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The Conversational Implicatures in Arvind Adiga's *The White Tiger*: A Study

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Abstract:

The present research paper aim is to study and analyze conversational implicatures in the novel *The White Tiger* by Aravind Adiga, a modern Indian writer in English. This research paper lies in discovering and analyzing the various layers of meanings in fictional discourse and studying the literary text from the pragmatic perspective. Communication is a social activity which conveys the different traits of human nature including anger, affection, emotion and intentions. Every utterance has a particular purpose behind it. If the purpose is fulfilled, then only the communication will be successful.

Keywords: Implicature, Pragmatics, anger, affection, emotion and intention.

Pragmatics is a branch of linguistics which focuses on the ways in which context contributes a lot to the meanings. It comprehends various theories such as cooperative and politeness principles, speech acts theory, deixis, and relevance theory etc. which approach language with different perspectives.

The conversational implicatures theory is one of the major theories in Pragmatics, which focuses on the semantic dimensions of the utterances. At present, pragmatic approach to literature is one of the essential phenomena in the field of research. It explores the hidden meanings and enhances the understanding of the literary texts.

Today, Indian literature in English has gained its own identity. Nowadays, it is not only an object of entertainment but a strong medium to talk about the social, political and cultural issues. The modern Indian authors have changed the traditional ways of writing, replacing it by

using new techniques of presenting the subject matter rather than painting an imaginary world. For example, Salman Rushdie mostly uses magical realism in his novels to present his characters and themes in the most specific way. The Indian writers in English believe in presenting the lives of people who are still at the bottom of the modern society and those who are trying to come out but are suppressed by the capitalist forces. While dealing with such subject, the authors use characters as their mouthpieces to satirize the ideologies that do not treat human as human but worse than animals. Sometimes, the conversations of characters become so complex or ambiguous, that the readers get confused.

Aravind Adiga, an Oxford scholar, is one of the successful Indian writers who believe in providing the platform to those who are still under the feet of capitalists and the victim of the upper-class society's brutal tendencies. His novels are about the common people of India struggling for their rights and freedom. His novels also present the Indian society at its political, cultural and social levels. His masterpieces *The White Tiger* and *Last Man in Tower* are based on the current issues of India such as poverty, crime, caste conflicts, and corruption.

Being a literary artist, Adiga is very conscious about the use of language. The fictional world he has created is somewhere motivated by the social reasons. He has used language as a weapon to uncover the truths of the modern Indian society. His characters are common people but speak in a very classic manner with thrust of strong emotions and with very rich thoughts. These strong expressions can be best understood in the light of the conversational implicatures which is an important phenomenon in pragmatics that contributes a lot to the process of encoding and decoding of messages in communication.

The conversational analysis is one of the vital, active and developing areas in the study of language, literature, and communicational varieties. As communication is an interpersonal phenomenon, it has two main functions- encoding and decoding of the messages, without which the process of communication is incomplete. If receivers' addressees fail to decode the message properly, communication can get crushed. Though, literature is a reflection of society and culture, but it is also a predominant source of language learning. Therefore, the study of both the novels in the light of conversational implicatures theory can give the reader a deep insight into it, consequently, resulting in overall understanding of the characters and events depicted in them.

The theory of implicature is one of the unique phenomena in the study of language. It is a core concept in pragmatics. It has two major implications. The first, it helps to articulate more

than what is said, and secondly, it is a paradigmatic phenomenon in pragmatics as it deals with the meanings of the utterances in the given context.

H. P. Grice first introduced the concept of implicatures. Like other phenomena, implicatures too does not have any historical preamble. It is just a key term that was proposed by Grice in Kulham James lectures, delivered at Harvard in 1967. Grice's early notion of conversational implicatures is similar to the concept of sign in structuralism; the structural linguistics where the meaning depends upon the sets of conversations. The structural scholars believe that the meaning of a sentence depends upon the appearance of a sign.

“A linguistic sign does not unite a thing and a noun, but a concept and an acoustic image” (Saussure 1968:98)

Example: 1. I like rose a lot!

In above example the word rose is a sign which signifies different images. First, it may be a flower, second it may be a girl or the speaker may be talking about any flavor or perfume. From the above example and the definition given by Saussure, it is clear that the relationship between a sign and a signifier depends on its appearance in the context. A sign which signifies something can be signifier of another thing.

The conversational implicatures are also known as non-conventional implicatures. They are purely based on the use of conversational maxims i.e. cooperative principles. According to Grice, the use of cooperative maxims gives proper direction to the understanding of an expression. Grice also governs these principles which prove to be universal in human life. The theory of conversational implicatures focuses on what the speaker says and what he implies and how the hearer understands the utterances.

Example: 1. A: Today she is looking *more* beautiful!

B: She just came from parlor.

In the above example, B's reply is quite unusual. The meaning of the given sentence falls on the word 'more' that indicates the person to whom A is referring in this example, may not be beautiful. This reply of B suggests that the person, who is referred in the above context, is as usual, but today she is looking more beautiful because she had gone to the parlor.

Grice distinguished the conversational implicatures into three broad areas of implied meanings.

U-6 Munna: He's a rickshaw-puller, sir. He's got no time to name me.

U-7 Schoolteacher: Don't you have a granny? Aunts? Uncles?

U-8 Munna: They've got no time either.

U-9 Schoolteacher: (a) 'Well, it's up to me, then, isn't it?'

(b) 'We'll call you...Ram.

(c) Wait—don't we have a Ram in this class?

(e) I don't want any confusion. It'll be Balram.

(f) You know who Balram was, don't you?'

U-10 Munna: No, sir.

U-11 Schoolteacher: He was the sidekick of the god Krishna. Know what my name is?

U-12 Munna: No, sir.

U-13 Schoolteacher: Krishna. (Laughs)

Speech Situation and Speech Event

The above conversation takes place at the beginning of the novel, where Balram narrates his nostalgic experiences to Mr. Jiabo. This is an early stage of protagonist's life where he is sent to school. This conversation is held between Munna and his school teacher. On the very first day of school, he is asked his name by the school teacher and the protagonist replies 'Munna'. In his childhood the protagonist was called 'Munna' which means just a boy. Getting a name is very important thing in everybody's life because throughout the life a person is socially known by his/her name given by his/her parents. But in darkness, people are too busy to earn their livelihood that they cannot name their children. This incident is very important in protagonist's life because he is named by his teacher. This incident is the first step in the protagonist's life toward gaining the social identity.

Implicature Analysis of the Passage

As mentioned above, this incident takes place when Munna is sent to the school for the first time. When his number comes, the school teacher asks his name and he replies 'Munna'. In this U-1 the schoolteacher's realization of the name Munna, is a glaring example of a particularized implicature. It implies that the teacher also belongs to the darkness. The U -1 has two implications, the first is that the teacher is very smart and strict and the second implication is that his utterance is an indirect speech act by which he asks Munna to tell his real name. Munna's reply in U-2 is a fine example of a scalar implicature. In this utterance, Munna stresses on the word 'All' which means apart from this, he does not have any other name. This utterance of Munna does not fulfill the requirement of the first utterance of the school teacher as it requires an answer in 'yes' or 'no'. But by U-2, Munna rejects the possibility of having any other name. In U-3 the teacher again questions Munna, and is given the same answer. From his indirect reply, the speaker wants to convey more to the school teacher. From his U-4 some implications can be drawn. The first, the literal meaning; his mother was ill and was on the deathbed. Therefore, in such a crucial time nobody named him. The second is - like the other people in darkness she also became a victim of illness. The expression '*spew blood*' indicates that his mother suffered from tuberculosis. The U-5 by the teacher is a good example of a particularized implicature. It is quite an ambiguous utterance. To understand the meaning of U-5, one should know the context of the conversation in which the utterance is produced. Here, by this utterance the speaker asks why the father of the addressee could not name him. In U-7 Munna justifies saying, his father is a rickshaw puller and hence, cannot name him. Here, the answer of Munna indicates that he got confused by the U-5 of the teacher. The U-7 by the teacher indicates his curiosity to know about Munna's family. In this utterance the teacher inquires about his family. But the reply by Munna in U-8 is a violation of the maxim of relevance. Instead of replying 'yes' or 'no' Munna repeats the same answer that gives no space to the teacher to ask any questions further.

In the U-9 (a) the teacher takes the responsibility of naming Munna. Throughout U-9 he suggests so many names for Munna. In U-9 (b), he suggests Ram but by the next moment in U-9(c), he remembers that he has already one Ram in the class and because of that in U-9(d) he clarifies that he does not want any confusion. The U-9(e) can be categorized as an example of a

commissive speech act. By this utterance of the teacher, Munna becomes Balram. In the U-9(f) he again questions Munna if he knows who Balram was. Munna in U-10 denies knowing. In U-11 the teacher replies calling Balram as a sidekick of Lord Krishna and asks for his own name. This expression can be categorized as an example of a particularized implicature. Here, why the teacher is asking his own name to Munna, is quite mysterious in the context. In U-12 Munna says that he does not know his name and in U-13 the teacher calls himself 'Krishna' which is a fine example of a generalized implicature. In the U-11 and U-13 the teacher implies that he is the god as he has named him. The second implication is, he wants Munna to be his '*sidekick*' that is the right hand for himself. In the context of the main story in the novel, the name Balram is quite significant, because Balram is the brother and right hand of Lord Krishna.

In the main story, Munna's brother's name is Kishan. Hence, Munna is also supposed to be the sidekick of his brother Kishan. But this is a paradox in the story. Instead of being his brother's sidekick, Balram in future, serves to the rich people.

Extract Selected for the Study

'Know what that was for?

'Yes, sir,' I said—with a big smile on my face.

'Good.'

A minute later he hit me on the head again.

'Tell him what it was for, Father. I don't think he knows. Fellow, you're pressing too hard. You're too excited. Father is getting annoyed. Slow down.'

'Yes, sir.'

'Do you have to hit the servants, Father?'

'This is not America, son. Don't ask questions like that.'

'Why can't I ask questions?'

'They expect it from us, Ashok. Remember that—they respect us for it.'

Conversational Passage (p. 71)

U-1 the Stork: Know what that was for?

U-2 Balram: Yes, sir' (*smiles*)

(After a minute he hits him again)

- U-3 Mukesh: Tell him what it was for, Father. I don't think he knows. Fellow, you're pressing too hard. You're too excited. Father is getting annoyed. Slow down.
- U-4 Balram: Yes, sir.
- U-5 Mr. Ashok: Do you have to hit the servants, Father?
- U-6: The Stork: This is not America, son. Don't ask questions like that.
- U-7 Mr. Ashok: Why can't I ask questions?
- U-8 The Stork: They expect it from us, Ashok. Remember that—they respect us for it.

Speech Situation and Speech Event

The present conversation reveals that the Stork has the special use of the driver number two; to massage his legs in warm water. All, the two sons and father sit in yard sipping whisky and discuss about the major issues such as politics, their coal business and China affairs etc. As their talk comes at an interesting point, Balram in excitement, rubs his legs hardly. By this act the Storks gets annoyed and blows on Balram's head twice. This causes arguments between Ashok and his father for hitting the servant. This conversational passage reveals the fact that how the rich people in India, treat their servants and how the servants bear the disgrace by their masters.

Implicature Analysis of the Passage

In the above conversation, the U-1 is an example of a particularized implicature. It is the Stork who hits Balram because he massaged him hardly and it causes pain to the Stork. The expressions U-2 and U-4 reveal, that Balram is a very quiet and polite person. After getting blows by the master, he still obeys him. The illocution-5 is spoken by Mr. Mukesh who is the same in nature as his father. The above conversation is very significant for two things. The first, it sheds light on the situation in the Stork's house where Balram is treated as an animal and the second important thing about this conversation is, Mr. Ashok's reaction on hitting Balram. This waters Balram's life to turn out to be a tiger in the texts. The dislike of Mr. Ashok for his father's action is quoted in the dialogue-5, where he questions his father. In U-6 while answering him, the Stork says '*this is not America*' this implies the basic difference between India and America. In India, the servants are treated worse than animals and in America the servants are treated nicely. Furthermore, he advises Mr. Ashok, not to compare India with America. In fact, this is an

indirect warning for Mr. Ashok, not to defend the servant as well as not to poke in the trivial family matters. Mr. Ashok again asks him the reason that why he cannot ask such questions, but in reply he says, ‘servants expect blows from the masters’ and further says this is a symbol of respect. This utterance is a violation of maxim of relevance by the Stork. It reveals the tragedy of servants in India, their silence is considered as a sign of respect. In general, the present conversation throws light on the kind of treatment Balram got at this house. This conversation indicates the dominating and adamant nature of the Stork.

Extract Selected for the Study

Two days later, Ram Persad and the slanty-eyed Nepali were gossiping. I took a broom, began sweeping the courtyard, and edged closer and closer to them.

‘She’s a Christian, did you know?’

‘No way’

‘Yes!’

‘And he married her?’

‘They married in America. When we Indians go there, we lose all respect for caste,’ the Nepali said.

‘The old man was dead set against the marriage. Her people were not happy either.’

‘So—how did it happen?’

The Nepali glared at me. ‘Hey, are you eavesdropping on us?’

‘No, sir.

Conversational Passages (p. 76)

U-1 Nepali guard: She’s a Christian, did you know?

U-2 Ram Persad: No way.

U-3 Nepali guard: Yes!

U-4 Ram Persad: And he married her?

U-5 Nepali guard: They married in America. When we Indians go there, we lose all respect for caste.

U-6 Nepali guard: The old man was dead set against the marriage. Her people were not happy either.

U-7 Ram Persad: So—how did it happen?

U-8 Nepali guard: Hey, are you eavesdropping on us?

U-9 Balram: No, sir.

Speech Situation and Speech Event

This conversation is held between Ram Persad and the Nepali watchman. This is a typical type of gossip of the servants about their masters. Ram Persad, the driver number one in the Stork's house and the Nepali guard are discussing about Mr. Ashok and his wife Pinky madam, who is not a Hindu. This is a very serious matter for them to have a wife from other religion as both of them belong to the 'darkness'. In between, they are disturbed by Balram who tries to listen what they are talking about the masters.

Implicature Analysis of the Passage

As the conversation begins, the Nepali watchman at the Stork's house is talking to Ram Persad. His U-1 is a dazzling example of a particularized implicature. Throughout the conversation, the names of the people about whom they talk, are not mentioned. But it can be easily understood that they are talking about Mr. Ashok and Pinky. In U-1 they talk about their mistress, Pinky madam. As Ram Persad is also an old servant of this family, he talks to the Nepali in order to have more information about Mrs. Pinky and Mr. Ashok. Being an old servant, Ram Persad knows everything, but still pretends to know nothing about his masters. In the U-4 his question represents a conventional implicature as it does not add anything to the truth condition of the utterance. He knows that she does not look like a Hindu lady. She is as modern as Mr. Ashok. Even he knows that he has married her but this curiosity or the implied meaning behind his U-4 is- after knowing the fact that she is a Christian lady why has Mr. Ashok married

her? The U-5 by the Nepali, is the denunciation and the center of their gossip that is ‘caste’. According to the Nepali, the Indian people forget their ethics when they go to the other countries. The prepositional value of this utterance is, Mr. Ashok has gone to America and he has lost respect for his caste. He furthermore, adds to his information that neither the Stork nor her family approved of their marriage. Thus, the Nepali wants to say both Mr. Ashok and Mrs. Pinky married even after the opposition of their families. This signifies that they are rebellious. Ram Persad is more curious to know about their marriage but the conversation remains incomplete as the Nepali finds Balram is overhearing their secret gossip and in fear he shouts at Balram, in order to make sure that he is not listening anything.

In the conversation held between Ram Persad and the Nepali, there are some implications; as they are gossiping about their master and mistress. It suggests that they are very close friends. As both of them are from the darkness, marrying someone out of religion is an immoral thing for them. As in the above sense, this watchman is real ‘watchman’ as he keeps watch on the family affairs of his masters’. In his every turns, he shares more information about Mr. Ashok to Ram Persad. By the end of this conversation the way in which he shouts at Balram, makes clear that Balram was too interested to know about Mr. Ashok’s marriage affair.

Extract Selected for the Study

‘All the books are in English.’

‘So?’

‘Do you read English?’ he barked.

Do you read English?’ I retorted.

There. That did it. Until then his tone of talking to me had been servant-to-servant; now it became man-to-man. He stopped and looked me over from top to bottom.

‘No,’ he said, breaking into a smile, as if he appreciated my balls.

‘So how do you sell the books without knowing English?’

‘I know which book is what from the cover,’ he said. ‘I know this one is Harry Potter.’ He showed it to me. ‘I know this one is James Hadley Chase.’ He picked it up. ‘This is Kahlil Gibran—this is Adolf Hitler—Desmond Bagley—The Joy of Sex. One time the publishers changed the Hitler cover so it looked like Harry Potter, and life was hell for a week after that.’

‘I just want to stand around the books. I had a book once. When I was a boy.’

'Suit yourself.'

Conversational Passage (p. 205)

- U-1 Bookseller: All the books are in English.
- U-2 Balram: So?
- U-3 Bookseller: Do you read English?
- U-4 Balram: Do *you* read English?
- U-5 Bookseller: No. (Smiles)
- U-6 Balram: So how do you sell the books without knowing English?
- U-7 Bookseller: I know which book is what from the cover, I know this one is Harry Potter. I know this one is James Hadley Chase. This is Kahlil Gibran—this is Adolf Hitler—Desmond Bagley—*The Joy of Sex*. One time the publishers changed the Hitler cover so it looked like Harry Potter, and life was hell for a week after that.
- U-8 Balram: I just want to stand around the books. I had a book once. When I was a boy.
- U-9 Bookseller: Suit yourself.

Speech Situation and Speech Event

The present conversation is held between Balram and a book seller. After driving Mr. Ashok and the ladies to the PVR Saket, the biggest theater in Delhi, Balram wanders in the second PVR market. He comes across many things, when this communication commences, he is in front of the heap of the old books. He looks at the books and gets the attention of the man of the stall and ergo, they exchange of the dialogue.

Implicature Analysis of the Passage

The conversation is opened by the book seller. In his U-1 he says '*all books are in English.*' This is a good example of a scalar implicature by which he insinuates, he does not have a single book in other languages and the second overtone of his insinuation is, by Balram's appearance itself, he presumes that he does not know English. In the U-2 position, by fortifying himself, Balram throws the question back to the bookseller. In U-3 the insinuation of the bookseller comes through the question he asked '*Do you read English.*' In the U-4 position

Balram reciprocates the same question to the person. In the text, when Balram reports to the bookseller, the stress is given on the word 'you.' In U-5 position the poor bookseller follows the cooperative maxims of quality and quantity saying no with a smile. Here his smile implies the approbation of the fact that he himself does not know English and should not ask others about it. In U-6 Balram poses a question, if he does not know English, then how does he sell? This question is not an elucidation but is asked out of curiosity. In U-7 position, the book seller vindicates himself saying, he knows the books from their cover. He further narrates an incident saying that once the publisher changed the Hitler cover which looks like Harry Potter and how his life becomes hell for a week. This is an outstanding example of a particularized implicature because what happened to him is not mentioned in the context but the particularized implication of his utterance can be- he might have become confused with the names of the books and has given the wrong books to the customers and after that either humiliated or cursed by the customers. The second implication of his utterance is that he might not have done well as he misunderstood the books. In U-8 Balram shifts to the nostalgic reference to justify the reason for standing around the book. It is a scalar implicature that only once in his life he had a book. The scalar meaning of his utterance that after this he could not have any book and an entailment of this utterance that now he a man now.

To conclude, it emerges from the whole discussion of the study; that the conversational implicatures play an important role in communication process. It provides various meanings to the utterances. The conversational implicatures are, however, used by the characters to assert and inform more rather than what is actually said. It represents the formula 'WHAT IS SAID' and W'HAT IS MEANT' proposed by H. P. Grice. The generalized implicatures are used by the interlocutors to give the general remarks that are present in the context of the utterances. Throughout the novels, the generalized implicatures are used by the character to convey more than the actual conversation. Particularized implicatures are used by the characters in order to focus on a proper context. But in both the novels, the particularized implicature is used to comment or to satire someone or something, using the double meaning utterance or to avoid the situations to answer. The scalar implicatures are used often by the characters in the novels. They are used generally by the characters to just give the basic quantity (scale value) of the referred words.

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