



The Application of Politeness Principle in the Analysis of Drama: Take *Teahouse* as an Example

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Supported by the Social Science Planning Research Project of Shandong Province (14CWYJ03); the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Planning Fund Project of Ministry of Education (15 YJA740041).

Received 9 January 2016; accepted 22 March 2016
 Published online 26 May 2016

Abstract

This paper analyzes the dialogues in the *Teahouse* which is written by Lao She under Leech's politeness principle. An analysis of the pragmatic features of *Teahouse* can help people gain a deep insight into each character's traits and experiences in the play as well as appreciate the special gist of the drama more deeply.

Key words: Politeness principle; *Teahouse*; Dialogue

Wang, J., & Wei, F. F. (2016). The Application of Politeness Principle in the Analysis of Drama: Take *Teahouse* as an Example. *Cross-Cultural Communication*, 12(5), 35-38. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/ccc/article/view/8376>
 DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/8376>

INTRODUCTION

Politeness is the symbol of human civilization and an important criterion of human social activities. In real life, there are many cases in which unnecessary misunderstanding or friction results from improper words or rudeness. Therefore, it is of great significance to illustrate the importance of politeness in language use. As to politeness principle, our predecessors have done a lot of researches; Lakoff (1973) put forward three basic conditions about politeness: Don't impose on others; give others the right of choice; be friendly with each

other, make each other feel good. Leech (1983) put forward the politeness principle systematically which contained six maxims: Tact Maxim; Generosity Maxim; Approbation Maxim; Modesty Maxim; Agreement Maxim; Sympathy Maxim. These maxims are intended to make communicators feel good, which is considered as an extension of Lakoff's three conditions for politeness. Brown and Levinson (1987) held that in order to establish some kind of social relations, people must recognize communicator's face, namely their public self-image. In communicative activities, both sides must respect each other's expectation for their own images and consider the feelings of others, to avoid "face threatening acts".

The early studies of the politeness principle are classic, however, some theoretical considerations suffer inadequacies. First, these principles are mainly confined to the sentential level, ignoring the cultural and social factors implicit in politeness principles, which need to be explicitly explored, but rarely done. Second, these theories, to some extent, focus on static rather than dynamic property of communication. *Teahouse* is the representative work of Lao She's late writings in which simple words and dialogues characterized by Beijing dialect are employed to enrich the expressive force of the characters and reflect the cultural and social environment at that time. Based on the dialogues of *Teahouse*, this paper is dedicated to the cultural and social dimensions in dynamic communication under Leech's politeness principle in order to deepen the understanding and appreciation of the drama.

1. THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Grice proposed the *Cooperative Principle* in 1975, referred to as CP. Grice believed that the conversation is subject to certain conditions. The two sides work together to make communicative activities go smoothly.

Grice's cooperative principle plays a major role in explaining communication activities. But it could not explain why people violate the cooperative principle deliberately in real life. Leech (1983) believed that it is out of politeness that people sometimes violate the cooperative principle deliberately. Leech classified the principles into six maxims:

- A. Tact Maxim
 - a. Minimize cost to other
 - b. Maximize benefit to other
- B. Generosity Maxim:
 - a. Minimize benefit to self
 - b. Maximize cost to self
- C. Approbation Maxim:
 - a. Minimize dispraise of other
 - b. Maximize praise of other
- D. Modesty Maxim:
 - a. Minimize praise of self
 - b. Maximize dispraise of self
- E. Sympathy Maxim:

- a. Minimize antipathy between self and other
 - b. Maximize sympathy between self and other
- F. Agreement Maxim:
- a. Minimize disagreement between self and other
 - b. Maximize agreement between self and other

Leech believed that politeness principle is the supplement to the cooperation principles, and even saves the cooperation principles.

2. THE APPLICATION OF POLITENESS PRINCIPLES TO ANALYZING THE TEAHOUSE

The drama set in a typical, old Beijing teahouse follows the lives of the owner of the *Teahouse* and his customers through three periods of modern Chinese history, namely, late Qing Dynasty, the early Republic of China, and after the victory of anti-Japanese War.

Table 1
Characters of *Teahouse*

Characters	Identity	Personality
Wang Lifa	The manager of teahouse	Shrewd, cautious
Tang Tiezui	Face reading	Glib, trifler
Qin Erye	TEAhouse landlord	Vain
Chang Siye	Bannerman	Upright, detest evil, full of sense of justice
Song Erye	Customer	Kind, timid, lazy, incompetent
Ma Wuye	Customer	Promote the foreign idea
Liu Mazi	Trafficker	Evil
Pang Taijian	The representative of feudal Ruling class	Stubborn, conservative
Song Enzi, Wu Xiangzi	Spy	Treacherous
Er Dezi	Serve the imperial court	Bullying

2.1 The Manifestation of Tact Maxim

(a) Obey the Tact Maxim

(1) Qin Erye: Mr. Wang, if the rent here should be raised up? In those days, the rent your father gave me was not enough for me to drink tea!

Wang Lifa: Of course, sir, how right you are! But there's no need for you to bother yourself over such small matters. Send your steward round, work it with him, I will certainly pay what's fair. Yes, I will sir!

(Act I, p.14)

The dialogue meets with the tact maxim as minimizing cost to other as well as maximizing benefit to other. The aim of Qin Erye is to increase the rent. Wang knows well what Qin Erye means. Although he is not willing at the bottom of heart, he still smiles to meet the need of Qin Erye. It indicates that Wang is a shrewd man and shows his attitude toward the superiors who have money and power. In his life, he is to please everyone.

(b) Disobey the Tact Maxim

(2) Wang Lifa: Brother, we are all friends. There is nothing we can't settle peacefully. You sit behind.

[Er Dezi didn't listen to Wang Lifa and threw the bowl down to the table. He also grabbed the collar of Chang Siye.]

Chang Siye: (escaping) what do you want to do?

Er Dezi: Eh? I can't deal with the foreigners but pretty enough to beat you.

(Act I, p.9)

Er Dezi broke the bowl and hit Siye. His attitude and behavior are rough and violent. What he did damages others' interests and violates the tact maxim. It indicates that he likes to bully others.

2.2 The Manifestation of Generosity Maxim

(a) Obey the generosity maxim

(3) Wang Lifa: Mr. Tang, why not take a walk somewhere else?

Tang Tiezui: (Sad smile) Mr. Wang, support me! If you give me a bowl of tea, I will tell your fortune. Free of charge. (Too late to refuse, Tang Tiezui pulls off the hand of Wang Lifa) This year is the Guangxu twenty-four years, the Reform Movement. Your age is.....

Wang Lifa: Forget it! I will give you a bowl of tea. Fortunetelling is useless. In this country, people like us are always underdogs anyway. Sit down. I tell you, if you don't give up drugs, you will never get the good luck. This is my method that is more efficacious than yours.

(Act I, pp.7-8)

Generosity maxim is to minimize benefit to self but maximize cost to self. Tang Tiezui lives on fortunetelling. He is too poor to offer a bowl of tea. In order to cheat Wang Lifa, Tang Tiezui pretends to tell his fortune. Wang Lifa knows his thoughts but to save Tang Tiezui's face, Wang offers Tang a bowl of tea free of charge, in which the generosity maxim applies.

(b) Disobey the generosity maxim

(4) Pang Taijian: How to say? Does a rural girl want two hundred pieces of silver?

Liu Mazi: A rural girl, but she is beautiful. Bring her into the city and then get her well dressed, she will be good-looking and obey the rules. I cannot be too careful for your thing.

(Act I, p.17)

The dialogue violates generosity maxim. Liu Mazi tries his best to exaggerate the merits of Kang Shunzi. His aim is to make more money and get more benefits. It indicates that he is a treacherous man.

2.3 The Manifestation of Approbation Maxim

(a) Obey the approbation maxim

(5) Wang Lifa: You take this pen yourself and I'll move at once!

Chang Siye: Where are you going to move?

Wang Lifa: Anywhere is the same. Mr. Qin, Mr. Chang, I'm not as great as you. Mr. Qin, you are wealthy, enterprising and ambitious. But a person of high position is liable to be attacked. Mr. Chang, you never gave in, never accepted injustice to yourself or to others. You never feared the consequences. I've been an obedient subject all my life. I bowed and scraped to everyone. (Laughing bitterly)

(Act III, pp.63- 64)

The dialogue obeys the approbation maxim as minimizing dispraise of other as well as maximizing praise of the other. In the *Teahouse*, Wang Lifa, Qin Erye, and Chang Siye are all losers, but Wang Lifa only praises the merits of the two men. Mr. Wang strongly commends them but degenerates himself strongly. What he did obey the approbation maxim to save their faces. We can also see that he is an obedient and weak person.

(b) Disobey the approbation maxim

(6) Song Erye: Are you a military? Come, sit down and drink a bowl of tea, we are all outsiders.

Er Dezi: Whether I am a military or not is none of your business.

Chang Siye: Sounds like you are a powerful man, then why don't you fight against the invaders. The British and French troops set fire to the Summer Palace, and your officials, were seen nowhere in the battle fields.

(Act I, p.8)

The dialogue violates approbation maxim. Er Dezi who serves the imperial court and likes to bullying others is the scum of the nation. Chang Siye is a patriot and hates those who work for the foreigners. What he said shows that he looks down on Er Dezi. It also shows that Mr. Chang detests evils.

2.4 The Manifestation of Modesty Maxim

(a) Obey the modesty maxim

(7) Wang Lifa: Ouch! Mr. Qin, how can you be so free and come to my teahouse? Don't you bring a servant?

Qin Erye: Let me see if you have a gift for doing business.

Wang Lifa: I learn as I work. I make my living through this. My father passed away early, but thanks to his old friends, they often visit here and don't mind my carelessness. Thousands of greetings and sweet words are few. No big trouble was made. Let me get you a seat and make tea for you.

(Act I, p.13)

The dialogue concurs with the modesty maxim as minimizing praise to self as well as maximizing dispraise to self. Wang Lifa is a shrewd and diligent man, but he is modest and attributes the teahouse's success to other people when asked by Qin Erye. This dialogue portrays an image of a typical small businessman—Wang Lifa who is sleek, sophisticated and speaks with smiles to powerful man like Qin Erye.

(b) Disobey the modesty maxim

(8) Chang Siye: Liu Ye, you are too cruel. You actually help other people sell their own children.

Liu Mazi: If I don't distract my energy and time, they may not find a buyer.

(Act I, p.11)

The dialogue violates the modesty maxim. Liu Mazi is a trafficker and a scum of the nation. But as for those vicious things, he doesn't consider it as a shame but as an honor. It fully illustrates that Liu Mazi is a brutal man.

2.5 The Manifestation of Agreement Maxim

(a) Obey the agreement maxim

(9) Ma Wuye: Er Dezi, you are quite something! Must you always resort to fisticuffs?

Erdezi: Of course, sir. You're quite right. I will go directly to the inner courtyard.

(Act I, p.9)

The dialogue obeys the agreement maxim as minimizing disagreement between self and other as well

as maximizing agreement between self and other. Ma Wuye is in a higher social position than Er Dezi who is a rascal. When Er Dezi and Chang Siye come into conflict, Ma Wuye shouts at Er Dezi, telling him not to resort to fisticuffs. Er Dezi readily promised, saying that you're right. Er Dezi minimizes disagreement to Ma, and maximizes agreement to Ma under his power. From his performance, we can see that he is a man who bullies the weak and fears the strong.

(b) Disobey the agreement maxim

(10) Chang Siye: This man, you are wise. You should judge between right and wrong.

Ma Wuye: (Stand up) I still have something to deal with, goodbye! (Go out)

(Act I, p.9)

The dialogue violates agreement maxim. Ma Wuye is a powerful man who promotes the foreign thoughts, in collusion with foreigner. But Chang Siye doesn't know this, in the conversation with Er Dezi, he shows contempt for foreigners. So when Chang Siye asks Ma Wuye to give a judge on reason, he gives an irrelevant answer to shun expressing indifference, discontent and rejection to Siye's request. His behavior maximizes disagreement with Chang Siye, violating the agreement maxim.

2.6 The Manifestation of Sympathy Maxim

(a) Obey the sympathy maxim

(11) Little Girl: Mom! I'm hungry! I'm hungry!

Chang Siye: Li San, fetch two bowls of noodles, and take them outside to eat.

(Act I, p.14)

The dialogue meets with the sympathy maxim as minimizing antipathy between self and other as well as maximizing sympathy between self and other. In the face of the poor mother and her daughter, Siye helps them. It fully indicates that Siye is a kind and upright man.

(b) Disobey the sympathy maxim

(12) Liu Mazi: Give me a reply, if ten teals of silver are OK with you? Time is running out. I'm busy and couldn't waste any more time on you.

Kang Liu: Liu Ye, how can a 15-year-old girl worth just ten teals?

Liu Mazi: Of course worth more if sold to the brothels. The point is you don't allow that.

Kang Liu: That's my own daughter, how can I.....

Liu Mazi: Who is to blame if you can't raise your own daughter?

(Act I, p.10)

The dialogue violates the sympathy maxim. Kang Liu lives in poverty, in order to feed their families, he has to sell his daughter. We can imagine how painful he is. But in face of such situation, Liu Mazi doesn't have any sympathy. Conversely, he entraps pitiful Kang Liu in any way. It violates the sympathy maxim and shows he is a scumbag.

CONCLUSION

Based on the above detailed analysis of the dialogic discourse of *Teahouse*, it can be discerned that an emphasis of cultural and social dimensions under politeness principle can facilitate a better understanding of character's personality and the relationship between the characters and mental activities in the drama analysis. In other words, when designing character dialogue, we can refer to the politeness principle to make the dialogue get unexpected effect and increase the popularity of the drama.

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