Opting out of Gricean Maxims in the Yemeni Dialect: A Pragmatic Analysis

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Abstract

This research attempts to investigate Gricean Theory of Conversational Implicature and its application to the Arabic language. To investigate such a theory, semi-structured interviews with 15 participants who speak the Yemeni dialect were recorded. Four Ph.D. candidates, four M.A. candidates and seven B.A. candidates were interviewed. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, translated and interpreted by adopting a qualitative and a quantitative approach. The analysis focused on opting out of the maxims. The findings revealed that Gricean Theory of Conversational Implicature can be applied to Arabic language, particularly the Yemeni dialect. Besides, the analysis showed that in spite of opting out of maxims the participants were to a great extent cooperative.

Keywords: Conversational Implicature, Maxims of speech, Opting out of the maxims, Arabic language, Yemeni dialect

1. Introduction

It goes without saying that languages have appeared for the sake of communication. We communicate with one another in order to convey a particular idea. To understand and be understood, one should produce something that makes sense. Therefore, the relation between the speaker and what s/he produces is the core idea of pragmatics.

According to Sperber and Wilson (1981, p.282), pragmatics is defined as the study of language use. In other words, it is defined as "the study of how linguistic properties and contextual factors interact in the interpretation of utterances, enabling learners to bridge the gap between sentence meaning and speaker's meaning" (ibid.).

Trask (2007, p.226) points out that the disparity between what is said and what is meant is the core idea of pragmatics. Wierzbicka (2003) states that "[t]he discipline studying linguistic interaction between 'I' and 'you' is called pragmatics" (p.5).

Among the most influential pragmatic theories that has captured the attention of the researcher is Gricean Theory of Conversational Implicature. Grice makes a clear-cut distinction between what is said and what is meant. With reference to this theory, an empirical study is going to be presented for the purpose of investigating the application of this theory to Arabic language, particularly the Yemeni dialect.

1.1 Gricean Theory of Conversational Implicature

Pragmatically speaking, Trask (2007, p.56) explains that the term implicature can be included under the umbrella of pragmatics. It is the study of how meanings are inferred from context. For Sperber and Wilson (1981) implicature is defined as the speaker's meaning that is extracted on the basis of "contextual assumptions and communicative principles" (p.282).

Green (2011, p.424) claims that what is interesting about implicature and exploiting the Cooperative Principle is that it grants us the opportunity to mean what we say in a number of different ways and this stands as a source of enjoyment for both speakers and hearers.

1.2 Gricean Cooperative Principle and the Maxims of Conversation

Grice subdivided his Cooperative Principle into nine maxims of conversation which were meant to explain how implicatures get conveyed. Then he classified these nine maxims into four categories: Quality, Quantity, Relation and Manner. They are used, according to Bach (2006, p.5), to explain the relation between utterances and what is understood from them. Bach (2006, p.6) also claims that we, as listeners, assume that the speaker is being cooperative by speaking truthfully, informatively, relevantly and appropriately. If an utterance appears not to conform to any of these presumptions, we look for another way of taking it so that it makes sense.

To paraphrase, we as speakers try to be cooperative by contributing meaningful and productive utterances to continue the conversation. And, as listeners, we assume that our conversational partners are doing the same. The simplest way to think of Gricean maxims is to think of them as general rules we follow in a conversation. However, the interesting thing

about these rules is that we do not always follow them.

In his article "Logic and Conversation" (1975), Grice makes a very general distinction between what is said by a speaker and what he means or implicates and he provides us with the definition of Cooperative Principle: "make your contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose of the talk exchange in which you are engaged" (p.45). Therefore, Grice's logic of conversation is based on the idea that contributors to a conversation are rational agents; that is, that they obey a general principle of rationality known as the cooperative principle.

Under the Cooperative Principle, there are four maxims and below each maxim, there are some other sub-maxims (1975, Pp.45-46):

I. The maxim of Quantity

- Make your contribution as informative as is required.

- Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

II. The maxim of Quality

- Do not say what you believe to be false.

- Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

III. The maxim of Relation

- Make your contributions relevant.

IV. The maxim of Manner

- Avoid ambiguity.

- Avoid obscurity of expression.

- Be brief

- Be orderly.

Grice supported the Cooperative Principle with four conversation maxims and he identifies four ways in which discourse participants may break or fail to fulfill maxims in a conversation: flouting, violating, clashing and opting out. (Lindblom, 2001, p.1603).

In this research the focus is going to be on opting out of the maxims that occurs when the participant may opt out of observing a maxim by indicating unwillingness to cooperate. In other words, the participant does not want to cooperate and contribute to the exchange the way the maxim requires. S/he shows some kind of unwillingness to cooperate in the way the maxim requires. Opting out of the maxims can be as follows:

1) Opting out of Quantity. E.g. My lips are sealed; I cannot say more.

2) Opting out of Quality. E.g. I'm not sure, but I think ...

3) Opting out of Manner. E.g. I don't know how to say this more simply ...

4) Opting out of Relevance. E.g. I don't know if this answers your question, but ... Such hedges are ways of marking that you are opting out of the CP (Grice 1975).

Thus, this investigation is going to be applied to Arabic language, particularly the Yemeni dialect and this is going to be the objective of this research.

1.3 An Overview of Yemeni Arabic

As the language of Qur'an, Arabic has become the national language of about twenty five countries. It is "the official language of Arabic-speaking governments, the written language of literature, and the spoken language of inter-regional communication and trade" (Dalby 2006 in Al-Qaderi, 2015, p. 25).

Generally, within each language there are various dialects and each dialect has got its own characteristics that make it up independent of other languages. Terminologically speaking, Al-Najjar (2013) defined a dialect as a group of sounds system that belongs to a special environment in which all members of that environment share these characteristics (as cited in Al-Qaderi, 2015, p. 26).

However, the contemporary dialects of Arab countries cannot have their own independence. They cannot be affiliated to one old Arabic dialect, but it is possible for the northern dialect to overcome the southern dialects in any Arab country or vice versa (Salloom, 1976 in Al-Qaderi, 2015, p. 29).

One of the Arabic dialects is Yemeni Arabic that is regarded as one of the Arabic varieties spoken in Yemen. Within the Yemeni Arabic, there are several main dialects each with its own vocabulary and phonology. Some of them are Sana'ani, Adeni, Ibbi, Ta'zzi, Tihami and Hadhrami. However, the most noticeable difference lies in the distinction between the dialect of the northern part of Yemen and that of the southern part of Yemen (Al-Qaderi, 2015, p. 31).

2. Method

After an intensive reading of various research approaches, the author has found that the most appropriate research approach that would achieve the aim of the study was the qualitative approach. This approach seems to be appropriate since it requires individual interviews, focus groups, observations, a review of existing literature, or a number of theses. This idea is also highlighted by Hancock and Algozzine's (2006) following statement:

> The individual interviews and focus groups inherent in qualitative research may slow one's research efforts if access to individuals is difficult. It is also worth mentioning that in qualitative research, the goal is to understand the situation under investigation primarily from the participants' and not the researchers' perspective. (p.7)

Within this approach, the author will focus on a case study in which semi-structured

interviews were designed to investigate the study participants' responses. The semi-structured questions and the consent form were translated into the participants' mother tongue (Arabic). The data were then transcribed and translated from Arabic into English.

After being analyzed qualitatively, a quantitative approach is going to be taken on. In other words, all the collected data that were analyzed qualitatively is going to be analyzed quantitatively by means of presenting some tables and figures.

2.1 Participants

This study was conducted in Warsaw city in Poland. All the chosen participants were interviewed individually in the dormitories wherein they live.

The participants of this study were classified into three groups. First consists of Ph.D. candidates (n = 4), second of M.A. candidates (n = 4), and the third and the last one was composed of undergraduate candidates (n = 7).

The Ph.D. candidates were selected and classified as the first group of the study participants. They were four candidates who are currently enrolled at the University of Warsaw, Poland. They were given these labels: *Participant 1, Participant 2, Participant 3, and Participant 4.*

The M.A. candidates were classified as the second group of the study participants. They were also four candidates who are currently enrolled at the University of Warsaw, Poland. They were given these labels: *Participant 5, Participant 6, Participant 7, and Participant 8.*

The undergraduate candidates were classified as the third and the final group of the study participants. They were seven candidates who are currently enrolled at the University of Warsaw, Poland. They were given the following labels: *Participant 9, Participant 10, Participant 11, Participant 12, Participant 13, Participant 14and Participant 15.*

2.2 Data-collection Instruments

Data-collection instruments in qualitative research are various. One of these instruments is interviewing. Interviews are considered a very effective instrument for expressing ideas, beliefs, knowledge, etc. Seidman (2006) states that "…interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (p.10). Therefore, fifteen semi-structured interviews have been designed for the three groups. Each group had its own questions. The questions used differ from one group to another because they were not of the same educational level and age. There are, on the other hand, some similar questions which were used to get some personal information. These general questions were used to break the ice before moving to the more specific ones.

2.3 Data-collection Procedures

When the interview questions were ready, the author tested the audio-recording tool in order to make sure that it was picking up the sounds clearly and could record for a long time. After that, the participants were contacted by phone and they agreed to be interviewed. After making appointments with the interviewees, the author went to their dormitories wherein they live. A consent form was prepared to introduce the study and to inform the interviewees how

they could participate in the study. The consent form was personally given to them before the interviews and was taken back signed. The Arabic language (Yemeni dialect) was used during the interviews. Each interview lasted for about fifteen minutes.

2.4 Data Analysis

The participants were given pseudonyms in order to protect their anonymity. The transcripts were organized and separated in separate files to make the analysis process easier. Each participant was given a separate file. These files encompassed all the data needed to be analyzed. After printing all the fifteen files in both languages, they were given to another researcher in order to check the translation. This was very important since it led to accuracy and reliability. After receiving the feedback, the author made all the necessary changes and started examining the whole translated data closely in order to select the most important extracts that can be used to investigate the Gricean Theory of Conversational Implicature.

After transcribing and translating the data, the author started going through the transcripts intensively many times that resulted in marking and segmenting the most important utterances/extracts that might answer the questions of the study.

These classifications were coded by giving them some letters that refer to the whole words. For instance, the author used OPM as a code for opting out the maxims. Next, the number of opting out of each maxim in each interview was identified.

To cut the long story short, the data are presented with further interpretation (qualitatively) and tables and figures (quantitatively) in the following section.

3. Results and Discussion

This section presents a qualitative and quantitative of the analysis of the data collected from the study participants. The first subsection presents an interpretational analysis that is related to Opting out of the Maxims. The author has selected five illustrative examples to be analyzed pragmatically. They were first given in Arabic. Then an English translation was given to them as well. The second subsection takes on a quantitative approach.

3.1 Qualitative Analysis

3.1.1 Opting out (of the CP and its Maxims)

Opting out of maxims means that the participant may opt out of observing the maxim by indicating unwillingness to cooperate. In other words, the participant does not want to cooperate and contribute to the exchange the way the maxim requires.

Example (1): (source in Arabic)

كم معك فلوس بالبنك؟

افضل الا اجيب.

Example (1): (translated into English)

Interviewer: How much money do you have in your bank account?

Participant 7: I'd prefer not to answer.

In this example, the interviewer asked the participant how much money he has in his bank account. The answer "I'd prefer not to answer" indicates that the participant does not want to cooperate with the interviewer and therefore the maxim of Quantity was opted out from.

Example (2): (source in Arabic)

<div dir="rtl">

ايش رايك بأوضاع اليمن حاليا؟

لا تعليق!

</div>

Example (2): (translated into English)

Interviewer: What do you think of the current situation in Yemen?

Participant 15: No comment!

Similarly, this example shows that the maxim of Quantity was opted out from because the participant's answer indicates that he is not cooperative. The interviewer asked the participant's opinion about the current situation in Yemen. The answer "[n]o comment!" has two different interpretations. The first one is concerned with the participant's implicature which indicates that the situation in Yemen is very bad. The second one, according to the interviewer, indicates that the participant does not want to give his own opinion about the current situation in Yemen or perhaps politics is not his 'cup of tea' and this also proves opting out of the maxim of Quantity.

Example (3): (source in Arabic)

<div dir="rtl">

ايش رايك بأوضاع اليمن حاليا؟

لا داعي لذلك .. معروف.

</div>

Example (3): (translated into English)

Interviewer: What do you think of the current situation in Yemen?

Participant 11: No need to say a word. Everything is well-known.

Like the previous example, the same question was asked to another participant and his answer opted out of the maxim of Quantity. The participant was asked about the current situation in Yemen. Likewise, the answer "[n]o need to say a word" has two different interpretations. One interpretation could be understood by the participant's implicature which states that the situation in Yemen is very bad. Another interpretation as it was understood by the interviewer that the participant's answer indicates that he is not willing to cooperate with the interviewer by giving his opinion about the topic under discussion or perhaps he is sensitive to be asked such political questions.

Example (4): (source in Arabic)

<div dir="rtl">

ايش سبب تردي الأوضاع في اليمن؟

الامور معقدة جدا .. مش ممكن تشرحه حتى بكلمة واحده.

</div>

Example (4): (translated into English)

Interviewer: What are the reasons that cause all the current problems in Yemen?

Participant 5: It is very complicated, actually. You cannot explain it in one word.

In this example, the maxim of Quantity was opted out. The interviewer asked the participant's point of view about the reasons that cause the current problems in Yemen. However, the participant's answer "[i]t is very complicated…You cannot explain it in one word" indicates that he does not want to cooperate with the interviewer by opining about the question being asked.

Example (5): (source in Arabic)

كيف تتمنى عروس المستقبل؟
مدري.. مش عارفه.

Example (5): (translated into English)

Interviewer: Based on your own perspective, what are the characteristics you prefer to be in your would-be husband?

Participant 10: I do not know. No idea.

In this final example, one of the participants was asked about how she hopes her future bride groom to be. Her answer "I do not know. No idea" opted out of the maxim of Quantity because it reveals that the participant feels shy or does not want to be cooperative.

In conclusion, after discussing the analysis of the data of this study qualitatively, the following subsection is going to present the main findings of this study quantitatively in detail.

3.2 Quantitative Analysis

3.2.1 Opting out (of the CP and its Maxims)

When one opts out of the conversational maxims it indicates that they are not cooperative. The following table shows how the maxims were opted out in each interview:

Table 1. Number of Maxims Opted out in Each Interview

Interviews	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**11**	**12**	**13**	**14**	**15**	**Total**
Quantity	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	6
Total	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	6

Based on the table above, the findings showed that the maxims were hardly opted out. In other words, the total number of opting out the maxims was just 6 times which means that most of the participants of the study were cooperative. According to the above table, the maxims were opted out only in the interviews number 5, 7, 9, 10, 11 and 12. Moreover, the following figure displays the total number of maxims opted out in each interview:
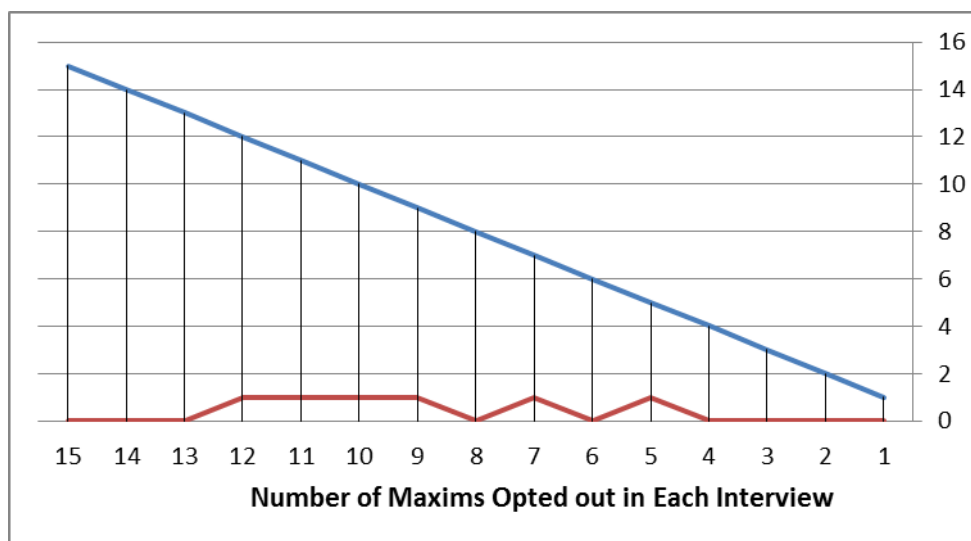
Figure 1. Number of Maxim Opted out in Each Interview

The figure above shows clearly how the participants of this study opted out of the maxims during the interviews. For instance, the brown line illustrates how each maxim was opted out in each interview. It can be observed that the maxims were only opted out in the interviews number 5, 7, 9, 10, 11 and 12 which shows that some participants were not cooperative with the speaker during the interview.

4. Conclusion

This research aimed at investigating Gricean Theory of Conversational Implicature and its application to Arabic language. The data came from 15 Yemeni participants who had different academic levels and different dialectal backgrounds and gathered through semi-structured interviews. The interviews were transcribed, translated, organized and interpreted. The focus was on opting out of the maxims of speech. The analysis revealed that the participants were to a great extent cooperative.

Acknowledgement

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Appendices

A. *Interview Questions for Ph.D. Candidates*

1- Please tell me your name.
2- Please tell me how old you are.
3- Please tell me where you are from.
4- Please tell me about your marital status.
5- Please tell me how many languages you speak?
6- Where do you study?
7- What do you study?
8- What program are you enrolled in?
9- I wonder if you please let me know how you got the scholarship.
10- What is the title of your thesis?
11- What are the difficulties you encountered while writing your thesis?
12- Have you got any publications?
13- How long have you been in Poland?
14- What do you think of Poland?
15- What do you think of the Polish language?
16- What do you think of the Polish culture?
17- When are you supposed to finish your studies?

18- Are you planning to go back home?

19- Are you planning to be an academic?

20- Are you willing to stay in Poland in case you find a work?

21- Where did you get your B.A. and M.A., which major?

22- Based on your experience, what is the difference between studying in Yemen and Poland?

23- What do you think of the current situation in Yemen?

24- What are the reasons that cause all the current problems in Yemen?

25- Where do you live nowadays?

26- How do you find your accommodation?

27- How did you spend your Christmas break?

28- What are you planning to do in the Easter time?

29- What do you think of this year's winter compared to the previous years'?

30- How much money do you have in your bank account?

B. Interview Questions for M.A. Candidates

1- Please tell me your name.

2- Please let me know how old you are.

3- Please tell me where you are from.

4- Please tell me about your marital status.

5- Please tell me how many languages you speak?

6- Where do you study?

7- What do you study?

8- What program are you enrolled in?

9- How did you get the scholarship?

10- What is the title of your dissertation?

11- What are the difficulties you encountered while writing your dissertation?

12- How long have you been in Poland?

13- What do you think of Poland?

14- What do you think of the Polish language?

15- What do you think of the Polish culture?

16- When are you supposed to finish your studies?

17- Are you planning to go back home?

18- Are you planning to pursue your Ph.D. program?

19- Are you willing to stay in Poland in case you find a work?

20- Where did you get your B.A.?

21- Based on your experience, what is the difference between studying in Yemen and Poland?

22- How many courses did you take in the first semester?

23- What do you think of the current situation in Yemen?

24- What are the reasons that cause all the current problems in Yemen?

25- Where do you live nowadays?

26- How do you find your accommodation?

27- How did you spend your Christmas break?
28- What are you planning to do in the Easter time?
29- What do you think of this year's winter compared to the previous years'?
30- When are you planning to get married?
31- Based on your own perspective, what are the characteristics you prefer to be in your would-be wife/husband?
32- How much money do you have in your bank account?

C. *Interview Questions for Undergraduate Candidates*

1- Please tell me your name.
2- Please let me know how old you are.
3- Please tell me where you are from.
4- Please tell me how many languages you speak?
5- Where do you study?
6- What do you study?
7- What program are you enrolled in?
8- How did you get the scholarship?
9- What did you study in Yemen?
10- How long have you been in Poland?
11- What do you think of Poland?
12- What do you think of the Polish language?
13- What do you think of the Polish culture?
14- When are you supposed to finish your studies?
15- Are you planning to go back home?
16- Are you planning to pursue your higher studies?
17- Are you willing to stay in Poland in case you find a work?
18- Based on your experience, what is the difference between studying in Yemen and Poland?
19- How many courses did you take in the first semester?
20- What do you think of the current situation in Yemen?
21- What are the reasons that cause all the current problems in Yemen?
22- Where do you live nowadays?
23- How do you find your accommodation?
24- How did you spend your Christmas break?
25- Did you find a difference between celebrating here and in Yemen?
26- What are you planning to do in the Easter time?
27- What do you think of this year's winter compared to the previous years'?
28- When are you planning to get married?
29- Are you planning to marry a Polish girl?
30- Based on your own perspective, what are the characteristics you prefer to be in your would-be wife/husband?
31- How much money do you have in your bank account?

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