

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

This final chapter is a discussion of the findings in the preceding chapter. It will summarize all the key points in this study and attempt to draw a conclusion to this investigation. Included are brief recounts of research goals and questions and how they are connected to the findings as well as a section which will incorporate the perceptions of the participants of the study. In the concluding section of this chapter, the implications of this research towards the pragmatic field and suggestions for further research in this area are discussed.

5.2. Research Goals

This study probes into an area of research which is still finding its hold in the arena of pragmatics, discourse and conversation analysis. The goal of this research is to look into the phenomenon of fulfillment and non-fulfillment of Grice's maxims in the conversations of Malaysian women friends. It also seeks to determine patterns that may emerge across all the seven conversations. While theories (Tannen, 1989; Coates, 1996) may have revealed evidence that women's conversational styles are collaborative and cooperative, to a lesser degree, it is not known how and whether the fulfillment and non-fulfillment of the maxims in conversations contribute to the notion of cooperation. It is important to note that this is a case study of seven conversations and while analysis may reveal certain findings, the samples are too modest to be used to represent all conversations of Malaysian women friends.

5.3 The Summary of Findings

5.3.1 Fulfillment

In the conversations analyzed, evidence suggests that the interlocutors strive to cooperate with their counterparts to ensure that the conversations progress smoothly and without hitches. Maxim fulfillments are displayed in the manner of direct responses to queries, questions and statements. In these cases, as expected the participants have observed all of the maxims:

Quantity	:	Information is adequate.
Quality	:	Information is truthful.
Relevance	:	Information is relevant.
Manner	:	Information is clear and orderly.

In reviewing the first research question stated in the first chapter (How are the fulfillments of maxims manifested in the conversations?), it could be observed that the women in this study appear to fulfill the maxims when conversing with their friends. Maxim fulfillment and adherence to the CP is executed through an array of discourse features which is prominent in women talk.

Qualitative discussions supported by quantitative measurements have shown that the most typical and common of features used which contributed to the fulfillment of maxims are minimal responses. The frequency of minimal response usage in all conversations was relatively higher than that of hedging and repetition. This feature took up between 5% - 16.2% of the conversations and was used in response to questions, as an indication or support to remarks made as well as to signal their continued presence in the conversations. It appears that Reid's (1995: 508) observation that "women do increase their use of minimal responses when talking to other women" is legitimate. While these responses are brief, nevertheless they managed to fulfill the conversational maxims tidily and effectively.

Hedging is found to be another feature of discourse utilized by the women especially when signaling uncertainty of truth of the proposition made. It is found that approximately in 1.7%-3.8% (see table 4.1) of the conversations contained hedging/hedge words. The use of the words or phrases such as “I think”, “Maybe” and a surprise find of hedge in Malay “kut” helps the women to fulfill the quality maxim as when used the hedges operates as a forewarning and alerts the hearers that the speaker is not fully sure of the truthfulness of her statement. This is reflected in Brown and Levinson’s (1978:164) view that “quality hedges may suggest that the speaker is not taking full responsibility for the truth of his utterance”.

Repetitions occur but only in a limited number of times (0.2%-1.4%) in all of the conversations. While other features such as simultaneity and overlaps do appear in the conversations, they are difficult to factor in, in terms of percentages. Nevertheless, the examples given in Chapter 4, suggests that these factors in the talk of friends, are supportive features and promotes joint effort and in Coates’ words “the organization of friendly talk” (1996: 15).

5.3.2 Non-fulfillment

In the preceding chapter, maxims non-fulfillments have been examined at length. Examples that have been described and discussed contain cases of flouts and violations of either one or more maxim. It appears that indirectness plays a significant role where non-fulfillments are concerned. The evidence of indirectness and its connection to non-fulfillment is further proving that Rundquist (1992), Kulasingam (2004) and Brumark’s (2006) findings in their studies are legitimate.

While it cannot be said with certainty, however from the examples given evidence seem to indicate that the maxim of relevance is either flouted or violated more than the other maxims. Perhaps this observation could concur with Sperber and Wilson

(1995) cited in Locastro (2003: 180), who theorized that Grice's CP and maxims can be simply substituted by a single principle, that of relevance. Hence, this observation bears merit to Locastro's (2003: 182) observation that "every utterance produces an expectation that the information in it will be relevant to the addressee, and the addressee thereby seeks the interpretation of the utterance that will generate the most 'salient' effect of relevance."

Indirectness is a striking feature in conversations especially where non-fulfillment is concerned. The second research question, part a) 'How do the participants work out indirect utterances?' can be best answered in several points. Findings (see examples 25, 26 & 27, chapter 4) have revealed that the women managed to decode the implicatures generated by indirectness by 'reading between the lines'. In theory researchers are aware that indirectness usually causes non-adherence to at least one or more of the maxims. The women look for a meaningful interpretation to the indirectness by relating it to the preceding topic or subject. Grice's (1975: 45) claim that "Our talk exchanges do not normally consist of succession of disconnected remarks, and would not be rational if they did" seem consistent as the women do not dismiss their friend's utterances as unimportant as they strive to look for a rational explanation and thus keeping the conversation alive.

While Thomas' (1995: 143) reasons for indirectness may prove relevant in Brumark's (2006) research (i.e. increase of the force of the message conveyed), what is clear in this study (as revealed in Chapter 4) is that the strength of the close friendship – solidarity, intimacy, familiarity, comfortability, camaraderie, knowledge shared and history as friends far outweighs Thomas's reasons (competing goals, politeness etc) for indirectness. This is similarly noted in all the conversations – that is, in the comfort zone of friendship, there was no need for competition or wearing a 'front stage' (Goffman 1971) face.

It can be concluded from the findings that Finegan's (2004) condition for indirectness; shared knowledge (both past and present) as well as situational contexts are crucial factors in helping the women to comprehend and to figure out indirect utterances and implicatures generated from the non-fulfillments. This prerequisite collaborates with Grice's (1975: 50) theory that the working out of an implicature produced by indirectness is done through the "CP and its maxims, the context, linguistic or otherwise, of the utterance, other items of background knowledge". Evidence supports Heritage's (1988) take on conversations that utterances are "shaped by" what precedes it as well as what is succeeded by it and whatever detail however small is not "disorderly, accidental or irrelevant" [quoted in Markee (2000: 41)].

Pertaining to the second part of the second research question (In instances of non-fulfillments, what kinds of pragmatic effects emerge?), evidence suggests that the women do apply 'pragmatic effects' in their conversations. This complies with earlier findings by Rundquist (1992), Kulasingam (2004) as well as Brumark (2006) that effects such as humor, sarcasm and irony do occur.

One salient effect found to be present in the conversations is humor. Humor is often accompanied by laughter and is a result of friendly banter, joking, teasing etc. An interesting note is that while laughter is discussed as a feature of non-fulfillment, this study also revealed that laughter is the product of humor (see examples 28, 29; Chapter 4) and thus can prove the co-existing nature of fulfillments and non-fulfillments. The causes of humor in the conversations analyzed are similar to Coates' (2007: 31) observation that:

"It emerges as the result of humorous stories, or of bantering or teasing among participants, or when speakers pick up a point and play with it creatively. Everyday conversation exhibits spontaneous outbursts or verbal play."

While according to Kowalski (2000), there may be good teasing and bad teasing, evidence have proven that the teasing and joking in this study are used “to demonstrate camaraderie and to strengthen social bonds with the target of the tease” (Kowalski, 2000: 32).

Sarcasm and irony are two other pragmatic effects which were found present in the conversations. Humor (joking, teasing etc) are the results of familiarity with each other and while sarcasm and irony disguise itself as threatening (in the eyes of an outsider), with the women these effects were part and parcel of their talk and in the event of sarcasm or irony, the women took it in stride and there were little not face threatening. Analysis shows that sarcasm and irony are ways for the women to be “honest” and to “challenge” one another in a healthy manner. Being open and comfortable enough to be sarcastic are ways for the women to be honest. This is similarly noted by one of Coates’ (1996: 26) participants who commented that “Your real friends you can – you’re gonna be more honest with” [Miranda]. Hence, politeness or ‘face’ are not to be factored into the women’s talk and their bond of friendship surpasses any threats to the ‘face’.

Again, it has to be stressed that the pragmatic effects are very much dependent on situational, contextual and shared knowledge – “spontaneous conversational humor relies on shared knowledge and in-group norms, which can make it opaque to outsiders (Coates; 2007: 31). If one is not a part of that group of friends, then certainly, there would be instances of confusion or offence taken to a joke or a remark.

I differentiated the use of repetition and echoic use (see chapter 2; 2.10.3) in this study. Repetition is seen as a feature of fulfillment (showing support etc) whereas echoic use is seen as a pragmatic effect of non-fulfillment. Echoic use is minimal making up about 0.4% - 1.3% conversations. Findings reveal that this effect is used to show puzzlement or confusion over remarks uttered. However, this effect did not

disrupt the flow of the conversation; rather it increases the solidarity of the group as they collectively try to help each other understand (see example 38, chapter 4).

5.4 Malaysian Conversations

Although the Malaysian influence is discussed in a separate section in Chapter four, nevertheless it is an important component (albeit more studies need to be conducted to arrive at a more concrete finding). One cannot deny that each of the conversations recorded is in itself different from the rest but patterns of consistency can be observed. This is due to the influence of the Malaysian culture and languages which have incorporated its way into the conversations. The most pronounced is code-switching and the use of Malaysian English (Manglish) such as the famous 'lah' particle and question tags unique to Malaysians 'kan' and 'or not'. Pertaining to code-switching, Grice (1975) as cited in Li Wei (2005: 376) has argued that "that various kinds of language choices are driven by the Cooperative Principle". Findings (see examples 42, 43; chapter 4) reveal that the women resorted to code-switching to keep originality and directness. This could be seen as way for them to maintain the cooperative principle in conversations that is by being sufficient in giving information, truthful, relevant (albeit the code-switch) and direct. The other features of Malaysian English as discussed in Chapter 4 are blended into the conversations and are seen to play a role in contributing to the fulfillment and non-fulfillment of the maxims. In the examples given in Chapter four, the tag question 'or not' could be seen as a method of fulfillment as well as non-fulfillment as it offers hearers a choice in answer (e.g. 'yes or not?', 'want or not?') whereas the use of 'kan' advertises fulfillment as when use implies that the speaker is looking for affirmation and support. As for 'lah', its use occurs in casual conversations and depending on situation could promote either fulfillment or non-fulfillment as seen

in the example in Chapter 4. However, a more in depth study should be done in order to ascertain whether the observations in this study carries merit.

5.5 The perception of the participants

My association with the participants in the conversations allowed me to retrieve some of their opinions pertaining to their recorded discourse. This was done informally and most of their opinions were obtained during the ‘gap-fill’ sessions.

Although prior to the recordings the details of what was being studied was made clear to the participants, they were still oblivious to the CP and fulfillment and non-fulfillment – taking their words “What in the world are fulfillments or violation?” As far as they were concerned, they were just having a conversation which they allowed to be recorded and would then be analyzed for research purposes by someone else.

The participants were not conscious of the many features and pragmatic effects that they have employed throughout their conversations admitting that it normally how they talk. However, they did disclose that they are aware of teasing, laughing or being sarcastic in certain points of the conversations. This according to them is due to the fact that they are comfortable with each other and to quote one of them “We know how far to go in our remarks or teasing and how much the other can take it”. The main factor in their opinion is their friendship and history of being friends which allows them to be able to take any sarcasm or teasing and know that it was not an attempt to offend anyone. This they said would be different if they were talking to other acquaintances or people not in their friendship circle.

In the informal ‘gap-fill’ sessions, the women agreed that the use of Manglish came naturally to them and that there was no conscious or deliberate decision to switch language (English – Malay/ English – Chinese). However, the women in conversations

5HL and 7AL (example 42 and 43 in chapter 4) admitted to code-switching as they believe that certain words are best left in their language of their origin. By code-switching, the essence of the story is captured and the message is delivered directly rather than if it was translated. In cases of 'lah' and tag questions, its use is so normal in their everyday conversation that it had become a pattern that none of them were aware of using.

5.6 Conclusion

Over the years, pragmatic and gender studies have become more progressive and especially focused on the area of mixed-gender research. Unfortunately, the focus on mix-gender has led to a scarcity in studies pertaining to single-sex discourse and only recently has all-female discourse received attention.

This investigation is designed to further address and contribute to the theories pertaining to naturally occurring discourse of all female friends. Its main aim is to investigate Malaysian women friends' conversation from the perspective of Grice's maxim via fulfillment and non-fulfillment. The data gathered for this research is modest in its nature but nevertheless have provided significant insights into the world of women's discourse and friendship and also attempts to fill the gap in research pertaining to Malaysian conversations.

In this study, evidence suggests that maxim fulfillment and non-fulfillment co-exist side by side in the conversations thereby reinforcing Grice's theory that while ideally interlocutors are to abide by the CP and conversational maxims, in the real world, there is a tendency for non-fulfillment as well. It is obvious from the analysis of the women's conversations that fulfillment and non-fulfillment of maxims are co-constructed in a manner that it operates in unison and is coherent to the interlocutors. Patterns of similarity have been noted that in all of the conversations, the women made

use of the same discourse features which were characteristics of friendly talk among women friends. The discourse features played a role in fulfilling the maxims. Where non-fulfillments are evident, the implication is that the interlocutors still choose to first and foremost rely on the Cooperative Principle and look for a meaningful interpretation to the utterances instead of taking offence to what is said. Also, it is obvious that in the conversations, occurrences of non-fulfillment did not lead to a halt or breakdown in the conversations and this justifies Grice's (1975) theory that utterances however disconnected it may seem is related in a manner which may require more 'working out' on the side of the hearer.

The seven conversations captured provided a context for talk between equals, and "while we may have other relationships of equals (e.g. with colleagues, workmates), such relationships are not characterized by intimacy" and that the "primary goal of talk between the women friends is the construction and maintenance of close and equal social relationships" (Coates; 1996: 264). The observations from this study also reflects on Edelsky's (1981) take of a F2 where conversations taking place on such a floor are 'collaborative', 'simultaneous', jointly built and taking Hafizah Ahamad's (2004) opinion promotes cooperation. This collaboration and cooperation ties the women friends together creating a balance where their conversational contents such as 'gossip' (good and bad), self-disclosure, teasing, laughter and the overall aim to catch up with each other leads to a strengthening of their friendship.

Familiarity, shared knowledge (Finegan; 2004) and a strong bond through time between these women friends allow for easy interpretation of the implicatures generated and an acceptance of sorts when sarcasm and teasing come about. There is no evidence of competing for goals or dominance over the conversational floor in the conversations. Another assumption that can be drawn from this study is intimacy or closeness of the women friends. The intimacy between these women is important as it weighs heavily on

what is said and how it is said. The closer the gap, the easier it is for one to grasp and understand utterances or statements that seem vague or ambiguous. It also allows sarcasms and teasing to be taken not as an offence but as play. In other situations, if the interlocutors were work-place acquaintances, a parent and child (i.e. social gap wider) or even men friends conversing, suffice to say the language, manner of conversation and atmosphere would undoubtedly be different from that of women friends.

Because data is limited, the findings cannot be used to measure or represent the talk of Malaysian women friends or talk of women friends in general. However, one aspect of regularity that can be discerned is the use of Malaysian English in all conversations. One can also surmise that this investigation, to an extent at least revealed that some component of women talk is similar across cultures and country (from the comparison of past works by foreign and local authors), be it from topics to discourse features or pragmatic effects.

Grice's CP and maxims are basic rules in everyday conversations and although the women do comply (albeit subconsciously) with its prescription, the claim of the CP's universality still remains questionable for findings in this study revealed that although speakers may strive to cooperate "this does not mean, of course, that the listener always waits for the speaker to finish before taking over. Nor does it mean that speakers never disagree, object or contradict each other" (Stenström, 1994) as cited in Davies (2000: 4). The atmosphere that is captured here is that in casual conversations especially one with close friends; it is not expected of the participants to wholly cooperative all the time. Perhaps in conversations of other kinds (teacher-student, police-perpetrator etc) a higher degree of cooperativeness is expected and in these cases, the participants would properly observe the CP and its maxims.

Simple quantitative findings have been used to support the principle qualitative observations. From this viewpoint, similar trends have been noted throughout the seven

conversations and discussed in detail in Chapter 4. Another implication to note is that laughter is represented in fulfillment as support and understanding and in non-fulfillment as a result of humor (via teasing or joking).

The results of this study could perhaps contribute in various ways to the field of pragmatics and gender research. It supports findings from other studies done on friendly talk and friendships of women and at the same time provided further insights especially on the ground of talk between Malaysian women friends.

Overall, the findings in this study could provide a basic groundwork for further and much needed qualitative research into this area, one with a more comprehensive data. Other possible areas stemming from this research that could warrant further investigation could include talk of Malaysian men friends from the Gricean perspective and comparative studies could be done similarly on ethnicity – an aspect which has not been touched in this investigation.