

Violation of Maxim of Quality in Jane Austen's *Sense And Sensibility*

Sunayana Chowdhury

M. A., M. Phil.

Assistant Professor,
Department of English,
Hojai Girls' College, Hojai
Nagaon, Assam-782435

Introduction

Language, at core, is an analytical study of linguistics. The study of language makes use of different branches of linguistics that deal with the use of language or meaning of a sentence or utterance. Pragmatics is one of the branches of language studies among the various branches of linguistics. According to pragmatics in particular and linguists in general, pragmatics is related to 'meaning.' David Crystal (1971:243) says "pragmatics studies the factors which govern someone's choice of language when they speak or write".

Studying the meaning of a sentence is to study semantics while studying the contextualised meaning is to study pragmatics. Pragmatics deals with the implied meaning of a sentence. Semantics deals with the dictionary or linguistic meaning of a sentence, whereas Pragmatics is concerned with the implied meaning of the sentence or utterance. The sentence meaning without a context is the literal or the denotative meaning which comes under the domain of semantics, while the consideration of the context to bring out the meaning of a sentence is the concern of pragmatics; it brings up the hidden meaning or the implied meaning of the sentence. According to George Yule (1985:127) "The study of 'intended speaker meaning' is called pragmatics."

The philosophers whose ideas lay much emphasis on the term 'pragmatics' are Austin, Searle, and Grice.

The Theory of Cooperative Principle

Grice's *Theory of Cooperative Principles* provides the maxims to be followed in conversation to be socially cooperative while people are engaged in an interaction with each other.

In his theory of cooperative principle, Grice formulated four maxims: *Maxim of Quality*, *Maxim of Quantity*, *Maxim of Relevance* and *Maxim of Manner*, which are known as the Maxims of Cooperative Principle.

The maxims of cooperative principle as formulated by Grice are:

Maxim of Quality:

Try to make your contribution one that is true.

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

By this maxim, Grice means that speakers should always provide true and valid information.

Maxim of Quantity:

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

In this maxim, Grice means to say that in conversation people should always check the quantity of information that is required at a particular stage and in a particular context of communication to be cooperative.

Maxim of Relation:

Be relevant.

According to this maxim, speakers should provide information that is relevant to the topic of conversation. The information must be related to the subject matter of their communication in some way.

Maxim of Manner:

Be perspicuous.

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

Jane Austen's Sense and Sensibility (1811)

Sense and Sensibility was her first novel to be published. It was first written under the title of *Elinor and Marianne*, but when she did not get a publisher, it was rewritten as *Sense and Sensibility* and published in the year 1811. *Sense and Sensibility* is the story of two sisters Elinor and Marianne, which resembles them with the representation of sense and sensibility respectively. It deals with the story of love and romance, of two sisters, which is guided by sense, in the case of Elinor; while sensibility supervises the romantic view of Marianne.

Characters in the Novel:

The chief characters in the novel are the two sisters from Dashwood family, namely, Elinor Dashwood and Marianne Dashwood. Among the other major characters are: Mrs. Dashwood (mother of Elinor and Marianne), Edward Ferrars (the young man whom Elinor marries finally), Colonel Brandon (the thirty-five year old man whom Marianne marries), and John Willoughby (whom Marianne loves). The minor characters are: Margaret Dashwood (youngest daughter of Mrs. Dashwood), John Dashwood (stepson of Mrs. Dashwood), Fanny (John Dashwood's wife, and sister of Edward Ferrars), Sir John Middleton (cousin of Mrs. Dashwood), Lady Mary Middleton (wife of Sir John Middleton), Mrs Jennings (mother of Lady Mary Middleton), Mrs. Ferrars (the mother of Edward Ferrars), Robert Ferrars (brother of Edward Ferrars), Lucy Steele (the girl with whom Edward has an engagement but who marries Robert Ferrars), and Anne Steele (sister of Lucy Steele).

Story of the Novel:

Mrs. Dashwood is the widow of Mr. Henry Dashwood who has three daughters Elinor, Marianne, and Margaret. They live at Norland Park in Sussex, which belonged to Mrs. Dashwood's step-son John Dashwood. John Dashwood has promised his dying father that he would take care of Mrs. Dashwood and her three daughters, but his wife Fanny

Ferrars dissuaded him from availing much help to his step-mother and step-sisters, which ultimately makes Mrs. Dashwood and her daughters to leave Norland Park in Sussex and move to Barton Cottage in Devonshire England. But, before they could move to their new small home in Devonshire, Elinor is attracted to Edward Ferrars who has come to visit his sister Fanny.

At Devonshire, Colonel Brandon, an ex-army man and friend of Sir John Middleton, falls in love with Marianne, but Marianne does not like him. On the other hand, John Willoughby helps Marianne to reach her home when she slips and falls while coming down a hill; and Marianne falls in love with Willoughby.

Elinor and Marianne get depressed regarding their lovers. Marianne feels depressed when Willoughby suddenly leaves for London for some work to be done, while Elinor is in a certain agony of not having the clear view of Edward's feelings towards her.

One day, Lucy Steele and her sister, relatives of Mrs. Jennings, arrive at Mrs. Dashwood's house and Lucy discloses Elinor that she and Edward have had a secret engagement. Whereas, on the other side, Marianne gets the news that Willoughby is going to marry Miss Grey, a very rich woman who would bring him a dowry of fifty thousand pounds.

Willoughby, in the progress of the story, actually marries Miss Grey, but visits Marianne to ask for forgiveness while she is ill. Colonel Brandon tells Elinor about the true nature of Willoughby who has seduced a girl and made her pregnant, and was taken care of by Colonel Brandon.

Elinor receives the news that Lucy Steele has got married to Mr. Ferrars, and she loses her hope of getting married to Edward because she thinks that he is already married to Lucy. Finally, the novel ends with happy marriages. Elinor discovers that Lucy was actually married to Robert Ferrars, and so she becomes happy and when Edward proposes her, she gets her love back tied in a marriage knot. Colonel Brandon provides Edward and Elinor, the newly married couple with an offer that Edward could be the clergyman of Delaford church of which he had the charge. On the other hand, Marianne too starts a liking for Colonel Brandon and finally, gets married to him. Mrs. Dashwood becomes very happy as two of her daughters are married to well suitors, and she begins to hope to see the bright future of her third daughter, Margaret, who has "reached an age highly suitable for dancing, and not very ineligible for being supposed to have a lover" (Austen, 1811: 334).

Analysis of violation of Quality Maxim in Jane Austen's Sense and Sensibility

Example: I

'That is to say,' cried Marianne contemptuously, 'he has told you that in the East Indies the climate is hot, and the mosquitoes are troublesome.' (Marianne)

Vol. I, Ch. X, Page 43

Here, Marianne is having a conversation with her sister Elinor and they have a talk about Colonel Brandon. In the given piece of dialogue Marianne violates the maxim of quality, as she does not have enough evidence to support the truth of her utterance. She ironically says to Elinor that Colonel Brandon appears to her as a good natured man with knowledge on various subjects because he told her something about the climate of the East

Indies, but she did not have enough evidence, which is very evident from the next dialogue in which Elinor clearly says her that Brandon has never said her anything as such.

Marianne violates the maxim because she does not like Brandon in particular and, moreover, Willoughby's presence makes Marianne think that by doing so she would be supporting Willoughby with whom she is in love, and who too does not like Brandon.

Example: II

'Your sister, I understand, does not approve of second attachments.' (Brandon)

'No,' replied Elinor, 'her opinions are all romantic.' (Elinor)

'Or rather, as I believe, she considers them impossible to exist.' (Brandon)

Vol. I, Ch. XI, Page 47

Colonel Brandon is in love with Marianne and hopes that she would love him in turn, but she loves Willoughby. Brandon feels that Marianne would not like to have second attachment, if she does not get married to Willoughby. His opinions violate the maxim of quality, as he does not know the truth of Marianne's heart and only tries to know it from Elinor and form his own guesses. The fact that he does not have the evidence of the truth of sentences and it is clear from the fact that Marianne indeed has a second attachment and the man is no one else but Brandon himself with whom she has a second attachment and whom she finally marries.

Brandon violates the maxim with an intention to give a little solace to his heart with the hope that he could find some clue from her sister to have any chance to get the love of Marianne.

Example: III

'Oh! Elinor,' she cried, 'I have such a secret to tell you about Marianne. I am sure she will be married to Mr. Willoughby very soon.' (Margaret)

'You have said so,' replied Elinor, 'almost every day since they first met on High-church Down; and they had not known each other a week, I believe, before you were certain that Marianne wore his picture round her neck; but it turned out to be only the miniature of our great uncle.' (Elinor)

Vol. I, Ch. XII, Page 51

This is a piece of conversation between Elinor and her youngest sister Margaret. Margaret relates to Elinor that Marianne would soon be married to Willoughby which Elinor does not believe as Margaret has previously told her something related to a picture of Willoughby which was in fact false.

Here, the utterance of Margaret violates the maxim of quality as though she says that Marianne would be married to Willoughby, but later on as the story of the novel progresses, it is Colonel Brandon to whom Marianne is actually married, and Willoughby had never had any intention to marry her. The evidence that Margaret provides to Elinor does not prove to be enough to maintain the truth of her utterance for long.

Example: IV

'Yes, yes, we can guess where he is; at his own house at Norland to be sure. He is the curate of the parish I dare say.' (Mrs. Jennings)

‘No, *that* he is not. He is of no profession at all.’ (Margaret)

Vol. I, Ch. XII, Page 52

This dialogue is a piece of conversation between Mrs. Jennings and Margaret, in which Elinor and Marianne are also engaged. Here, Mrs. Jennings wants to know something more from Margaret about a certain gentleman with relation to Elinor, who is Edward. Mrs. Jennings guesses that he is a curate of the parish at Norland. Here, she violates the maxim of quality as she says something about which she is not sure enough whether it is true or false, and she just makes a guess, but she is proved wrong by Margaret who confirms that the gentleman is ‘of no profession at all.’

The motive behind Mrs. Jennings’ violation of quality maxim is to get more information from Margaret about the certain gentleman whom Elinor likes, as she is always interested in collecting more information about the others’ affairs.

Example: V

‘There are some people who cannot bear a party of pleasure. Brandon is one of them. He was afraid of catching cold I dare say, and invented this trick for getting out of it. I would lay fifty guineas the letter was of his own writing.’ (Willoughby)

Vol. I, Ch. XIII, Page 55

When Colonel Brandon receives a letter from his ‘immediate attendance in town’ and it becomes very urgent for him to leave the place where there is supposed to be a party. Everybody wishes that Mr. Brandon could delay his journey to attend the party, to which he simply replies that it is not in his power and he must go. At this point the above piece of dialogue takes place in which Willoughby gives his reason to Marianne about Mr. Brandon’s leaving the place.

Willoughby violates the maxim of quality, as the truth is that whatever he whispers to Marianne all proves to be false. Colonel Brandon could easily bear the pleasure of a party and he did not write the letter in question and it was indeed from the town for a very serious matter, which we later come to know in the novel. Willoughby violates the maxim because he dislikes Colonel Brandon and wants to present a poor picture of him in the mind of Marianne.

Conclusion

The characters violate the maxim of quality with a certain specific aim in mind.

The maxim is violated if one does not have enough evidence about something he/she is talking about. It is also violated, if one does not like someone, with the view of providing hint to the listener that one has something else in mind (as in example I).

A guess leads to the violation of the maxim with the intention to get some clue, of the topic of conversation, from the listener (as in example II).

An utterance which cannot hold truth of the proposition for long leads the speaker to the violation of the maxim (as in example III).

The characters violate this maxim to get more information about their doubts and queries, such as Mrs. Jennings violation of the maxim to know more about a certain man (example IV).

This maxim has also been violated to have demoralizing effect on a particular character by some other characters; as Willoughby (in example V) violates the maxim in order to demoralize the character of Mr. Brandon.

Works Cited:

- Aronoff, M. and Rees-Miller, J. (ed.) (2001), *The Handbook Of Linguistics*, Blackwell: U. K.
- Austen, Jane. (1811), *Sense And Sensibility*, Oxford University Press (pub.1970): Oxford
- Brown, G. and Yule, G. (1983), *Discourse Analysis*, Cambridge University Press: New York
- Crystal, D. (1971), *Linguistics*, Penguin: U. S. A.
- Grundy, P. (1995), *Doing Pragmatics*, Edward Arnold, London.
- Leech, G. (1983), *Principles Of Pragmatics*, Longman: U. S. A.
- Levinson, S. (1983), *Pragmatics*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, U. K.
- Lyons, J. (1981), *Language And Linguistics: An Introduction*, Cambridge University Press: U. K.
- Mey, J. L. (2001, 2nd edn.), (First pub. 1993), *Pragmatics: An Introduction*, Blackwell: U. S. A.
- Yule, G. (1985), *The Study Of Language*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, U. K.