

## ON THE CO-EXISTENCE OF COOPERATIVE PRINCIPLE AND POLITENESS PRINCIPLE<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

*In the field of pragmatics, controversies arouse all the time between Cooperative principle and Politeness principle. Some believe Cooperative principle (CP) should be universally accepted, without considering of Politeness principle (PP) while others argue that PP should be taken as the first principle in social interactions. However, the author states in this paper that both CP and PP are significant in daily communication. They can co-exist and should cooperate with each other in guiding people's utterances in different level, especially in different cultures. This paper tries to illustrate clearly the superiorities and limitations of CP and PP. The analysis serves the next part in which the author explains the feasibility and must for the two principles to co-exist by comparing and case study. And thus, the author finally concludes that CP and PP can co-exist and should cooperate for better communication among cultures. Throughout the whole paper, the author not only provides arguments and detailed analysis, but also makes comparison by using examples and detailed contexts to prove her statement. Thus, the explanation and argumentation become reasonable, logical and vigorous. By presenting this paper, the author is going to provide a complete understanding of CP and PP, analyzing them and comparing them with each other. Also, by demonstrating the different level of usage for CP and PP, the author emphasizes the importance for the two to cooperate, especially under different cultural backgrounds. In the way, she hopes that daily communications among people would be easier and more successful.*

Key words: Cooperative Principle, Politeness Principle, Co-exist, Communication

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## Introduction

In 1975, H.P. Grice published an article entitled "The Co-operative Principle", which exerted a great influence in the linguistic field and brought about a large number of linguistic publications built on Grice's hypothesis. But, what exactly is Cooperative Principle (CP)? "Grice (1975) defines this principle as follows: Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged (Cole and Morgan, 1975:45)" (He Ziran, 2003: 65). That is to say, both the speaker and the addressee in a conversation will expect the other/others to make conversational contribution and they have to follow certain rules, have to co-operate, in order to communicate effectively. The rules are the exact content of this Cooperative Principle. It consists of four maxims that appear very simple and straightforward, namely: Quantity, Quality, Relation and Manner Maxim.

Cooperative Principle is very reasonable since it covers different aspects in a conversation, including content, manner, the quantity of words, etc. However, people may still encounter a great many of problems when they put it into practice. Every day we have to communicate with others for sake of exchanging information, gaining knowledge and so on. We try to carry out conversations exactly following CP but in many cases, it just doesn't work. We will not say "The food you provide is awful" when we meet the question "Do you like the food" and "Have some more." by the host. Instead, we may say "Great. But I'm full already." Thus, people begin to realize that besides the rule of Cooperative Principle, there must be another principle that serves when people are talking. "And the need to be polite can rightly account for why we choose to imply rather than assert an idea." (Peccei, Jean Stilwell, 1999:60) Therefore, there comes the Politeness Principle

(PP) which has been developed by Geoff Leech. The politeness principle is a series of maxims; which Leech has proposed as a way of explaining how politeness operates in conversational exchanges. Leech defines politeness as forms of behavior that establish and maintain comity. That is the ability of participants in a social interaction to engage in interaction in an atmosphere of relative harmony. There are six maxims involved in this principle, namely: the Tact Maxim, the Generosity Maxim, the Approbation Maxim, the Modesty Maxim, the Agreement Maxim and the Sympathy Maxim (Leech, 1983:132).

## Argumentation

It is perceptible that there are contradictions exist in Grice's Cooperative Principle and Leech's Politeness. There is no clear borderline that can tell you when to use CP and when to use PP. This arouses interests in the academe and many scholars express their own ideas on how to balance the two principle. The author is going to describe some of the main thoughts in this area.

Some believe that PP may be a supplement for CP, say to be a fifth maxim of it. However, the author finds it definitely impossible. CP as it first developed is quite systematic and integrated. Although even Grice himself found that people in social interactions always violate the CP maxims, which is called conversational implicature by him, no other principles or maxims can be just casually added to the system of the four maxims because of the different levels on which they are based. As to PP, it is developed based on the so-called face issue. That is to say a variable in this PP study must be the consideration of others' faces. When face issue is concerned by the addresser, PP will start to work. If, when the addresser does want the hearer to lose face, for example for sake of

mocking him, PP may not be adopted. However, CP is based on a more universal level which means generally, all people involving in any conversation should adopt it. Obviously, it is not feasible for PP (based on certain situations) be added into CP (based on general condition.)

Besides, since occasions appear all the time on which CP has to be violated, some scholars believe that PP totally overrides CP and we shall never follow CP anymore. For example, we will never say "I'm sorry to hear that your grandpa died." Rather, we might say "I'm sorry to hear that your grandpa has passed away." Impolite words will lead to failure of conversations and politeness would be culturally universal and socially motivated (Asa Brumark, 2006), thus PP is so important that it should be the first principle that must be followed while former prevailing general rules like CP can be set aside or even eliminated since it's always fail to work properly. But, the author finds that although CP is sometimes overridden by PP, it still works, in deeper level. Even if we might violate some principles in CP, say Quality Maxim, the other maxims of CP still works. If you have to say something that is not true, you still have to say it orderly or briefly, rather than say redundant words. And it becomes perceptible that CP cannot simply be eliminated without a deep thinking.

Moreover, still some people find politeness only occur in particular situations and the so-called Politeness Principle is not a universal one and shouldn't be taken as a kind of regulation to human behavior. They have the opinion that in most conversations in daily life, especially between people that are close to each other, there is no need for people to be so polite all the time. But, from the author's opinion, also according to the FTA (Face-Threatening Act) by Brown & Levinson (1978), whatever a speaker says, he should be polite because it is face threatening. Be polite is, to some degree, a kind

of compensation for the words. In this case, PP is so significant that it must be considered before anyone says any words.

Therefore, the author states her own opinion here that both CP and PP are important that neither of them should be simply abolished or simply mixed together. The participants in social interactions should always take both of them into consideration and try to do inferential and get the intended message with their help. And in the following part, the author will give detailed analysis of the two principles and further illustrate why they are able to work together.

### **Advantages and Limitations Analysis of the maxims of CP**

The universal Cooperative Principle is guidance for people because in conversations, participants have to and must be willing to follow a certain kind of rules which both sides in a conversation agree to accept. That is to say people have to make an effort to achieve their goals of conversation. Cooperative principle has altogether four maxims, which can be listed as follows:

#### **Maxims of quantity**

1. Make your contribution as informative as required.
2. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

#### **Maxims of quality**

1. Do not say what you believe to be false.
2. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

### Maxim of relation

1. Be relevant.

### Maxims of manner

1. Avoid obscurity of expression.
2. Avoid ambiguity.
3. Be brief.
4. Be orderly.

And the author is going to take a deep look at the Maxims.

### Quantity Maxim

The meaning of Quantity maxim is to be “as informative as required”. The speaker should avoid unnecessary, redundant information in his contribution. If the speaker rambles on without saying anything new or informative, the addressee will lose interest in the discourse very quickly and stop paying attention. The key idea in this maxim is that an utterance must contain something new to be informative. In other words, Quantity Maxim deals with the how many words one should say, not too much but informative. For example:

- A: Is your sister at home?  
B: No, she is out.  
A: Do you know where I can find her?  
B: I'm sorry I don't know.

In this example, the second speaker answered exactly what the first speaker asked. We find it appropriate because the answers are informative but not redundant. And in this situation, the two participants cooperate well and the conversation was carried on smoothly and successfully. However, if the second speaker answered like this: “I don't know. She didn't tell me before she went. So, I have no idea of where she is going and I am not able to tell you.” The hearer would definitely feel boring since the following

sentences means the same with the first one. And that violate the Quantity Maxim, leading to failure of the conversation.

### Quality Maxim

Let's now turn to the maxim of Quality. Quality maxim means that the speaker has to include all the information that the addressee requires to understand while all the information should be truthful. If the speaker leaves out a crucial piece of information, the addressee will not understand what the speaker is trying to say. Also if the speaker say something lack of evidence, the utterance will be meaningless to the addressee. The key idea is to be truthful. If one participant in a conversation deliver something false or lack of evidence, then the words become meaningless not only to the hearer, but also to the whole conversation. For example:

- A: Where are you going?  
B: I'm not sure. Maybe to the café.  
A: What about playing basketball?  
B: Great!

In this example, the second speaker told the truth that he was not sure where he was going. The hearer got the correct information and then offered a suggestion. This truthful word brought about the following pleasant conversation about playing basketball. However, if the second speaker violated the Quality Maxim and said something false, say “I have to go home.” Then, there will be no such pleasant second half of conversation.

### Relation Maxim

Relation Maxim is an extremely important maxim in CP, and violation of this principle will directly lead to failure of a conversation. The demand for relevance simply means that the speaker should only include the exact

information in his communication that is relevant to the discourse topic. Of course, the key words will be relevant. Irrelevant things will be nonsense in a conversation and it makes the other/others uncomfortable, failing to carry out further conversation. For example:

- A: Could I borrow your pen?  
B: My bike has already broken.  
A: ...

In this example, the first speaker asked something about a pen while the second speaker's answer had something to do with the bike. The first speaker became puzzled and embarrassed and no further conversation was conducted. That is obviously the violation of Relation Maxim. In order to carry out the conversation successfully, the second speaker had to say "Of course. Help yourself" or at least "Sorry, my pen has already broken."

### **Manner Maxim**

Finally comes to the Manner Maxim. This maxim deals with the way to utter. It regulates the words of a speaker to be brief, logical and with no obstacles for the hearer to understand. Oriented from the hearer, this maxim is a final decoration for what one says from content and way of expression, securing the success of a conversation. The key word in this will be "clear", be clear enough to be understood. And let's see an example:

- A: What did you give to your family member's for Christmas?  
B: Mom, watch. Oh, that's for dad. Something that people can ride, for brother. And ...

In the above example, there is almost no order in the answer and there's difficulty for the hearer

to guess what exactly he sent to his brother. "Something that people can ride" could be a bike, and also a horse. So, it's difficult for others to understand and the conversation is absolutely a failure.

While admit that CP is universal and quite useful in daily interactions of our human being, its weaknesses should not be neglected. Observation shows that people always try to or have to violate CP, for sake of being polite and saving others' face. And violations do not just appear seldom but frequently emerge. Also, when discussing CP, people find that cooperative behavior is a kind of abstract and philosophical conception and the notion of cooperation reduces to what is minimally necessary to explain people's actual use of language. And these two seemed by the author as the main limitations of CP.

### **B. Analysis of the maxims of PP**

Politeness is a universal phenomenon, since it can be observed in all languages and cultures. It plays a very important role in human communication, helping to establish and maintain harmonious interpersonal relationships and promote social interactions. (周洁, 2006.)

What the author is going to talk about is linguistic politeness which is closely associated with appropriateness of utterances. Just as what the author has stated above, it has aroused great interest among researchers in academic fields such as sociolinguistics, pragmatics and cross-cultural communication, with its importance well established and recognized.

The representatives in the study of politeness were Brown and Levinson. In their discussion, they argue that politeness is a linguistic universal of human interaction in the sense that 'face want' is a basic human nature. And that is

the origin of Politeness Principle (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

However, PP was not developed by Brown & Levinson, but rather, Geoff Leech. The six maxims of PP are stated as follows:

- a. Tact maxim (in directives [impositives] and commissives): minimize cost to other; [maximize benefit to other]
- b. Generosity maxim (in directives and commissives): minimize benefit to self; [maximize cost to self]
- c. Approbation maxim (in expressives and representatives [assertives]): minimize dispraise of other; [maximize praise of other]
- d. Modesty maxim (in expressives and representatives): minimize praise of self; [maximize dispraise of self]
- e. Agreement maxim (in representatives): minimize disagreement between self and other; [maximize agreement between self and other]
- f. Sympathy maxim (in representatives): minimize antipathy between self and other; [maximize sympathy between self and other]

It is worth pointing out that the Politeness Principle has its own features or characters. For example:

- a. The maxims in Leech's model go together with categories of speech acts (note the slightly terminology in Leech's model: assertives=representatives, directives=impositives).
- b. Each maxim is accompanied by a sub-maxim which is of lesser importance. This reflects a more general law that negative politeness (avoidance of discord) is more important than positive politeness (seeking concord).

- c. Not all of the maxims are equally important. For instance, "Tact" involves a more powerful constraint on conversational behavior than does "Generosity", and "Approbation" is more important than "Modesty", at least, if we accept the general assumption that politeness is more other-oriented than on self-oriented.

The author also believes that the Politeness Principle is very important in regulating human social interaction. By following PP, conversations are carried out under harmonious atmosphere. However, as every coin has two sides, there are still limitations of this great principle. First of all, what exactly is "polite"? According to Leech, "some illocutions (e.g. order) are inherently impolite, and others (e.g. offers) are inherently polite" (Levinson, Stephen C, 1983:83). This view assumes politeness to be an abstract quality in individual expressions without regarding for the particular circumstances that govern their use. Thus, it becomes something superficial and a reflection of specific cultural values in the language. Therefore, while admitting the universality of politeness, we must also realize the cultural characteristics of politeness. It will help us to communicate with each other successfully by making reaches on the cultural factors and then find the essential characters of politeness. That's just what the author believes: PP is established on the basis of certain culture. Moreover, even within a culture, the social position of the speakers may indicate different politeness values for individual cases. That is to say, the social hierarchy also influences the use of politeness. For example, it will not be impolite for a commander to give an order to a soldier in an army. And that's what the author believes: PP is based on certain situations. (Mey, Jacob L, 1993: 80) Besides, too polite will be taken as impolite, especially between friends. For

instance, if you say something like “would you possibly pass me the book, please” to your closest friend, it becomes a symbol of estrangement of your relationship. All those above should be considered as the limitations of PP.

### Comparison and Case Study

Since both PP and CP has their advantages and limitations, it is naturally for the author to figure out whether, if possible, the two Principles can be supplement to each other's and they together can be guidance for people in social interactions. And the author argues that the answer will be yes. There are many reasons from the perspective of principles themselves and from the perspective of culture.

### Perspective of Principles Themselves

In the first place, Politeness principle and Cooperative Principle do not contradiction with each other and they **can** co-exist because firstly, there is no contradiction between Quantity Maxim and PP; secondly, Quality and Relation Maxim may sometimes contradict with PP, but they are working on different levels; and thirdly, there is both difference and similarity between Manner Maxim and PP. Also, under all those circumstances, it's the cooperation of the two principles that build up a successful and harmonious conversation. The author is going to further elaborate them in the following parts.

### Politeness Principle & Quantity Maxim

From the author's opinion, Quantity Maxim deals with the how many words one should say, not too much but informative, while Politeness Principle deals with in which way one should deliver the words. Since the way you express yourself has nothing to do with how long your expression will be, it is obvious that the two maxims have no conflicts and should be

together, regulate different aspects of daily conversation. Examples can show it vividly.

1) A: 我昨天才买的衣服, 好看吗? B: 恩, 挺合身的。横看竖看都适合你, 就是按你的身材做的嘛。太服帖了, 太合身了.....

2) A: 新买了相机, 画质还可以吧?

B: 糟透了, 一点都不清晰。

3) A: Fine day today, isn't it?

B: Yes, it is indeed.

In the first conversation, the second speaker strictly followed PP (maximize praise of other) while violate Quantity Maxim, saying too much with the same meaning. This would result in failure of conversation since the hearer would feel boring and uninterested in what the second speaker had said, even it was compliment. On the contrary, the second speaker in example no.2 followed Quantity Maxim but severely violate PP (the Agreement and Approbation Maxim). Although what he said is informative, not redundant, his way of expressing was a disagreement and dispraise of other. Obviously, the conversation cannot be continued in this situation either. The ideal situation of daily interaction will be like the third example. The second speaker follows both Quantity Maxim and PP, being informative, concise, and at the same time, polite by agree with what the first speaker said. That shows how PP has to work with Quantity Maxim in social interaction.

### Politeness Principle & Quality Maxim

Quality Maxim deals with the content of what one says, be truthful and be of enough evidence. This may be contradicting with PP sometimes because for sake of being polite and saving face of others, people intend to lie in some cases.

However, as the author has stated above, they work on different levels. Generally, Quality Maxim is more universal while PP varies according to different situations. Examples are like this:

1) A: 那壶里还有水吗?

B: 还有。

(事实上壶里明明已经没水了。)

2) A: 店里还有这本书吗?

B: 不知道啊, 我找找看。

3) A: What about going out for a hiking tomorrow?

B: I have no interest in such boring activities.

From the above three examples, we can see that with Quality Maxim only or PP only, conversations cannot be continued or will not be carried out successfully. In the first example, the second speaker violated the Quality Maxim by saying what he knew was false. If the hearer believed what he said and try to, say fetch some water, he will find the truth and began to think the second speaker as unreliable. That does no good to their relations. And in the third example, although the second speaker followed the Quality Maxim and said what exactly in his mind, he simply violated PP by disagreeing with or even dispraising other. The result of such an answer will definitely be the friendship to be ruined. However, in the example no.2, the second speaker strictly followed both Quality Maxim and PP by telling the truth that he was not sure if there was any book left, and at the same time minimizing the cost of other according to PP. And perceptibly, this conversation is going to be smooth and friendly. In these cases, the importance of PP and Quality Maxim working together is easy to see.

## Politeness Principle & Relation Maxim

Similar with the Quality Maxim, Relation Maxim also deals with the content of the utterances. That is what the second speaker says should be relevant to what the first speaker has just said. So, there are some similarities between PP with Quality Maxim and with Relation Maxim: they sometimes contradict with each other. But also the same, Relation Maxim regulates people's behavior in general: usually one should say something relevant to what the other asks. However, in particular situations, irrelevant words are said because of PP. Thus, in order to make correct inferential, both PP and Relation Maxim should be take into consideration. Examples go like this:

1) A: Her skirt is beautiful, isn't it?

B: Yes, you really have a good taste. The coat on her is just exquisite.

(the skirt is actually not suitable for her as to the second speaker)

2) A: What about we establish a study group?

B: Great. Clever student like me can help you guys with your study.

3) A: 你期末论文写完了吗?

B: 哦, 听说你已经被选为学生会主席了, 挺棒。恭喜你!

Clearly from the above examples, although violation of PP or Relation Maxim is inevitable, the cooperation between the two still can serve a conversation better. Seeing from the second example, the second speaker did say something about the study group, related to what the first speaker said before, he broke the rule of PP



(praise of self and dispraise of other), which will definitely lead to unhappy even anger of the other. On the contrary, in the third example, although the second speaker congratulated the first one which followed PP maxims, the completely irrelevant words he said may cause a sense of aloofness because of the unwillingness to answer this question especially between two close friends. Finally, the first example is well uttered for what the second speaker said was not totally irrelevant with the first one while he also followed PP to praise him. This brought about a comfortable feeling and a successful conversation can thus be continued. Therefore, cooperation between Relation Maxim and PP should be considered significant, too.

### Politeness Principle & Manner Maxim

In the end, the author finds that there is difference between PP and Manner Maxim of CP since PP has something to do with face issue while Manner Maxim doesn't. But, similarities also exist because both of them are related to the way of utterance. The four points in Manner Maxim regulate the words of speakers to be logical and clear and the PP from face perspective. It is easy for the two to cooperate and the cooperation is preferred by people in their daily life, too. For instance:

1) A: 插座坏了, 你去买个好吗?

B: 可以啊。但是, 买个什么牌子的? 什么插座坏了? 去那个店买? 可以修不? 我很愿意的。

2) A: 壶里没水了, 你去打一下水好吗?

B: 你怎么不去啊?

From the examples, we can see that with only Manner Maxim or PP, although the

conversations can continue probably, the utterance brings about uncomfortable feelings. In the first example, although the second speaker said something approving the first speaker's idea, the words in his utterance was neither brief nor in order. The result would be the difficulties for the first speaker to understand what he said. People would definitely prefer words like “可以啊。哪里有卖?” or “好的。什么牌子? ”. In the second example, though the words were brief and simple, no PP maxims could be reflected. Thus, the utterance became unfriendly. People in this case would prefer utterance like “是吗? 你没空的话我去吧。”. Therefore, it is preference of people that in their daily life, both Manner Maxims and PP should be considered before saying something.

In conclusion, both analysis of the detailed maxims and examples of daily life prove that from the perspective of the two principles themselves, PP and all four maxims of CP not only can co-exist harmoniously, but also should and preferred to be considered as a whole, being supplement to each other. In this way, social interactions can be conducted under friendly and harmonious atmosphere.

### Perspective of Culture

Moreover, the author finds that CP and PP **have to** and sometimes **must** cooperate with each other, especially in a context like the participants come from different cultures. In these cases, the most important thing in a conversation is to basically follow CP while if possible, to try to gain as much information as possible in the aspect of the others' conventions and regulations. There are two reasons: firstly, since CP is a universal regulation as the author has stated above, even if participants of a conversation are from different cultures, they have to follow; secondly, since it is known to all that differences between cultures will result in misunderstandings and failure of interactions, to

learn and then to put into practice the politeness conventions of different culture become inevitable. And thus, the cooperation of CP and PP become desperately needed. The author would like to take Chinese culture and the Western culture as an example to make comparisons. And the example goes like this:

Western people (W): Would you like to come to my house this evening to have lunch with us?

Chinese people (C): 谢谢, 我很愿意去, 你做的菜太好吃了。家里装饰的也很漂亮。你儿子也十分可爱的。他该读小学吧, 成绩肯定很好。我来你们就随便做点菜就行, 不用太客气的。不然搞的我很不好意思。

W: ...

In the above example, the Chinese speaker did follow the western conventions to accept the invitation politely and praise the western speaker about his family. However, the fundamental rule of CP maxims (especially the Quantity Maxim) is violated, which causes unpleasant feelings. And that conversation becomes a failure and the western speaker may not offer an invitation to the Chinese speaker anymore.

And here is another example:

W: It's really a long journey, isn't it?

C: Yes, and you must be very tired since you are old.

W: Oh. . . I'm NOT OLD and I'm NOT tired.

On the contrary, the Chinese speaker did follow PP. He answered the question clearly and orderly, and expressed his care for the western speaker. However, because of the disparity between the two conventions, the polite Chinese way of expression becomes impolite in western countries. And the result of this difference would then be the anger. Therefore, in a conversation between people from different cultures, politeness is quite important and it should be the right one, too, because of conventional differences.

So, finally let's see an example of successful conversation between people from different cultures. And we can see clearly that this should be based on CP in general, and a right understanding of how to be polite.

C: Thank you for inviting me. Here is a small gift for you.

W: Oh, pretty. Thank you for coming. Please enjoy yourself tonight.

In the example, the Chinese speaker had a good understanding of how to being polite when invited to the western people's house. He brought a gift and deliver great thanks for the invitation. And obviously, the western speaker is very happy and further home visits might be possible. The author should mention here also, that CP plays a very significant role in this successful conversation, too. Without CP, the situation might be like the first example before.

In a whole, from the three examples, we get a clear map that people have to or must follow both CP and PP in order to carry out a successful interaction. The reason that the author takes situations between people from different cultures and lays more emphasis on it is that in these cases, the correct understanding of PP is

needed. Thus, the cooperation between CP and PP is not better for harmonious atmosphere as the above part, but rather a must for continuous conversations.

### Conclusion

In the whole paper, the author tries to prove what her opinion is right. That is the coexistence of Cooperative Principle and Politeness Principle is possible and actually only with their cooperation can people achieve successful conversations and harmonious atmosphere. The author proves her statement from the analysis of the advantages and limitations of CP and PP and the feasibility and must for the two principles to co-exist together from the perspective of principles themselves and culture. During the whole paper, she not only gives her arguments on the other scholars' opinion in this field, but also provides readers with examples and detailed situations and contexts. And all these evidence and argument together completely prove the author's opinion.

By writing this paper, the author is going to show that in daily interactions, especially between people from different cultures, the acceptance and the use of both CP and PP is important. When people start their conversations, they should have a clear idea of how to be polite and how to cooperate in his mind. Only by doing this, can people, no matter where they from, communicate easily and harmoniously between each other, which is significant because of the globalization of today's world.

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