1975, p. 50). In light of creating conversational implicature through flouting the maxim of quantity, Grice mentions the example given below:

"A is writing a testimonial about a pupil who is a candidate for a philosophy job, and his letter reads as follows: 'Dear Sir. Mr. X's command of English is excellent, and his attendance at tutorial has been regular. Yours, etc.'" (1975, p. 52).

In the above example, Grice emphasizes that A perceives that he must provide more information about the pupil. However, he intends to obliquely convey a message that Mr. X is

weak at philosophy (1975, p. 52). While this paper, the writer also wants to analyze the data using a pragmatic approach. This paper also analyzes some verses of the Holy Quran based on the implied meaning through utterances by employing Gricean theory.

7. Methodology and Discussion

The study consists of seven excerpts quoted from the *Holy Qur'an*. The expressions-under discussion- were underlined, and analyzed according to Grice's maxims (relevance, quality, quantity, and manner). The following examples illustrate that how implicature leads to ambiguity resulted from flouting, in a way or another, one or more than one of Grice's maxims.

Excerpt (1)

(قَالَ بَلْ فَعَلَهُ كَبِيرُهُمْ هَذَا فَاسْأَلُوهُمْ إِنْ كَانُوا يَنْطِقُونَ) الأنبياء: 63

"He said: "Rather, this biggest one of them did it. Ask them, if they are able to speak up." (Irving, 63)

In this verse, the Prophet Abraham realizes that the idols are inanimate; hence, by nature they were not able to do anything. When he smashed the idols and his folk asked about this action, he replied in ironical way that the chief of idols did this. He flouts the maxim of quantity to create implicature.

Excerpt (2)

(وَنَادَى أَصْحَابُ الْأَعْرَابِ رَجَالًا يَعْرِفُونَهُمْ بِسِيمَاهُمْ قَالُوا مَا أَغْنَىٰ عَنْكُمْ جَمْعُكُمْ وَمَا كُنْتُمْ تُسْتَكْبِرُونَ) الأعراف: 48

"The Companions on the Heights will call out to some men whom they will recognize by their features; they will say: "How did all your storing things up and how proud you acted benefit you?". (Irving, 48)

This verse indicates that the people of *Al'ara:f* were informed that their great reward will be the hell. As it can be noticed that there is no relation between the sentence structure and its function. In other words, the sentence is interrogative but it carries the function of statement; hence, this creates the implicature. The underlined sentence indirectly refers to the wealth which cannot protect people from the torture of Allah. It flouts the maxim of quality through introducing oblique words that make the readers eager to understand the context.

Excerpt (3)

(قَالَ رَبِّ إِنِّي وَهَنَ الْعَظْمُ مِنِّي وَاسْتَعَلَ الرَّأْسُ شَيْبًا وَلَمْ أَكُنْ بِدُعَائِكَ رَبَّ شَقِيًّا) مريم: 4

"He said: "My Lord, my bones are tottering for me and my head is glistening with white hair, while I have never been grumbling in my appeal to You, my Lord!" (Irving, 4)

In the above excerpt, Zakaria's speech is not to tell us that he is old and aged, but it is to show his weakness in front of the power of Allah. Consequently, he flouts the maxim of quantity by giving extra information in an oblique way so as to introduce the implied meaning. Also, he indirectly refers to the latter stage of life when man lacks his physical strength, especially

as a result of age.

Excerpt (4)

(وَأَتَى الْمَالَ عَلَى حُبِّهِ ذَوِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَالْيَتَامَىٰ وَالْمَسَاكِينَ وَابْنَ السَّبِيلِ) البقرة: 177

"And no matter how he loves it, to give his wealth away to near relatives, orphans, the needy, the wayfarer and beggars" (Irving, 177)

In this verse, the maxim of quantity is flouted in order to generate the implied meaning of the phrase على حبه, "his love". Consequently, there is extra information in the text which emphasizes that you should love to spend money for those needy and without this phrase it will be understood that you should spend money whether you like it or not, or it may be discarded.

Excerpt (5)

(قَدْ مَكَرَ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ فَأَتَى اللَّهُ بُنْيَانَهُمْ مِنَ الْقَوَاعِدِ فَحَرَّ عَلَيْهِمُ السَّمَاءُ فَوَاقَهُمْ مِنَ فَوْقِهِمْ وَأَتَاهُمُ الْعَذَابُ مِنْ حَيْثُ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ) النحل: 26

"Those before them schemed, and God reached for their buildings through its foundations, so the roof caved in on them and torment came at them from where they did not even suspect it." (Irving, 26)

This Qur'anic verse flouts the maxim of quantity to create implicature. It is thought for the first time that the word "on them" فوقهم is not necessary to be mentioned here because the ceiling is absolutely above. But this word is mentioned in the place of intimidation as a kind of exaggeration.

Excerpt (6)

(وَمِنْهُمْ أُمِّيُونَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ الْكِتَابَ إِلَّا أَمَانِيٍّ وَإِنْ هُمْ إِلَّا يَظُنُّونَ) البقرة: 78

"Some of them are illiterate and do not know the Book except to say "Amen" [to it]. They are merely guessing" (Irving, 78)

The above verse refers to the great mass of Jews and describes them the ignorant. The word الكتاب does not mean the book but the principles of faith as enunciated by Allah, the rules of conduct, and the teachings which are of fundamental importance for man's salvation. Also, the word أمانِيٍّ expounds that the Jewish masses fabricated a religion out of their fancies and desires. Their false hopes and illusions made them as if they lived in the paradise but the reality shows their capricious thoughts. Here, the contextual meaning is different from the literal one in order to create implicature. The both expressions الكتاب and أمانِيٍّ flout the maxim of quality since these expressions reflect the reader's eagerness to seek the implicit meaning through consulting multiple authentic exegeses.

Excerpt (7)

(فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ مَرَضٌ فَزَادَهُمُ اللَّهُ مَرَضًا وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ بِمَا كَانُوا يَكْفُرُونَ) البقرة: 10

"Their hearts contain malice so God has increased their [share of] malice. They will have painful torment because they have been lying". (Irving, 10)

Here, the intended meaning in this verse *في قلوبهم مرض* is not the direct meaning. It refers to those who say things but their hearts carry other things such as envy, malice, and hypocrisy. The casual reader or one who is unacquainted with Islam may not understand the contextual message. The implied meaning is generated in order to achieve euphemism. In other words, floating the maxim of manner maxim is to imply the social diseases. Also, the phrase *في قلوبهم مرض* floats the maxim of quantity since it provides more information than the reader needs.

6. Conclusion

The study has found that Grice's maxims were flouted due to several factors. Firstly, the rhetorical style of the Holy Qur'an is defied; therefore, no one can create such discourse. Besides, flouting maxims often mitigates Qur'anic expressions and absorbs their harshness. Further, the study has revealed that the implicature cannot be understood by the casual reader unless s/he consults different exegetical books. The study recommends that there should be studies tackling the phenomena of implicature in Makki and Madani verses. The results of this study can also be helpful in teaching the meanings of the *Holy Qur'an* to Arab or non-Arab readers, by introducing these four maxims and their principles, a better understanding of the Holy Quran could be obtained.

References

- Anderson, N. (2013). *Flouting the Maxims in Comedy: An Analysis of Flouting in Comedy Series Community*: Sweden: Karlstad University.
- Archer, D., Aijmer, K., & Wichmann, A. (2012) *Pragmatics*. The UK: Routledge.
- Capkova, E (2012). *Pragmatic Principles and Humor in "The IT Crowd"*. Unpublished Diploma thesis, Brno: Masaryk University.
- Chuanpiputpong, A. (2011). *When Flouting is Funny: Analyzing Humor in 'Friends' Via Grice's Cooperative Principle*. The USA: Institute of Development Administration.
- Crystal, D. (2003). *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.
- Grice, P. (1975). Logic and conversation. In Peter, Cole & Morgan, Jerry (Eds.), *Syntax and semantics* (pp. 41-58). Academic Press: New York, USA and Canada.
- Irving, T. (1991). *Noble Qur'an: Arabic Text & English Translation*. The USA: Princeton University.
- Levinson, S. (1983). *Pragmatics*. Cambridge: University Press.
- Mehawesh, M., & Jaradat, A. (2015). Inshallah: Extensive Flouting of Grice's Maxim of Quality. *Asian Social Science*, 11(4), 319-327
- Mey, J. (1993). *Pragmatics: An Introduction*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publishers.

Thomas, J. (1995). *Meaning in Interaction: An Introduction to Pragmatics*. New York: Longman Group Ltd.

Yule, G. (1996). *Pragmatics*. The UK: Oxford University Press.

Copyright Disclaimer

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>).