

The Implicature of Eloquent Silence and its Role in Emotional Communication in O. Henry's *The Gift of the Magi* (A Pragmatic Study)

Wirya Ahmed Ameen¹, and Mohammed Hussein Ahmed²

1 Garmian Polytechnic University, Garmian, Kurdistan Region, Iraq

2 Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Erbil, Kurdistan Region, Iraq

ABSTRACT: The application of pragmatic rules and principles to the interpretation of literary works has so far been of great advantage for literary readers, as it helps to obtain two points in relation to literature: its understanding and enjoyment. Silence, as a nonverbal means of communication, can sometimes be a more powerful expression of emotion than words, particularly in moments of loss, grief, or conflict. In literature, a character's silence can often communicate more effectively than direct dialogue, allowing readers to connect with the character's pain or sorrow. The present work is an attempt to analyze intermittent instances of silence in a short story, namely *The Gift of Magi*, by the American Writer O. Henry (1862-1910), in view of Grice's theory of Conversational Implicature. The conclusions of the research ascertain the applicability of implicature principles to the interpretation of literary genres, especially short stories; besides, the writer's deliberate flouting of these principles forces his readers to think and infer the deep meanings behind his expressions, and feel the true emotional relations between the characters in the story under study.

Keywords: Emotional Communication, Pragmatic Analysis, Eloquent Silence, O. Henry – *The Gift of the Magi*.

1. Introduction:

Eloquent (conversational) silence occupies an important position in conversation analysis, as it is regarded as an integral part and one characteristic feature of natural conversation. It provides verbal communication with its multiple informative and communicative functions.

Studies on 'silence' have been valued since late 1980s as claimed by Jia (2013). Scholars investigated it via a number of disciplines while emphasizing its complex nature as a cultural phenomenon. For instance, Samovar & Porter (1991) studied 'silence' from a cross-cultural perspective. In *Silence: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, Jaworski (1997) approached 'silence' from many points of view, including sociology, anthropology, aesthetics and ethnography. Nakane (2006) conducted ethnographic studies on 'silence' patterns and their cultural meanings in the EFL class. Thus, each of those studies focused on a particular aspect of silence.

The present research attempts to study 'silence' from a pragmatic perspective, i.e., it quests to verify to what extent pragmatic theories can be utilized in the process of interpreting and comprehending eloquent silence, especially in literary works. Since the study is application oriented, a given literary work, a short story in the present paper, has to be chosen for the purpose. Taking into account the nature of the subject, one may find good potential for the application of certain pragmatic principles, such as implicature principles, to O. Henry's short story *The Gift of the Magi*.

William Sydney Porter (1862-1910), better known by his pen name O. Henry, is an American short story writer. Porter's stories are known for their naturalist observations, witty narration, and surprise endings. The story portrays the concept of sacrifice, love, and the true meaning of giving. It is about a young impoverished couple, Jim and Della, who sacrifice their most precious properties for the sake of buying each other meaningful Christmas gifts: Della, who has long beautiful hair, sells it to buy a chain for Jim's pocket watch; meanwhile, Jim sells his watch to buy Della a nice set of combs for her hair. When they exchange the gifts, they realize that their sacrifices have made the gifts useless, but their love and selflessness the greatest gift of all.

The scenario of the story involves intermittent instances of silence that convey communicative information among characters; and the present work analyzes those instances in the light of pragmatic principles drawn from Grice's theory of Implicature, with the aim of showing the communicative value of them in verbal communication, as well as their applicability to literary work interpretations

2. Pragmatics and Literary Interpretation:

The role of pragmatic theories and concepts in the interpretation of literary works has been vividly seen in the last decades. It can be regarded as a fairly recent development in linguistic and literary research writing. Most pragmatic analysis has been done on spoken language, considerably less on written language use, and still less on literary use. Mey (2006:) maintains that when we dwell on the role of pragmatic norms in literary studies, it is important to bear in mind that pragmatics was not developed from inside linguistics, but rather emerged from related fields, such as philosophy, sociology, and the theory of interaction. Accordingly, from Mey's viewpoint, this sort of pragmatics is concerned with the user's role in the societal production and consumption of texts (ibid).

One of the benefits of utilizing pragmatic principles in literary analyses, as maintained by Sell (1991), is to relate language specialists and literary specialists together. This step emphasizes the relationship between language use and context. It sees entire processes of production and reception as specific to particular socio-cultural, situational, and interactional circumstances. Thus, by applying pragmatic principles to the story under study, the researcher aims to sensitize students and researchers of English literature to language itself; as literature is the art form realized entirely via language. Such investigations encourage them to look at single utterances, in any given literary work, in terms of their functions and their intended effects, i.e. providing a reader with a pragmatic description of a given piece of literature helps him perceive a concept different from the ones available to him. Moreover, such an approach enhances the enjoyment of reading literature, and, meanwhile, enables the reader to unravel the hidden agenda and the suggested values behind a literary work, on the basis of the available concrete facts, contextual information, and evidences shown in that given work.

The nature of the intermittent instances of silence in *The Gift of the Magi* postulates the application of certain pragmatic rules and regulations (especially implicature principles) to help literary readers understand and appreciate literary works in general, and short stories in particular.

Grice's Theory of Implicature:

The concept of implicature in pragmatics is traced back to the work of the philosopher H. P. Grice (1913-88), and is currently used in linguistics as part of the study of conversational structure. This theory dwells on how hearers manage to work out the complete message when speakers mean more than they say. It concerns the message that is not found in the plain meaning of the sentence; the speaker implies it, and the hearer infers it by appealing to the rules and regulations governing successful conversational interaction. That is, implicatures result from the process of implication which speakers and listeners rely on in the production and interpretation of utterances (Cristal, 1980).

Grice postulates two types of implicatures: conversational and conventional. Conversational implicatures refer to the implications which can be deduced from the form of an utterance on the basis of certain cooperative principles (maxims) which govern the efficiency and the normal acceptability of conversation. For instance, the expression *There is some chalk on the floor* is taken to mean 'you ought to pick it up'. Grice proposes that such an implicature can be calculated from the former expression by bearing in mind three points:

1. The usual linguistic meaning of what is said.
2. Contextual information (shared or general knowledge)
3. The assumption that the speaker is obeying what Grice calls the cooperative principles

Conventional implicatures, on the other hand, are not derived from these maxims but simply attached to particular expressions by convention; for example, the use of certain lexical items like *however*, *yet*, *even*, *therefore* etc. or sequences of these in utterances such as *He is an Englishman; therefore, he is brave*. Thus, all sorts of things can be said to have implications: actions, events, and so on; but only linguistic events carry implicatures that are unstated information conveyed to the audience, who is expected to be able to work out what is being said on the basis of the cultural/linguistic maxims that are often being intentionally flouted by interlocutors (Al-Sulaimaan, 2010).

From what has been said so far, we can say that implicatures are inferences that cannot be made from isolated utterances. They depend on the context of the utterance and the shared knowledge between the speaker and the hearer. Grice has proposed a way of analyzing implicatures based on the cooperative principle and its maxims of relevance, quality, quantity, and manner. In Grice's viewpoint, the speaker's flouting of a maxim combined with the hearer's assumption that the speaker has not actually abandoned the cooperative principles leads to an implicature. Grice postulates that all speakers, regardless of their cultural background, abide by a basic principle governing conversation which he dubbed 'cooperative principles'. This implies that, in a conversation, the participants will cooperate with each other when making their contributions. In this regard, Grice distinguishes four categories under each of which there are several maxims which render a speaker's conversation cooperative (ibid):

1. Maxim of Quality (truthfulness)

This maxim requires the speaker's contribution to be true. It gives the following guidance:

- a. Do not say what you believe to be false.
- b. Do not say that for which you lack evidence.

1. Maxim of Quantity (informativeness):

- a. Make your contributions as informative as required.
- b. Do not make your contributions more informative than is required.

2. Maxim of Relation (Relevance):

Be relevant (i.e. make sure that whatever you say is relevant to the conversation at hand).

3. Maxim of Manner (Clarity):

This maxim asks the speaker to:

- a. Avoid obscurity of expression.
- b. Avoid ambiguity.
- c. Be brief
- d. Be orderly

It is to be noted that the above maxims are not always observed. A distinction is often made between two cases: violating a maxim and flouting a maxim. The former is the case where it is not obvious at the time of the utterance that the speaker had deliberately lied, supplied insufficient information, or been ambiguous, irrelevant or hard to understand. In the latter, the situation is where the speaker flouts a maxim, i.e. where it is obvious to the hearer at the time of the utterance that the speaker has deliberately and openly fails to observe a maxim (ibid).

It is to be noted that the instances of silence, analyzed in this paper, will definitely be investigated in the light of the conversational implicatures that those instances convey in relation to the entire message of the data analyzed.

3. Intelligibility, Comprehensibility, and Interpretability of Literary Texts:

Generally speaking, the three steps or processes that are inevitable to understand the intention behind any literary text are: Intelligibility, Comprehensibility, and Interpretability. On the interpretability of texts in general, and of literary texts in particular, Enkvist (1991) has his own viewpoint. He thinks that human beings are programmed to look for information, even desperately, in anything they suspect might be a message.

Concerning the discussion of interpretability of texts, Enkvist (1991) comes out with a conclusion that we need a conceptual frame over and beyond that of traditional syntax. The terms he proposes to discuss interpretability are: intelligibility, comprehensibility and interpretability. He believes that a piece of text is 'intelligible' to those who can recognize in it phonological, lexical and syntactic structures. A text is 'comprehensible' to those who can assign to it a definite meaning, i.e., a semantic structure. And a text is 'interpretable' to those who can build around that text a scenario, a text world, a set of state of affairs, in which that text makes sense. Taking the above three components together, Enkvist (1991) deduces that 'intelligibility' is the syntactic component of 'interpretability' (which includes phonology, lexis and syntax); 'comprehensibility' is its semantic component which incorporates syntax plus semantics; and 'interpretability' is the pragmatic totality involving pragmatics as well as semantics and syntax. However,

he admits that discourse processing does not work uni-directionally from 'intelligibility' through 'comprehension' to 'interpretability', but it proceeds in an intricate see-saw, an intricate blend of bottom-up and top-down processing.

However, in regard to the reader and his/her collaboration with the author in the pragmatic analysis of literary texts, and the potential validity and explanatory significance of pragmatic mechanisms for literary texts, Mey (2001) has his own point of view. He believes that the reader plays a vital role in the process of the actual production and consumption of literary texts; and the significance of pragmatics for the study of written texts should generally be seen from the angle of the user (the reader in his opinion). To him, it is the reader who acquires the product of someone else's literary activity, and by consuming (reading) them, satisfies a personal need. In this way, the work that the author has done, in producing the text, is supplemented and completed by the reader.

On the basis of what has been mentioned before, we can maintain that the benefit of subsuming pragmatic rules and regulations, as a new trend in the pragmatic study of literary works, lies in its studying and analyzing literary texts in the light of pragmatic theories and approaches, of which the concepts of implicature is a good example. The importance lies in the fact that they relate literature to the science of language (Linguistics), and consequently bring literary specialists and language specialists together. Besides, these pragmatic norms facilitate readers' understanding of literary texts and consider the whole process as a collaborative activity between the reader and the author.

4. Models of Communication:

As an alternative to the classical code model, proposed by Shannon and Weaver (1962), Grice (1975) laid the foundations for an inferential model of communication. According to the code model, a communicator encodes his/her intended message into a signal, which is decoded by the audience using an identical copy of the code. That is, according to this model, communication involves the processes of encoding and decoding, and understanding is a matter of unintelligent, mechanical decoding. Whereas the inferential model postulates that a communicator provides evidence of his intention to convey a certain meaning, which is inferred by the audience on the basis of the evidence provided. So, an utterance is a linguistically coded piece of evidence, so that verbal comprehension involves an element of decoding. However, the linguistic meaning recovered by decoding is just one of the inputs to the inference process which yields an interpretation of the speaker's meaning (Sperber & Wilson, 2004, P. 2)

Understanding is achieved when the communicative intention is fulfilled – that is, when the audience recognize the informative intention. To fulfill one's communicative intention requires an inferential process in addition to the linguistic encoding and decoding. It is especially needed for one to understand a non-verbal signal like 'silence'. The interpreting process is said to involve the following steps (Weidong & Xueyan 2003):

1. Perception of the signal (an utterance or a silence, for instance) Cognition of the conceptual meaning of the signal to form a relation between the new and old information on the part of the audience stimulated by the signal.
2. Cognition of the contextual meaning of the signal to involve the cognitive context and infer a series of assumptions
3. Fulfillment of the communicative intention: to choose some assumption and infer the implication guided by pragmatic knowledge. Among the above steps, number one is a physical process, the rest are all cognitive. The cognitive process is the key to inference and the success in communication.

5. Silence as a Nonverbal Means of Communication:

5.1. Silence, Pause, Muteness:

Though silence is defined as the absence of sound, it is different from other seemingly synonymous words like pause, muteness and the like. A pause in a spoken communication may indicate that the speaker has: reached a natural conclusion, is thinking, or is giving the listener a chance to respond. Alternatively, a pause may be used for 'dramatic effect', so that the audience think carefully about what is said next (Pearl, 2020). Muteness generally means the absence of any kind of ambient audible sound. Whereas in communication, this muteness is taken as 'silence'. It is usually characterized as the absence

of speech. However, the absence of speech does not amount to the absence of communication. In fact, the forbearance or abstinence of speech is a deliberate or imposed state of muteness – a very powerful form of communication (ibid).

5.2. Different Implications of Silence:

Silence has many meanings in intercultural communication. It can be used to intimidate; to save face; to show respect; or it can simply suggest that the other person is relaxed enough in your company to enjoy a quiet moment. Sometimes, silence has more to do with not being comfortable with the proposal than anything else. Besides, silence implies thought, or thinking up an answer to a question with suitable gravitas. Moreover, in Chinese people's communication, silence can express plenty of meanings, such as agreement, praise, disagreement, protest, decision, respect, etc. When Chinese people talk with strangers, they will not break the ice, for they think that it will be embarrassed to talk with someone that they don't know at all (Quan, 2015). When speakers intentionally remain silent, silence may have myriad meanings to the listeners – ranging from acceptance to disapproval or scorn. The range of the interpretations may vary from one culture to another as it is subjective and relative, and this indicates that silence is both context specific and culture specific (Jaworski, 1993).

5.3. The Literature of Silence:

The theme of silence in literature has been extensively analyzed, with scholars exploring its multifaceted roles across various genres, periods, and cultures. Silence can function as a form of resistance, a manifestation of trauma, a reflection of power dynamics, an expression of oppression, a medium for introspection, or even as a poetic and narrative device. It is utilized in modern literature to explore how authors use silence to convey meaning and express the ineffable (Glücksberg, 1975). Likewise, the phenomenon that one can make something out of silence has already been exploited and employed by writers, in particular short story writers. This type of silence, used in literature, is sometimes labelled "pregnant silence" (Jia, 2013). The present work studies instances of silence picked up in *The Gift of the Magi* and explores how silence is used as a verbal means among interlocutors in the story.

6. Analysis of Eloquent Silence in 'The Gift of the Magi' (Adopting Implicature Principles)

In *The Gift of the Magi*, 'silence' is designed to convey the informative and communicative intentions of the person who falls silent, not only for the characters but also for the readers. It plays a crucial role in building emotion, highlighting sacrifice, and conveying meaning beyond words. The following are instances of silence in *The Gift of the Magi*, analyzed pragmatically in view of implicature principles.

Situation One: Della's Silence (Before selling her hair)

When Della recognizes that she doesn't have enough money to buy Jim a Christmas present, she encounters a real sorrow, and there is an observable silence in her despair. She does not express her feelings in words, emphasizing the weight of her emotions.

Extract: "Which instigates the moral reflection that life is made up of sobs, sniffles, and smiles, with sniffles predominating."

The Analysis:

1. Maxim of Quantity (Provide as much information as needed):
 - a. The expression is more than required; it should have been a simple statement like "Life is mostly sad," which means the speaker deliberately includes extra details.
 - b. The extra phrases like "sobs, sniffles, and smiles" provide a variety of emotions, denoting that life has different moments, and the phrase "with sniffles predominating" suggests that sadness or struggle is the most frequent.
2. Maxim of Quality (Truthfulness)
 - a. The sentence is metaphorical; it does not strictly adhere to factual accuracy.
 - b. The writer expects the reader to recognize that this is not a statistical analysis of life but a reflective and interpretative statement.

3. Maxim of Relation (Relevance)
 - a. The phrase is relevant to the 'moral reflection' it aspires to arouse in the readers.
 - b. The reader infers that the sentence aims to comment on the human experience, rather than listing emotions arbitrarily.
4. Maxim of Manner (Clarity)
 - a. The phrase is poetic rather than direct, this flouting of the maxim results in the Implicature that life is not purely sorrowful but has moments of happiness.
 - b. The choice of "sobs, sniffles, and smiles" (alliteration) conveys a rhythmic and philosophical tone, rendering the message more emotionally engaging rather than straightforward.

Discussion:

According to implicature principles, the writer, in this extract, deliberately flouts some of the maxims to convey his thoughts to his readers. The sentence does not explicitly show the writer's intended meaning; it is the structure and choice of words that create the implicature. The phrase "which instigates the moral reflection" encourages the reader to think about this emotional reality of life, leading to an interpretation rather than a direct statement. The contrast between "smiles" and "sobs/sniffles" denotes that while joy exists, it is outweighed by sorrow.

Situation Two: Jim's Silent Reaction (After Seeing Della's Hair Cut)

When Jim comes home and sees Della's short hair, he does not immediately react with anger or disappointment. Instead, he simply stares at her with an unreadable expression. This moment of silence builds tension and suspense, making the reader wonder what he is thinking.

Extract: "Jim stopped inside the door, as immovable as a setter at the scent of quail. His eyes were fixed upon Della, and there was an expression in them that she could not read."

The Analysis:

1. Maxim of Quantity:
 - a. The narrator, instead of briefly stating what Jim is thinking or feeling, describes his physical reaction. This creates an implicature: the reader infers that Jim's expression and stillness indicate shock, surprise, or even distress.
 - b. Lack of explicit explanation forces the reader to fill in the gaps.
2. Maxim of Quality:
 - a. The expression does not make direct statements about Jim's emotions; it only states that his reaction is genuine.
 - b. It suggests that his reaction is intense and meaningful without directly saying so, making the moment open to interpretation.
3. Maxim of Relation:
 - a. Likening Jim to a "setter at the scent of quail" is highly relevant because it suggests he is frozen in a state of focus, which implies a deep emotional impact.
 - b. The relevance is backed up by the fact that his reaction is to seeing Della, who has cut her hair.
4. Maxim of Manner:
 - a. The wording is deliberately indirect and descriptive rather than straightforward. Instead of saying, "Jim was shocked and confused when he saw Della," the writer uses imagery and metaphor to convey the same meaning in a more powerful way.
 - b. Lack of directness contributes to the suspense; the reader does not know what Jim's reaction truly means at this point.

Discussion:

In this particular situation, the writer uses implicature to create suspense, deep emotional impact, and invite readers to infer meaning beyond the literal words. The silence, ambiguous facial expression, and

stillness all work together to suggest that the character of Jim is experiencing an intense emotional reaction that cannot be expressed in words, and this can be regarded a perfect example of "eloquent silence" in the story.

Situation Three: The Moment of Understanding Between Jim and Della

After they reveal their gifts to each other (Della's combs and Jim's watch chain) their silence speaks volumes. They both realize the irony of their situation as well as the depth of their love. No lofty expressions are needed; their mutual sacrifice says everything.

Extract: "And here I have told you the story of two children who were not wise. Each sold the most valuable thing he owned in order to buy a gift for the other."

The Analysis:

1. Maxim of Quantity:
 - a. The sentence 'The children were not wise,' seems like a complete judgment. However, the next sentence "Each sold the most valuable thing he owned in order to buy a gift for the other" provides information that contradicts the simple interpretation of "not wise." So, the writer is saying more than is required for a particular purpose.
 - b. This suggests an implicature: while they were "not wise" in a practical sense (giving up their most valuable possessions), they were wise in a deeper, more meaningful way (selfless love).
2. Maxim of Quality:
 - a. The statement that they were "not wise" can be interpreted as an ironic or non-literal remark. The story implies that their actions, while impractical, reflect a wisdom of love and selflessness.
 - b. The narrator does not vividly state that they were truly foolish, leaving the reader to infer the deeper wisdom behind their actions.
3. Maxim of Relation:
 - a. The phrase "most valuable thing" is relevant to the theme of sacrifice: while the gifts were intended to bring joy, their true value lies not in their practicality but in the love behind them.
 - b. The reader is led to connect the act of giving with the idea of true wisdom, and this makes the narrator's statement implicitly ironic.
4. Maxim of Manner:
 - a. The phrasing "who were not wise" appears direct but is actually ambiguous in content. The irony becomes clear in context: they were not wise in a worldly sense, but they were wise in a moral or emotional sense.
 - b. The contrast between what is explicitly stated and what is meant relies on the reader's ability to infer the true message.

Discussion:

The writer utilizes situational irony in this extract: the characters' sacrifices render their gifts useless, yet their love makes their actions meaningful. The writer does not explicitly state that their actions were wise in a deeper sense, but the structure of the passage helps the reader to arrive at that conclusion. The irony creates the implicature that wisdom is not only about material gain but about love and selflessness.

7. Conclusion:

The conclusions the study arrived at can be summarized as follows:

The writer, in *The Gift of the Magi*, is flouting the conversational maxims to convey his message to the reader, and help him/her unravel the hidden agenda behind this literary work.

Eloquent silence plays a vital role in the story in expressing the ineffable. The writer's literary use of it proves that it is sometimes more powerful than verbal means in expressing emotions and feelings.

Eloquent Silence, in *The Gift of the Magi*, enhances the emotional depth of the story. It allows the characters' love and sacrifices to be felt rather than told explicitly.

Analyzing the story through the lens of implicature, we can see that the narrator implies something beyond the literal meaning. Moreover, one can claim that this piece of work can be considered a good example of how implicature and irony work together to convey deeper themes in literature.

Among literary genres, short stories allow more potentiality for the applicability of pragmatic theories, especially Grice's theory of conversational implicature, to the interpretation of writer's intentions. This is perhaps due to the manageable, short expressions that can be more easily interpreted or analyzed as compared to expressions in other literary genres such as novels.

Utilizing implicature principles, the writer forces his readers to read between the lines and grasp the philosophical message without needing a direct statement like "life is mostly about sadness."

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