

A Cross Cultural Pragmatic Analysis of He Ziran's and Grice's Principles in Mandarin Film *Hi, Mom*

Dian Sari Unga Waru¹

Sukma²

Sri Khaerani Rahman³

Liu Dan Dan⁴

^{1,2}Universitas Hasanuddin

³Universitas Bosowa

⁴Nanchang Normal University, China

¹diansariungawaru@unhas.ac.id

³srikhaerani.rahman@universitasbosowa.ac.id

Abstract

This study aims to compare the suitability of utterances based on He Ziran's politeness-oriented pragmatic framework with H. P. Grice's Cooperative Principle, using the contemporary Mandarin film *Hi, Mom* (2021) as the case study. The focus is on how the characters manage speech acts in everyday interactions, including both adherence to and deviations from pragmatic norms, and how such communication is interpreted by interlocutors. A qualitative pragmatic analysis was employed, examining selected dialogues that exemplify Grice's maxims of quantity, quality, relation, and manner, alongside He Ziran's principles of appropriateness and socio-cultural alignment. The findings reveal that while most dialogues conform to Grice's Cooperative Principle, deliberate violations are employed to create humor, irony, or emotional emphasis. Meanwhile, He Ziran's framework highlights the significance of cultural values in Chinese communication, particularly in familial hierarchy and intergenerational respect. The comparative analysis demonstrates that pragmatic principles are influenced not only by universal cooperative strategies but also by culturally embedded communicative norms. This study contributes to cross-cultural pragmatics and Mandarin as a foreign language pedagogy by deepening the understanding of effective communication strategies within contemporary Chinese cultural contexts.

Keywords: *Cross-Cultural Pragmatics; He Ziran's Pragmatic Framework; Grice's Maxims; Cooperative Principle*

Introduction

Language not only serves as a means of communication but also reflects the mindset and cultural values of a society. In cross-cultural interactions, differences in politeness norms, social values, and strategies for conveying meaning often give rise to pragmatic misunderstandings. Therefore, the study of cross-cultural pragmatics is necessary to understand how speakers from different cultural backgrounds adapt their speech acts to remain effective and appropriate to their social context.

In Western pragmatics, the Cooperative Principle proposed by Grice (1975) is the primary reference for understanding communication effectiveness. Grice emphasized four maxims quantity, quality, relevance, and manner that form the basis for cooperative communication. Violating a maxim does not necessarily hinder communication; instead, it can produce implicatures that help speakers convey implied meanings through contextual support.

Meanwhile, Chinese pragmatics focuses on the values of social harmony, respect for hierarchy, and the maintenance of interpersonal relationships. He Ziran developed a theory of pragmatic politeness that emphasizes the conformity of speech to Chinese cultural norms, including the protection of face and the balance of social relations. From this perspective, politeness is viewed as a cultural strategy that affirms relationship stability and communication harmony.

The film "Hi, Mom" (2021) provides a relevant empirical context for analyzing the application of these two theories. The interactions between the characters in the film demonstrate various forms of adherence to and violation of Grice's maxims, while also demonstrating the application of He Ziran's politeness strategies in maintaining close family relationships imbued with the value of filial piety. Thus, the film serves as an effective medium for examining the differences between Western and Chinese communication orientations.

With this context in mind, this study proposes three research questions: (1) how is Grice's Cooperative Principle applied in "Hi, Mom"; (2) how are He Ziran's politeness strategies manifested in the characters' interactions; and (3) how do the analytical results compare Grice's and He Ziran's theories in the context of the film. The aims of this study are to describe the application of Grice's maxims, identify He Ziran's politeness strategies, and compare the two theories to understand typical Chinese communication patterns. The research findings are expected to enrich cross-cultural pragmatics studies and provide practical benefits for learning Mandarin as a foreign language.

The Cooperative Principle proposed by H. P. Grice (1975) is a foundational concept in modern pragmatic studies. Grice argues that in conversation, speakers and hearers generally cooperate to ensure effective communication. This principle is realized through four maxims: (1) the maxim of quantity, providing information in an adequate and appropriate amount; (2) the maxim of quality, speaking truthfully based on sufficient evidence and avoiding false information; (3) the maxim of relevance, contributing information relevant to the context; and (4) the maxim of manner, delivering information clearly, orderly, and unambiguously.

Violations or floutings of these maxims do not necessarily disrupt communication. In many cases, such deviations produce implicatures that help speakers convey implied meanings, such as humor, irony, emotional emphasis, or indirect politeness. Pragmatic studies in Indonesia (e.g., Herawati, 2013) show that while speakers often adhere to Grice's maxims, non-fulfillment still occurs due to cultural values, high-context communication patterns, and interpersonal considerations.

Critics have noted that the concept of "cooperation" in Grice's theory is not entirely universal. Conversational contributions may vary according to social norms, power structures, politeness expectations, and interactional settings, including digital communication. Thus, although Grice's Cooperative Principle provides a strong theoretical foundation, its application requires attention to the sociocultural context shaping how utterances are produced and interpreted.

Contrasting with the Western pragmatic approach, He Ziran (1997) offers a politeness framework rooted in Chinese sociocultural values. He argues that politeness is not merely linguistic formality but a strategy for maintaining social harmony, hierarchical relations, and face protection. These politeness strategies are deeply influenced by Chinese cultural values such as *xiao* (filial piety), intergenerational respect, and relational balance.

He Ziran identifies four main types of politeness strategies: (1) affective politeness, showing empathy, concern, and emotional warmth; (2) informative politeness, providing information carefully and appropriately based on social distance and relationship; (3)

humorous politeness, using humor or irony to reduce tension or soften criticism; and (4) hierarchical politeness, honoring elders, superiors, or socially higher interlocutors through more cautious and respectful linguistic choices. These strategies are flexible and selected according to situational demands, interpersonal relations, and communicative goals.

In Chinese cultural contexts, such strategies help explain why certain utterances may appear to “violate” Grice’s maxims yet remain polite and effective. He Ziran’s framework therefore provides a more culturally grounded lens for analyzing communication in family settings, intergenerational conversations, and social interactions shaped by traditional values.

In analyzing the film *Hi, Mom* (2021), both theories offer complementary insights. Grice’s Cooperative Principle helps identify how characters adhere to or flout maxims to produce implicatures, humor, and layered meanings. Meanwhile, He Ziran’s politeness theory provides deeper understanding of the sociocultural motivations behind the characters’ utterances, particularly in mother–daughter interactions, peer relationships, and intergenerational communication.

Combining the two frameworks offers a comprehensive understanding of how communication in the film is shaped not only by linguistic effectiveness but also by Chinese cultural norms. Thus, applying both Grice and He Ziran allows researchers to see that communicative patterns in the film are influenced by universal cooperative principles as well as culturally embedded values that frame how speakers think and communicate.

Methods

This study adopts a qualitative pragmatic approach to investigate the meanings of utterances within the social and cultural contexts shaping communication among characters in the film *Hi, Mom* (2021). This approach is employed because the research emphasizes interpretive understanding of communicative functions and strategies rather than quantitative measurement. The primary data consist of transcribed dialogues selected for their relevance to Grice’s Cooperative Principle (maxims of quantity, quality, relevance, and manner) and He Ziran’s Politeness Principle (affective, informative, humorous, and hierarchical politeness). Each utterance is analyzed considering the situational context, social relationships, communicative intent, and culturally embedded norms that influence meaning construction in contemporary Chinese society.

The analytical procedure involves categorizing utterances according to Grice’s maxims and He Ziran’s politeness strategies, identifying adherence to or violation of pragmatic norms, and interpreting implicatures, humor, and politeness strategies within the dialogue. Data validity is ensured through iterative examination, contextual interpretation, and triangulation with relevant cross-cultural pragmatics literature. This methodological framework enables a nuanced understanding of how communication in the film reflects the dynamic interplay between universal cooperative principles and culturally specific strategies, providing insight into the influence of sociocultural values on pragmatic behavior in Chinese discourse.

Results

No	Dialogue	Grice's Principle	Type of Grice Violation/Strategy	He Ziran's Politeness	Type of Politeness Strategy	Pragmatic Notes
1	Mother: "Have you eaten yet?" Child: "Yes... I just had a plate of instant noodles."	Quantity: adequate Quality: true Relevance: relevant Manner: clear	No violation – cooperative response	Informative politeness – maintaining harmony	Positive politeness – honesty and respect	Mother's reaction adds humor and irony; maintains warm mother-child relationship Child expresses longing without offending; mother responds with attention, maintaining harmony
2	Mother: "Was school enjoyable today?" Child: "Very enjoyable... but I miss home." Mother: "You miss home? I'm right here."	Quantity: adequate Quality: true Relevance: relevant Manner: clear, polite	Slight violation in manner – emphasizes emotion	Affective politeness – emotional respect; maintaining family harmony	Positive politeness – empathy and emotional care	Violation of quantity and quality serves humorous, socially polite purpose
3	Friend: "Are you ready for tomorrow's exam?" Mother: "Ready? I've only studied one word today."	Quantity: insufficient Quality: hyperbolic, intentional Relevance: still relevant Manner: emphasizes humor	Deliberate violation – exaggeration for humorous effect	Humorous politeness – lowers ego, preserves social relation	Humor strategy – indirect expression	Subtle humor and face-saving; soft rejection while respecting mother
4	Mother: "Do you want to go to the market with me?" Child: "If I have to walk, I'd rather stay home."	Quantity: minimal Quality: true Relevance: relevant Manner: clear, natural	Slight violation – indirect refusal	Indirect politeness – soft refusal without offense	Negative politeness – minimizing imposition	Contains irony and respect; emphasizes social hierarchy and
5	Mother: "Why does your face look so worried?" Child: "Because I think you are"	Quantity: adequate Quality: true Relevance: relevant Manner: clear	Slight violation – ironic expression	Hierarchical politeness – respect to elder, maintaining intergenerational hierarchy	Positive politeness – indirect respect	

No	Dialogue	Grice's Principle	Type of Grice Violation/Strategy	He Ziran's Politeness	Type of Politeness Strategy	Pragmatic Notes
	always right, Mom."					cultural norms

Application of Grice's Cooperative Principle

The analysis shows that most conversations in *Hi, Mom* (2021) adhere to Grice's Cooperative Principle, particularly the maxims of relevance and manner. Characters generally strive for smooth, coherent, and understandable communication in everyday family interactions. For example:

Dialogue 1:

Mother: "Have you eaten yet?"

Child: "Yes... I just had a plate of instant noodles."

Here, the child provides adequate information (Quantity), truthful content (Quality), relevant response (Relevance), and clear delivery (Manner). The slight irony in the mother's reaction adds humor without disrupting communication. However, deliberate violations of Quantity and Quality occur to produce humor or emphasize emotional states. For instance:

Dialogue 2:

Friend: "Are you ready for tomorrow's exam?"

Mother: "Ready? I've only studied one word today."

The mother's hyperbolic statement intentionally violates Quantity and Quality to create a humorous effect, reflecting the indirect and emotionally expressive nature of communication in Chinese family culture. Such violations are pragmatic strategies rather than communicative failures.

Application of He Ziran's Politeness Principles

The film also illustrates He Ziran's pragmatic politeness strategies, emphasizing social and cultural norms such as family harmony (hé, 和) and hierarchical respect (xiào, 孝). Interpersonal relationships and hierarchy influence the selection of speech acts, showing that politeness in Chinese culture goes beyond literal wording.

Dialogue 3:

Mother: "Was school enjoyable today?"

Child: "Very enjoyable... but I miss home."

Mother: "You miss home? I'm right here."

In this interaction, affective politeness is applied: the child expresses longing without offending, and the mother responds attentively, maintaining emotional harmony. Indirectness, humor, and hierarchical respect frequently mediate family conversations, reflecting a culturally embedded approach to positive and negative politeness.

Dialogue 4:

Mother: "Do you want to go to the market with me?"

Child: "If I have to walk, I'd rather stay home."

This illustrates indirect politeness: the child refuses softly without confrontation, preserving the mother's "face" while expressing personal preference.

Comparative Analysis of Grice and He Ziran

Comparison of Gricean and He Ziran principles demonstrates that communication effectiveness is culturally contingent. While Grice emphasizes logical and cooperative information exchange, He Ziran prioritizes social balance and relational harmony.

Dialogue 5:

Mother: "Why does your face look so worried?"

Child: "Because I think you are always right, Mom."

A literal Gricean analysis identifies slight maxim violations (irony in Quantity and Manner). However, from He Ziran's perspective, the statement reflects hierarchical respect and subtle politeness, showing that perceived Gricean violations may serve as culturally appropriate polite strategies. This illustrates that effective communication in Chinese culture integrates both informational clarity and relational sensitivity.

Cross-Cultural Pragmatic Implications

The findings highlight the importance of cultural context in cross-cultural communication. For Mandarin language learners, understanding He Ziran's politeness strategies is essential to communicate appropriately in Chinese social settings. Grice's Cooperative Principle remains a useful framework for analyzing the logical structure of discourse, but it must be complemented by culturally informed politeness strategies.

Overall, *Hi, Mom* (2021) demonstrates that modern Chinese conversational practices, even in casual dialogues, continue to reflect traditional values of harmony and intergenerational respect. The integration of Gricean and He Ziran frameworks provides a comprehensive perspective on cross-cultural pragmatics, showing that effective communication relies not only on information clarity but also on adherence to cultural norms and relational awareness.

Conclusion

Based on the qualitative pragmatic analysis of the film *Hi, Mom* (2021), it can be concluded that the characters' communication is influenced by two main factors: universal communication principles and local cultural norms. From the perspective of Grice's Cooperative Principle, most conversations adhere to the maxims of relevance and manner, although there are deliberate violations of the quantity and quality maxims to create humor, irony, or emotional expression. These violations serve pragmatic functions rather than indicating miscommunication, reflecting the context-specific nature of interaction in Chinese culture.

From the perspective of He Ziran's politeness principles, the characters' utterances demonstrate a strong awareness of social relationships, family hierarchy, and interpersonal harmony. Interestingly, apparent violations of Gricean maxims often align with He Ziran's politeness strategies, highlighting the significant role of cultural context in shaping communication practices. Therefore, communication effectiveness in Chinese culture is not measured solely by informational accuracy, but also by the ability to

maintain harmony and positive interpersonal relationships. This study emphasizes the importance of integrating universal and culture-specific pragmatic frameworks to understand cross-cultural communication, providing valuable insights for both pragmatic theory and the teaching of Mandarin as a foreign language.

References

- Alfiansyah, M. A. (2023). Analisis kesopanan tindak tutur direktif dalam pembelajaran daring: Kajian pragmatik. *Literasi: Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan Bahasa, Sastra Indonesia dan Daerah*, 11(2). <https://doi.org/10.23969/literasi.v11i2.3412>
- Azzahra, F., & Delijar, R. M. (2024). Analisis prinsip kesopanan antar budaya penutur bahasa Mandarin pada TikTok: Kajian pragmatik. *Bambuti: Jurnal*, 6(2). <https://doi.org/10.53744/bambuti.v6i2.144>
- Chen, X. (2019). 'Family-culture' and Chinese politeness: An emancipatory pragmatic account. *Acta Linguistica Academica*, 66(2), 251-270. <https://doi.org/10.1556/2062.2019.66.2.6>
- Chu, Y. (2016). A contrastive pragmatic study of politeness strategies in disagreement between native speakers of English and Chinese EFL learners. *Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 39(2). <https://doi.org/10.1515/cjal-2016-0015>
- Fatmawati, & Ningsih, R. (2022). Alasan pelanggaran maksim cara/pelaksanaan dalam prinsip kerja sama Grice pada budaya masyarakat Riau. *Sintaks: Jurnal Bahasa & Sastra Indonesia*, 2(2), 130-136. <https://doi.org/10.57251/sin.v2i2.486>
- Herawati, A. (2013). *The cooperative principle: Is Grice's theory suitable to Indonesian language culture?* *Lingua Cultura*, 7(1), 43-48. <https://doi.org/10.21512/lc.v7i1.417>
- Istiqomah, S. N., Al Farisi, M. Z., & Supriadi, R. (2022). Pragmatic violations of the cooperative principle in the narrative of Prophet Ibrahim: Implications for Islamic da'wah. *Al-Irfan: Journal of Arabic Literature and Islamic Studies*, 8(1). <https://doi.org/10.58223/al-irfan.v8i1.419>
- Lee, H.-Y. (2020). Linguistic politeness in the Chinese language and culture. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 10(1), 1-9. <http://dx.doi.org/10.17507/tpls.1001.01>
- Li, M., Hickman, L., Tay, L., Ungar, L., & Guntuku, S. C. (2020). Studying politeness across cultures using English Twitter and Mandarin Weibo. [Preprint]. <https://arxiv.org/abs/2008.02449>
- Mubarok, D. F., Sudaryat, Y., & Sutisna, A. (2023). Prinsip kesopanan tindak tutur humoris dalam konten Reels akun Instagram @uc___i: Kajian pragmatik. *Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Bali*, 11(2). <https://doi.org/10.23887/jpbb.v11i2.93952>
- Revita, I., Kharismadewi, Y., & Lesmana, S. (2021). A sociopragmatic study of cooperative principles in a group of middle-aged women's conversation. *IJOLTL (Indonesian Journal of Language Teaching and Linguistics)*, 6(2), 140-154. <https://doi.org/10.30957/ijoltl.v6i2.669>
- Santoso, D., & Yulianti, D. W. (2021). Politeness strategies in the teaching-learning process in English as a foreign language (EFL). *Edukasi Islami: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 11(1). <https://doi.org/10.30868/ei.v11i01.3066>
- Zhang, H. (2024). Politeness in acculturation: How power dynamics shape intercommunication between Chinese and Western culture. *Journal of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences*, 42, 1017-1022. <https://doi.org/10.54097/22henx16>
- Zhou, L., & Zhang, S. (2018). Reconstructing the politeness principle in Chinese: A response to Gu's approach. *Intercultural Pragmatics*, 15(5), 671-693. <https://doi.org/10.1515/ip-2018-0024>