

## A Study on the Conversational Implicature in *Sons and Lovers* From the Perspective of Cooperative Principle

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### Abstract

*Sons and Lovers* is one of the masterpieces of David Herbert Lawrence. This novel reveals the complicated relationship which is mainly resulted from the great gap between Mr. Morel and Mrs. Morel. The growth of Paul is greatly influenced by his parents. The conversation between Paul and his parents plays an important role in indicating Paul's unbalanced attitude towards his parents and his relationship with his parents. The unbalanced attitude of Paul and his relationship with his parents contribute to the novel's development.

With the application of the Cooperative Principle, this paper mainly analyzes the conversation between Paul and his parents. In this way, the relationship between Paul and his parents can be revealed. The underlying reason of the novel's plot development can be better understand.

**Key words:** *Sons and Lovers*; Conversational implicature; Cooperative Principle

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### INTRODUCTION

*Sons and Lovers* is the representative works of David Herbert Lawrence who is regarded as one of the most controversial novelists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the English literature. At the same time, it is Lawrence's

autobiographical works. It depicts the irreconcilable differences between lower class and middle class. Mr. Morel and Mrs. Morel are the representative of the lower class and the middle class respectively. The relationship between and among Mr. Morel, Mrs. Morel and Paul plays an important role in promoting the development of the story. Paul has held different attitude towards his father Mr. Morel and his mother Mrs. Morel since his childhood. Paul hates his father and loves his mother. Disharmonious relationship between Mr. and Mrs. Morel and Paul's abnormal love for his mother are the basis of the novel. Most researches concerning *Sons and Lovers* have been done from the literary criticism perspective. Few researchers have studied it from the linguistic perspective especially from the perspective of Cooperative Principle. This paper analyzes the conversation between Paul and Mr. Morel and the conversation between Paul and Mrs. Morel and intends to explore the conversational implicature from the perspective of Cooperative Principle. In this way, "Oedipus complex" can be interpreted from a new perspective, that is, linguistics perspective.

## 1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 1.1 Cooperative Principle

Conversation is a two-way communication activity. It needs speakers and hearers to cooperate in order to communicate smoothly. In 1967, H. P. Grice put forward Cooperative Principle in his "Logical and Conversation" lecture at Harvard. Cooperative Principle is defined as 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 (Grice, 1975). The Cooperative Principle (CP) includes four maxims. They are the maxim of quality, the maxim of quantity, the maxim of relation and the maxim of manner. The Cooperative Principle and its component maxims

ensure that in an exchange of conversation, the right amount of information is provided and that the interaction is conducted in a truthful, relevant and perspicuous manner (Huang, 2009, p.25).

- a) The maxim of Quality
  - (i) Do not say what you believe to be false.
  - (ii) Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.
- b) The maxim of Quantity
  - (i) Make your contribution as informative as required for the current purposes of the exchange.
  - (ii) Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.
- c) The maxim of Relation
  - Be relevant
- d) The maxim of Manner
  - Be perspicuous
  - (i) Avoid obscurity
  - (ii) Avoid ambiguity
  - (iii) Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity)
  - (vi) Be orderly (Grice,1975)

## 1.2 Conversational Implicature

Conversational implicature is an important notion in the field of pragmatics. In daily communication, Cooperative Principle is considered as an ideal principle for people to observe to communicate smoothly. However, people violate Cooperative Principle in conversation for different purposes and do not say something in an explicit, truthful and relevant way. Therefore, conversational implicature is generated. Put it another way, when the speaker violates any maxim mentioned above, the hearer has to make inference from the literal meaning of the utterance in order to understand the speaker's real intention. Grice also put forward four characteristics of conversational implicature. They are calculability, cancellability, non-detachability and non-conventionality. According to the four characteristics, conversational implicature can be summarized as a type of extra meaning, which can be inferred by the hearer based on the conventional meaning, the CP and the context.

## 2. ANALYSIS OF CONVERSATIONAL IMPLICATURE IN *SONS AND LOVERS* FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF COOPERATIVE PRINCIPLE

### 2.1 Conversational Implicature Generated by Violating the Maxim of Quality

#### 2.1.1 Providing Untrue Information

The maxim of quality can be flouted by providing untrue information. The speakers intentionally try to veil certain truths.

Example 1

“Are ter asleep, my darin’?” Morel asked softly.

“No; is mother comin’?”

“She’s just finishin’ foldin’ the clothes. Do you want anything?” Morel rarely “thee’d” his son.

“I don’t want nothing. But how long will she be?”

“Not long, duckie.”

Paul has an attack of bronchitis and his father very concerns about his physical condition. Disappointedly, Mr. Morel realizes that his son does not need him and his appearance can make things even worse. In this conversation, Paul violates the maxim of quality. Paul indeed wants his mother to accompany him, but he says he does not want anything. Paul flouts the maxim of quality by providing untrue information. The conversational implicature is that Paul does not want to talk to his father. He does not like his father.

Example 2

“Four Penn’ orth!” she moaned.

“How Cheap!” she cried.

“Yes, but I couldn’t afford it This week of all weeks.”

“But lovely!” he cried.

In this example, Paul violates the maxim of quality by providing opposite information. This dialogue is between Mrs. Morel and Paul. When Mrs. Morel comes back from market, she shows her son roots of pansies and daisies which she calls them extravagance, and says she cannot afford it. Paul knows his family’s economic condition, but he says “how cheap” the flowers are. In reality, these flowers are luxury to a poor family. In order to comfort his mother, he has to say something against reality.

Example 3

“You know Mr. Leivers has gone to live on a new farm. He asked me last week if I wouldn’t go and see Mrs. Leivers, and I promised to bring you on Monday if it’s fine. Shall we go?”

“I say, little woman, how lovely!” he cried.

In this conversation, Paul calls his mother “little woman”. It is obvious that Paul violates the maxim of quality. In the novel, Paul also says that his mother is a fine little woman to go jaunting out with. This kind of calling implies that Paul falls in love with his mother and their relationship is abnormal.

Example 4

“What are you so mad about?” he asked. “Because you don’t like her.”

“I don’t say I don’t like her. But I don’t hold with children keep companying and never did.”

“But you don’t mind our Annie going out with Jim Inger.”

“They have more sense than you two.”

Paul always goes to Willey farm and gets familiar with Miriam. Gradually, Paul loves Miriam. And he often goes out with Miriam and comes back very late, which irritates Mrs. Morel. She is very possessive about her son and is worried about her son who may be taken away by Miriam. Mrs. Morel hates Miriam who is her

potential enemy. Mrs. Morel violates the quality maxim by hiding her true feeling. That is, she provides untrue information.

Example 5

“And I have never-you know, Paul-I’ve never had a husband-not really-”

He stroked his mother’s hair, and his mouth was on her throat.

“And she exults so in taking you from me-she is not like ordinary girls.”

“Well, I don’t love her, mother,” he murmured.

Paul and Miriam often stay together, and get closer and closer. They are talking about many things, like painting. In this conversation, both Paul and his mother provide untrue information. Obviously, Mrs. Morel has a husband who is a miner. But Mrs. Morel says that she does not have. In this way, Mrs. Morel regards Paul as present husband. The relationship between mother and son looks very abnormal. It is very natural for Paul to love girls in his age. He indeed loves Miriam. But he is so dependent on his mother that he cannot admit the fact that he loves Miriam. He loves his mother so deeply and he cannot see his mother so sad. For this purpose, he violates the maxim of quality by telling lies.

Example 6

“Not very well?”

“Well, yes!”

“Has it been bad?” he asked.

“No. It hurt a bit, but nothing to mention.

Paul and Mrs. Morel are afraid of each other. Paul knows that his mother is dying. Mrs. Morel indeed knows her own health condition. But they pretend to be happy. Every morning, Paul goes into her room and asks if she feels well. She pretends to be very well. Paul sees that his mother’s hand is pressing the place where the pain is. His mother’s condition worsens. But his mother says that the pain is not serious. Mrs. Morel violates the quality maxim by telling lies. From her lies, we can see that Mrs. Morel is afraid of death and wants to have a happy time with her son.

Example 7

“Oh, it is bitter, Paul!” she said, making a little grimace.

“It’s a new sleeping medicine the doctor gave me for you,” he said.” “He thought it would leave you in such a state in the morning.

This conversation occurs between Paul and Mrs. Morel. The cancer tortures Mrs. Morel so much. Paul cannot bear it much longer and decides to put all the crashed morphia pills in Mrs. Morel’s milk with the purpose of killing her. When Mrs. Morel finds the milk very bitter, Paul tells her that it is a new sleeping medicine. In fact, Paul makes the plan to kill his mother with morphia. From the conversation, Paul reveals that he wants to live without the influence of his mother. To some extent, his mother makes him unhappy because his own

desire cannot be satisfied. Paul’s feeling for his mother changes from abnormal love to hate.

### 2.1.2 Metaphor

Metaphor is a rhetorical device, which compares one thing to another. In daily communication, the use of metaphor can make the conversation more interesting and create humor effect. Sometimes, the use of metaphor can avoid embarrassment.

Example 8

“An’ is it goin’ to be wasted?” said Morel. “I’m not such a extravagant mortal as you lot, with you waste. If I drop a bit of bread at pit, in all the dust an’ dirt, I pick it up an’ eat it.”

“The mice would eat it,” said Paul.” It wouldn’t be wasted.”

This dialogue is between Mr. Morel and Paul. Mr. Morel is eating dry and dirty bread- and- butter. He says that he does not waste food even if a bit of bread is full of dust and dirty. Paul talks back to his father and says mouse will eat it. Obviously, Paul compares his father to mouse. It is very impolite to make such comparison. The alienated relationship between Mr. Morel and Paul is showed clearly.

In example one, “Duckie” is also a metaphor which is used by Mr. Morel to call his son and it violates the maxim of quality. But it can reflect Mr. Morel’s love for his sick son. Unfortunately, his love is not valued by his son.

### 2.1.3 Hyperbole

According to Longman dictionary of English language & culture, hyperbole is defined as a way of describing something in order to make it sound bigger, smaller, better, etc than it really is. The use of hyperbole is to achieve special effect, such as strengthen emotion.

Example 9

“But she is nice, mother, she is! And not a bit common!”

“I never suggested she was”

“But you seem to think she’s –not as good as-she is Better, she is! She is fair, she is honest, she’s straight! There isn’t anything underhand or superior about her. Don’t be mean about her.

Mrs. Morel does not like Clare. In Mrs. Morel’s mind, Clare is older than Paul, and she is a married woman. Paul tries his best to establish a positive image for Clare and persuades his mother to like Clare. Paul employs hyperbole to show his mother that Clare is the best women who should be accepted.

## 2.2 Conversational Implicature Generated by Violating the Maxim of Quantity

### 2.2.1 Providing Less Information or Generalized Information

Mr. Morel, who is Paul’s father, is an illiterate person working in the mines. He marries a well-educated middle-

class woman. Happy marriage life does not last long due to different education level and financial pressure. Under the deep influence of their mother, children in the family do not get on well with their father, Mr. Morel. At the bottom of Paul's heart, he hates his father and looks down upon his father for the reason that his father has rude behavior and bad temper. All the members in the family seldom communicate with Mr. Morel. The conversation between Paul and his father can reflect their relationship. The conversation happens when Paul wins a prize in a child's paper competition. Paul's mother asks him to tell his father the good news. In reality, he is reluctant to do so.

Example 10

"I've won a prize in a competition, dad," he said. Morel turned round to him.

"Have you, my boy? What sort of a competition?"

"Oh, nothing-about famous women."

"And how much is the prize, then, as you've got?"

"It's a book."

"Oh, indeed!"

"About birds."

"Hm-hm!"

From the above conversation, we can see that both Paul and his father violate the quantity maxim by providing less information. In other words, they both use understatement. When Paul tells his father the good news, his father asks him two questions. His father is surprised to hear the news, so his father wants to make sure and asks for more information about the competition. However, Paul replies with only a few words. He answers his father very briefly for the second time when his father wants to know what prize he has got. His father expresses his attitude only by saying "Hm-hm". The conversational implicature is that Paul and his father seldom have emotional communication in daily life and they are unwilling to speak to each other. Most importantly, they do not know how to continue their conversation. It reflects the poor relationship between father and son.

Example 11

"What do you want to be?" his mother asked.

"Anything."

This conversation occurs between Mrs. Morel and Paul. When Paul is fourteen, he begins to look for work. He suffers from the shrinking self-consciousness for the reason that he is overly dependent on his mother. He pays little attention to what he can do to make a living. What he cares most is if he can always stay with his mother. So when his mother asks him what he wants to be, his answer is too general and unclear. For him, it is the only answer he can give. His ambition is to earn thirty or thirty-five shillings a week near home and lead a happy life with his mother after his father dies. In this conversation, Paul flouts the maxim of quantity by providing generalized information.

Example 12

"Why don't you like her, mother?" he cried in despair.

"I don't know, my boy," she replied piteously.

"I'm sure I've tried to like her. I've tried and tried, but I cannot-cannot!"

After walking with Miriam, Paul is in a state of hesitation. He loves Miriam, but his love for a girl makes his mother so painful. He has to ask his mother the reason why she does not like Miriam. In this conversation, his mother flouts the maxim of quantity by understatement. She cannot fully make an explanation to his son and she just repeats words "tried and cannot." In this situation, Paul is anxious to know the real reason, but his mother is hiding something and does not want him to know. In fact, his mother tries to prevent him from dating with Miriam for strong control desire. From this conversation, we can see that Paul gradually has self-consciousness and wants to be dependent.

Example 13

"When wor that?"

"About twelve this morning."

"H'm!"

This dialogue is between Mr. Morel and Paul. Paul tells Mr. Morel that Mrs. Morel is dead. Mr. Morel asks Paul when Mrs. Morel died and his reaction to Mrs. Morel's death is quite apathetic by saying H'm. Hearing the tragic news, Mr. Morel seems to be indifferent and does not show any grief. It is common for people to express sorrowful feelings after hearing the death of relatives. Here, Mr. Morel flouts the maxim of quantity. Mr. Morel's reaction shows that Mrs. Morel seems to be a stranger to him.

### 2.2.2 Providing More Information

Example 14

"And you think I ought to marry?"

"Sooner or later, everyman ought."

"But you'd rather it were later."

"It would be hard-and very hard." It's as they say: "A son's my son till he takes him a wife, but my daughter's my daughter the whole of her life."

Paul and Mrs. Morel have a conversation about marriage after Annie gets married. Paul asks Mrs. Morel if he ought to marry. Mrs. Morel's answer is quite long. She can just tell Paul that he had better get married later without mentioning the old saying. By borrowing the old saying, Mrs. Morel implicitly shows that if Paul gets married, she may be abandoned by her son. Mrs. Morel violates the maxim of quantity by providing more information. Between the lines of old saying, Mrs. Morel is afraid of losing her son. It is indicated that Mrs. Morel's love for her son is very abnormal and her control desire is very strong.

Example 15

In spite of his mother's veiled criticism, Paul still takes Clara home.



"Did you like her?" he asked grudgingly at last.

"Yes, I like her. But you'll tire of her, my son; you know you will."

This conversation occurs between Mrs. Morel and Paul. Mrs. Morel is flouting the maxim of quantity by providing more information. Paul just wants to know whether Mrs. Morel likes Clara or not. Mrs. Morel provides the extra information that Paul will tire of Clara. The conversational implicature is that Mrs. Morel wants Paul to give up Clara who is not the right person for him.

### 2.3 Conversational Implicature Generated by Violating the Maxim of Relation

#### Example 16

"Hello, son! Tha has landed, then?" said the father.

"Yes," replied the son. "But I'm going back to-night."

"Are ter, beguy!" exclaimed the collier. "An' has ter eaten owt?"

Mrs. Morel suffers from tumor now. Paul comes home to tell his father the bad news. Before he comes back, he has written a letter to his father. As a husband, Mr. Morel should have more concerned about his wife's health condition. It is a surprise that Mr. Morel just asks whether his son has eaten or not without mentioning his wife. It is a negative indication that he is afraid of mentioning his wife who has a bad term with him. At the same time, he does not want to accept the fact that his wife undergoes a painful illness. In this conversation, Mr. Morel violates the maxim of relation. It is an indication that he does not love his wife any more.

#### Example 17

"You'll have to go and see her next week, father," he said.

"I hope she'll be a whoam by that time," said Morel.

"If she is not," said Paul, "then you must come."

"I dummon where I s'll find th' money," said Morel.

After hearing the bad news, Mr. Morel should go to see and take care of his ailing wife. But he does not shoulder the responsibility as a husband. His son has to request him to see Mrs. Morel again and again. In this conversation, Mr. Morel violates the maxim of relation. He neither answers his son's question directly nor makes a promise to see his wife. He just talks about where he can find money. The poor marriage relationship between Mr. Morel and Mrs. Morel is showed.

#### Example 18

"Well," he said, "it's so pretty in the country. Mr. Sleath asked about you. He said he's miss you. Are you a bit better?"

"I ought to have been in bed a long time ago, she replied.

This conversation occurs between Paul and Mrs. Morel. Paul makes his mother angry because he dates with Miriam and returns home late. In order to comfort Mrs. Morel, Paul changes the subject by saying Mr. Sleath misses her. But her answer is not related to the subject

and she says that she should have been in bed long time ago. Usually, she does not go to bed until quarter past ten. By flouting the maxim of relation, Mrs. Morel shows her dissatisfaction with her son and she does not want to say a word with him.

#### Example 19

"You noticed the blinds were down?"

"No," he said. "Why-has she gone?"

"Yes!"

In this conversation, Paul has already known that Mrs. Morel is dead. So he just wants to draw his father's attention to Mrs. Morel's death. His father asks him why she has gone. Paul's answer is so simple that he can only tell his father the fact that Mrs. Morel is dead. Paul flouts the maxim of relation. He tries to hide the truth that he kills his mother with morphia. So he does not mention the reason of Mrs. Morel's death.

#### Example 20

"I thought tha wor niver comin', lad."

"I didn't think you'd sit up," said Paul.

In this conversation, Paul is not following the maxim of relation. Paul goes out and plays cards at a friend's after Mrs. Morel is dead. His father is alone in the house and cannot go to bed with fear. Paul is not back until midnight. Mr. Morel thinks that Paul will not come back. Paul's answer is not related to his father's question. But his answer discloses that if he knows his father is afraid to go to bed, he would come earlier. After Mrs. Morel's death, the relationship between Paul and his father seems to have a slim change. At least, Paul pays attention to his father's feelings.

### 2.4 Conversation Implicature Generated by Violating the Maxim of Manner

#### Example 21

"Edgar and Miriam are coming to tea tomorrow." She didn't answer.

"You don't mind?" Still she did not answer.

"Do you?" he asked.

"You know whether I mind or not."

Although Mrs. Morel hates Miriam, Paul still somewhat loves Miriam. He invites Miriam and Edgar to have tea. Paul asks his mother if she minds Miriam and Edgar coming to have tea. His mother does not give the answer directly. The vague answer makes Paul very angry. He cannot figure out his mother's intention. He only knows his mother opposes Miriam.

#### Example 22

"Waste your own staff!" he cried

"What -what!" suddenly shouted Morel, jumping up and clenching his fist.

"I'll show yer, young jockey!"

"All right!" said Paul viciously, putting his head on one side. "Show me!"

This is a dialogue between Mr. Morel and Paul. Mr. Morel and Paul both violate the maxim of manner by

saying vaguely. When the drunkard Mr. Morel comes home, he grabs a piece of pork-pie which is prepared for Paul by Mrs. Morel. Paul is unhappy to see his father eat his pork-pie. Mr. Morel thinks that he is working for the family and supports the family. Paul's words are so impolite and provoke his father to anger. On the one hand, Mr. Morel says "what" to indicate that he does not hear clearly. On the other hand, he was mad at his son who says such impolite words to him. Paul's reaction to his father also has double meaning. Paul wants to see how his father would do next. At the same time, he adds fuel to the flame on purpose. From the conversation, we can see that in the family Paul holds hostile attitude towards his father.

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## CONCLUSION

This paper attaches great importance to the conversation between Paul and his parents. In the novel *Sons and Lovers*, Mr. Morel, Mrs. Morel and Paul are deliberately violating the Cooperative Principle in conversation. From the perspective of the Cooperative Principle, the conversational implicature in *Sons and Lovers* is analyzed. From detailed analysis of conversation, the findings are summarized as follows.

Firstly, Paul is influenced by his mother, so he cannot get along well with his father. Mr. Morel shows much concern when Paul is ill, but their relationship is not improved. Paul and his father do not often communicate. So the number of dialogue between them is small. At the same time, the conversation between Paul and Mr.

Morel is very short. What's more, the atmosphere of their conversation is unhappy. After Mrs. Morel's death, Paul's attitude towards his father begins to change.

Secondly, Mrs. Morel has a close and intimate relationship with Paul. Therefore, Mrs. Morel has a lot of conversation with Paul. Mrs. Morel pins all her hopes on Paul. She gradually regards her son as her husband. Her love for Paul is very abnormal. She wants to control Paul and does not want him to date with other girls. Initially, Paul cannot get rid of the influence of his mother. He is accustomed to rely on his mother. But Paul gradually wants to satisfy his own desire. He does not want his mother to influence his choice. So he hates his mother and has to kill his mother with morphine.

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