A Model for the Pragmatic Analysis of Gossip

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1. Introduction

Sometimes people are 'courageous' enough to tell frankly all they think and feel towards others even though, in some situations, this might lead to inconvenience of some sort. But, for the majority of cases, people all over the world whosoever tend to backbite others or, more adequately, tend to 'gossip' others.

Hence, gossip is not an all-new concept; per contra it is very common. By common is meant the obviousness of the notion of gossip: two (or more) persons are talking (positively or negatively) behind some third one's back in her\his absence concerning different topics (such as love, fame, money, etc.). In other words, no two persons would dispute the meaning of gossip when it comes to the scene. It is sometimes thought that gossip is a manifestation of any 'normal' everyday life – a very important part of our communicative and "social behaviour that nearly everyone experiences, contributes to, and presumably intuitively understands" (Foster, 2004: 78).

In spite of its commonness, gossip has not undergone a purely linguistic analysis. As Prodan (1998:1) points out, in the twentieth century gossip has attracted the attention of anthropologists, psychologists, sociologists, evolutionary biologists, philosophers and literary critics, but not linguists.

Nowadays, emphasis has been shifted to approach gossip more deeply at different levels. For example, there have been studies (such as Prodan's, just cited) that have tackled gossip in a hybrid method (that is, sociological and linguistic (at both the pragmatic and the sociolinguistic levels)). Other studies, such as Eggnis and Slade's (1997), have dealt with gossip linguistically but in a superficial way. That is, they have quickly referred to the politeness principle and the search for agreement in their approach of gossip without giving a full account of the employment of this principle in gossip. Besides they have only limited their study

to the negative side of gossip, whereas almost all the scholars, who deal with the topic, agree that gossip does have a positive facet.

Accordingly, the present paper attempts to establish a pure pragmatic perspective of gossip through developing a model intended to analyze gossip pragmatically away from any sociological, biological or any other non-linguistic perspectives. The workability of the model will be tested against data represented by different situations chosen randomly from Sheridan's **The School for Scandal**.

2. Definition

It is very common that when anybody embarks on explaining something, s/he begins by giving a definition in order to draw a clear picture of that very thing. But, paradoxically, there might be cases, of which gossip is one, where it is very difficult to put forward a clear-cut definition that fits all cases. That is, gossip is one of the terms that are defined differently on the basis of how one tries to approach or study it. For instance, if one tries to approach gossip sociologically, then gossip can be defined as [1]:

It can be *A way of talking between women in their roles as women, intimate in style, personal and domestic in topic and setting, a female cultural event which springs from and perpetuates the restrictions of the female role, but also gives the comfort of validation.* n be tailored according (Jones, 1980: 243) with Izuogu (2009: 10)

How *Gossip does not lend itself to simple definitions or uniform explanations. We all know what gossip is, but defining, identifying, and measuring it is a complex enterprise for practical investigations.* nition will be Foster's (2004: 83): " In a context of congeniality, gossip is the *exchange* of personal information (positive or negative) in an evaluative way (positive or negative) about absent third parties" (my italics).

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[1] For more definitions, see: Rosnow and Fine (1976:87), De Sousa (1994: 26), De Vos (1996: 20), Holland (1996: 198), Emler (2001: 318) and Iterson et al. (2002: 26).

In the following few lines, a short elucidation shows how this definition addresses the problem of this paper – the pragmatic tacklement of gossip.

The key word in Foster's definition is 'exchange'. Exchange is, actually, an umbrella term that embraces different pragmatic notions. Since any exchange requires at least two interlocutors to communicate, then such kind of communication means that the pragmatic concepts (such as the Cooperative Principle and Conversational Implicature, the Politeness Principle, and Presupposition) are (almost) all employed in order to open the channel of communication and keep it open as well, regardless of how this communication ends (i.e., whether or not it satisfies the convictions of both of the communicating parties). Put differently, any exchange almost means the non-literal use of language to mean (communicate) more than it seems to at face value. That very thing (i.e., the additional hidden meaning) is one of the main domains of pragmatics- the pillar of this work.

There remains one thing to close down the discussion on the definition of gossip: why should gossip be launched in *a context of congeniality*? Why not in an ordinary context of communication (two interlocutors (at least) with a specific topic)? Eggnis and Slade (1997: 282) give an illustrative account on this point. They argue that unless that sense of agreement is confirmed (to the speaker), then s/he will back away from the gossip. Besides, if the interlocutors (participants) do not agree with the gossip, then they will not enable the gossip (in particular) and communication (in general) to continue. By so claiming, Eggnis and Slade as well as this paper confirm the idea that the cooperative aspect of people's conversational activity is manifested in the preference for agreement in discourse.

2.1 Eggnis and Slade's (1997) Generic Structure of Gossip

Eggnis and Slade (1997: 284-98) present their view by positing a clear idea about what a generic structure is meant to be. They characterize such a structure as being 'ideal': it has no fixed or rigid schema; rather it is a description of the underlying structure which participants often orient (but not necessarily stick) to.

As such, one can conclude that the structure of gossip is as stipulative as its definition. Yet, as they assert, there are obligatory and optional elements or stages (as they, apparently, use the two terms interchangeably) for gossip, as discussed below:

These stages, as they (ibid.) point out, occur in a specified sequence, as follows:

1. **Third Person Focus (TPF) Stage**: Functions to introduce the gossipee and in most cases to beckon the deviant behavior.

2. **Substantiating Behavior (SB) Stage**: This stage functions to present two things: the event about which gossip launches (as this event highlights some departure from normality); and the solid support (enough convincing information) provided by the gossiper(s) to make the other participants pass a negative evaluation.

3. **Pejorative Evaluation (PE) Stage**: This is the final stage where the events outlined in the SB stage are evaluated and commented on. As a matter of fact, it is in the PE that a gossip exchange is motivated and driven forward.

Eggnis and Slade give an important clue on these stages: in spite of being obligatory (core), these stages do not occur alone. There might be other intervening elements that co-occur with them (and thus called optional).

To clarify more, they argue that in the process between signalizing a behavior as being inappropriate or unacceptable (hence providing evidence) and then pejoratively evaluating it, there is often a speaker who requests more details. In other words, the cycle of SB followed by PE is often prompted by another speaker asking for further information. This optional element in which such a request is made has been labelled **Probe**. Another optional element which might follow the probe is **Defense**: where a listener disagrees with the speaker (gossiper) by defending some aspect of the gossipee. And this is normally followed by a **Response to Defense** (by the gossiper). As a result of these two elements, there comes a compromise position where one of the parties concedes, and here we

have what is called **Concession**. The final optional element in this generic structure is labelled **Wrap-up**: a thematic summation of the event which pinpoints the aforementioned deviant behavior in the TPF stage.
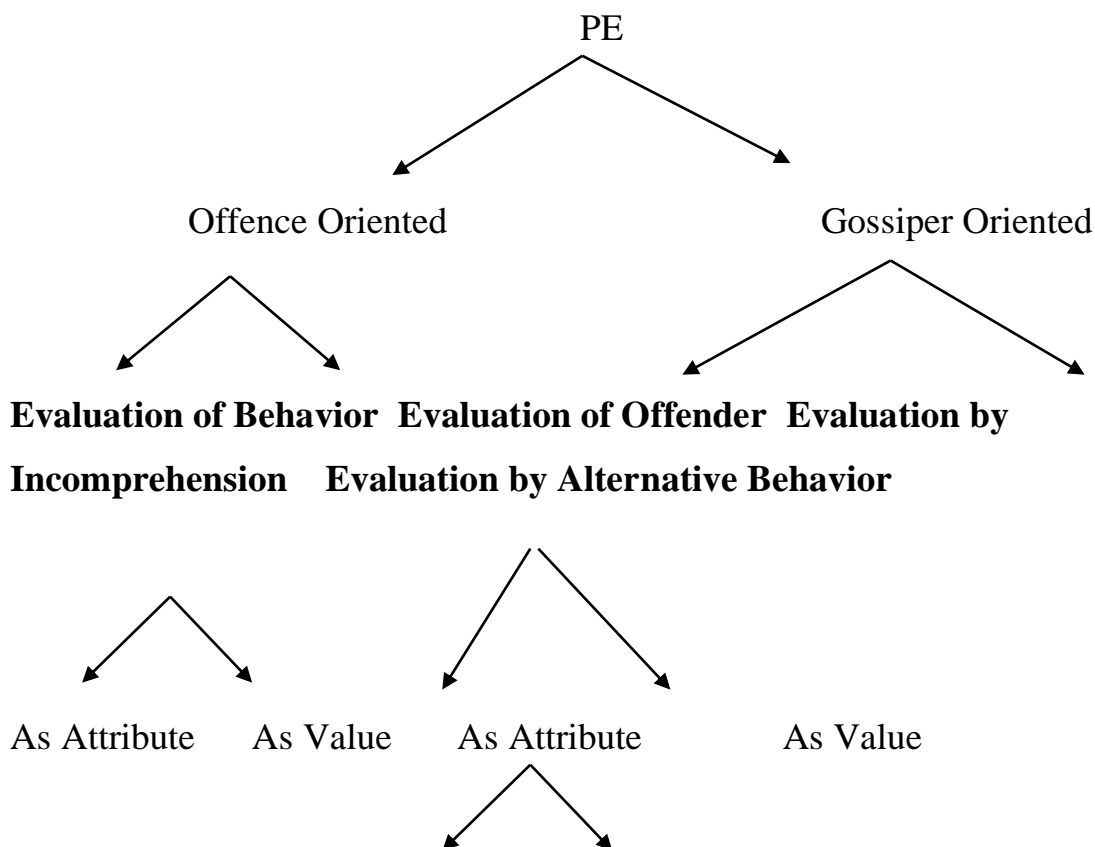
Eggnis and Slade sum up this generic structure in the following way: **TPF** stage paves the way for the negative (pejorative) evaluation which is reached by means of the **SB** stage whose function is to provide sufficient support that lays the ground for the **PE**, as just hinted at. Besides, they devise the structural formulae (that includes both the obligatory and optional elements) for gossip as follows:

Third Person Focus ^ [{Substantiating Behavior ● {(Probe)/ Pej. Evaluation} ^ (Defense) ^ (Response to Defense)] " ^ (Concession) ^ (Wrap-up)}"

Key:
[^ = is followed by, ●= occur in either sequence, () = optional, [] = domain of recursion or sequencing, {= either/ or, "=recursion].

Eggnis and Slade finish up explaining their generic structure by further detailing the PE stage (as it is the real stage in which gossip is motivated and driven forward, as mentioned before (See 1.3.1 above). They summarize what they have in mind in the following diagram:

PE

Offence Oriented   Gossiper Oriented

Evaluation of Behavior Evaluation of Offender Evaluation by Incomprehension   Evaluation by Alternative Behavior

As Attribute   As Value   As Attribute   As Value

General   Specific

They give the following examples to further clarify these divisions:

1. (It is really ridiculous), an example on evaluation of offence as an attribute.

2. (It was the laughing stock of the whole hospital), as a value.

3. (She's pretty insecure, that girl), an example on the general attribute of the offender evaluation.

4.   (She has made an absolute fool of herself), as a specific.

5. (She was the laughing stock of the whole hospital), as a value.

6. (I just do not understand), as an example on evaluation by incomprehension.

7. (I mean I would have asked), an example on evaluation by an alternative behavior.

2.2 The Generic Pragmatic Structure of Gossip as Developed by this Paper (The Eclectic Model)

On the basis of what has been just reviewed about the generic structure of gossip, it is time to achieve the second aim of this paper: developing the generic pragmatic structure of gossip.

Eggnis and Slade's (1997) structure will be partially adopted for one reason: theirs concentrates only on the negative facet of gossip, whereas gossip has two valences, positive and negative, as indicated before (See 1.1.2 above).

The developed pragmatic structure can be illustrated as follows:

Gossip consists of three stages: **Third Person Focus** stage (henceforth, **TPF**), **Substantiating Behavior** stage (henceforth, **SB**), and **Evaluation** stage (henceforth, **E**). Two important things must be indicated in advance. First, the third stage has been named as evaluation only in order not to specify it with only one facet of gossip (whether positive or negative); rather, it refers to the general concept of gossip. Second, only the obligatory (core) elements of the structure will be included, all other optional elements will be excluded to make the model (and consequently the analysis) simpler.

2.2.1 Third Person Focus Stage

This stage introduces the gossipee in addition to some information about her/him to be gossiped. It has been hinted at before that any piece of information cannot be considered as gossip unless the gossipees are known by the people involved in this exchange (See 1.2.1 above). Pragmatically speaking, "what a speaker (writer) assumes is true or known by a listener (reader) can be described as a presupposition" (Yule, 2006: 117). Hence, the TPF is pragmatically achieved by presupposition.

Presupposition is of six types: existential, factive, non-factive, lexical, structural and counterfactual (Yule, 1996:27-30) [For the definition and example on each of these types, see ibid].

2.2.2 Substantiating Behavior Stage

In this stage, the gossiper should posit some extra convincing support to get others involved in gossip. To pragmatically achieve this goal, the data reveal that conversational implicature is the pragmatic strategy that is employed to pass through this stage. But a point of caution must be raised here. By conversational implicature is not meant the ordinary violation of the Gricean maxims; rather, it is used as an umbrella term to embrace two types of pragmatic strategies:

1. Relevance.

2. Rhetorical devices.

As for relevance, Wilson and Sperber (2004:607) argue that "the expectations of relevance raised by an utterance are precise enough and predictable enough to guide the hearer towards the speaker's meaning".

Rhetorical devices, on the other hand, include: metaphor, irony, simile, rhetorical questions, and over(under)statement. One might wonder: what rhetorical devices have to do with conversational implicature? As a matter of fact, those devices have much to do with conversational implicature as they violate one or more of the Gricean maxims. Metaphor, for instance, which is "a figure of speech in which a word or phrase is used to describe something it does not

literally denote, e.g. this journal is a gem" (McGlone, 2007:2), violates the quality maxim as stated by Rozina and Karapetjana (2009:598)[1].

There remains one very important thing that the data of the work have revealed about the employment of these rhetorical devices: being optional. That is, it is not necessary to find one or more of these devices in the SB stage, as is the case with relevance. Rather, they are either employed as a convincing support or not, but all in all the relevance maxim still takes the lead in this stage. Consequently, in the model diagram those devices will be parenthesized to indicate optionality.

2.2.3 Evaluation Stage

This is the final stage where the events outlined in the first two stages are evaluated and commented on either positively or pejoratively. Whether this or that, this stage is pragmatically divided into two sub-stages:

1. Communicative-intent oriented[2]; and

2. Gossiper oriented.

2.2.3.1 Communicative-intent Oriented Evaluation

This first sub-stage of evaluation is further sub-divided into two branches:

1. Communicative-intent per se: which, as the data show, is expressed by different speech acts such as: (dis)praise, criticism, blame, etc.

2. Communicative-intent Issuer: which, as in the just outlined sub-stage, is expressed by means of different speech acts (the same just indicated ones)

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[1] **Irony**, as defined by Xiang Li (2008:5), is a discordance between what is said and what is really believed to be true, as in "What a sunny day" during a storm.
Simile: the direct comparison between two things or action via the use of 'like' or 'as', such as: Their house is like a Renaissance palace, (Cruse: 2006: 165).
Rhetorical Questions: those questions which do not except an answer, as in: Is that a reason for despair? (Quirk et al.,1985: 825-6).
Overstatement: the deliberate positive or negative exaggeration to increase impact or to attract attention, as in The traffic was moving at a snail's pace (Cruse, 2006:80).
Understatement: an expression of less strength than what would be expected. For example, an army officer lost his leg, but when asked how he feels, he looks down at his bloody stump and responds "Strings a bit" (Web source 1).
[3] **Communicative Intent**: one of two types of intent, as argued by Leech 1983 and Sperber and Wilson 1986, that refers to speaker meaning. The other is the informative intent which refers to sentence meaning (Web source 2).

with the difference that they are, here, oriented to the gossipee and not to her/his intent?

It must be noted that Eggnis and Slade's further divisions of each of these two sub-divisions (i.e. as attribute, as value, general and specific) will not be taken into consideration in this developed pragmatic model, as they have much to do with psychology which is far beyond the scope of this paper. This very reason, i.e. the psychological dress of Eggnis and Slade's structure, has led this work to replace their terminology with a more accurate pragmatic one, hence there becomes (Communicative-intent Oriented) instead of (Behavior Oriented).

2.2.3.2 Gossiper Oriented Evaluation

In this sub stage of evaluation, it is the gossiper that is addressed and not the gossipee. Hence, this addressing is tackled from two various aspects:

1. Evaluation by incomprehension: This is arrived at by different speech acts as in: request, criticism, blame, thank, etc., because it manifests the addressees' (un)acceptability on what is said. As such, they will either request more information from the gossiper about some certain topic, or they will criticize, blame, thank, praise or whatsoever act that expresses their (dis)approval on what is gossiped.

2. Evaluation by alternative behavior: Which is achieved by different speech acts as well, like: suggestion and advice. This sub-stage is represented by these two speech acts only because they share in common the feature of giving some other alternatives that imply benefit for the addressee (alone in case of advice) and the addressor (in case of suggestion) concerning some certain issue

Whether the gossiper oriented evaluation is arrived at by incomprehension or an alternative behavior, the Politeness Principle (henceforth, PP) must be activated at this very stage. This is mainly because "the potential for conflict and confrontation inherent in all human interchange", as remarked by Lakoff (1977:88), becomes really at stake when the interchange shifts from talking about some third 'absent' party to another some 'present' one.The model of Politeness

that will be chosen is Lakoff's (1975)[1] as it applies very much to the data of this work, which are represented by various situations selected from a comedy entitled <u>The School for Scandal</u> by Richard Brinsley Sheridan. This drama has been found representative to what is required by the data needed for analysis.

The following diagram shows clearly how these various pragmatic strategies are distributed over the different stages of gossip, in order to form the eclectic model that will be utilized to analyze gossip pragmatically.

3. Testing the Validity of the Model

In order to test the workability of the aforementioned developed model, different situations taken from Sheridan's comedy <u>The School for Scandal</u> will be analyzed. A brief description of the context of situation within which gossip occurs is given and then the pragmatic analysis is presented on the basis of the eclectic model.

Situation (1): **LADY SNEERWELL**. Why truly Mrs. Clackit has a very pretty Talent--a great deal of industry--yet--yes--been tolerably successful in her way--To my knowledge she has been the cause of breaking off six matches[,] of three sons being disinherited and four Daughters being turned out of Doors. Of three several Elopements, as many close confinements--nine separate maintenances and two Divorces.-- nay I have more than once traced her causing a Tete-a-Tete in the Town and Country Magazine--when the Parties perhaps had never seen each other's Faces before in the course of their Lives.
VERJUICE. She certainly has Talents.
LADY SNEERWELL. But her manner is gross.
VERJUICE. 'Tis very true. She generally designs well[,] has a free tongue and a bold invention--but her colouring is too dark and her outline often extravagant--She wants that delicacy of Tint--and mellowness of sneer--which distinguish your Ladyship's Scandal.

Lady Sneerwell, a wealthy young widow, sits in her house with her friend, Verjuice, and talks about others, one of whom is Mrs. Clackit, a woman known to both.

The TPF in this example is initiated by the employment of the existential presupposition represented by the proper name 'Mrs. Clackit', in addition to the discussion of her talent.

In the immediate SB, Lady Sneerwell, the gossiper, employs both of the pragmatic strategies: the relevance principle and a rhetorical device, viz.

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[1] For the detailed discussion of this model, see Al-Hindawi (1999:97-104).

metaphor. As for relevance, the gossiper tells things which breathe relevance to the main topic of gossip (See the example itself).That is, the cognitive level is easily reached. At the communicative level, on the other hand, what is intended to be really communicated is that Mrs. Clackit has a good ability in screwing things up (for instance, breaking off marriages, causing three sons being disinherited, etc.). A metaphor, that is industry, has been used to describe that very ability in order to show how skilful she is in doing that, due to the fact that any industry needs a certain skill to perform.

The E, which is communicative-intent oriented, is positive (though in some abnormal way). The evaluation is expressed by praising both the communicative- intent per se, and the communicative-intent issuer herself at the same time. As for the first, it is expressed by praising Mrs. Clackit's ability to screw things up by calling it a talent, as talent is an individual-specific feature (regardless of whether it is good or bad). The second, in its turn, is expressed, also, by implicitly praising her of being so skilful in that ability because assuring (via the use of the qualifier certainly) that a person has talents means that s/he is good at doing certain things while others are not.

After that (first E), another aspect of the same gossipee is tackled: her manner, which is described as being terrible (gross). Hence, there is another TPF with the same person (consequently, with the same existential presupposition) but different information to be gossiped (thus different SB and E).

In the (second) SB, only the relevance principle with its two levels is employed. The cognitive level is easily reached as Verjuice mentions only the things which make reference to what she intends to communicate at the other level (See the situation itself for examples). At the communicative level, Verjuice intends to criticize Mrs. Clackit's coloring and outline by describing them as being too dark and extravagant successively, things which are dispreferred in general.

The (second) E is a pejorative evaluation of the communicative-intent issuer (Mrs. Clackit) herself. It is expressed by implicitly criticizing her for

not being delicate and mellow via the use of the verb 'want', which means that she has neither delicacy nor mellowness. This can be more emphasized by the fact that if someone has something already, then why s/he wants it again? Humans want only the things which they do not have.

Situation (2): LADY SNEERWELL. For our mutual interest--but I have
found out him a long time since[,] altho' He has contrived to deceive
everybody beside--I know him to be artful selfish and malicious--
while with Sir Peter, and indeed with all his acquaintance,
He passes for a youthful Miracle of Prudence--good sense
and Benevolence.
VERJUICE. Yes yes--I know Sir Peter vows He has not his equal
in England; and, above all, He praises him as a MAN OF SENTIMENT.

Lady Sneerwell and Verjuice are talking about Surface, a young man under the guardianship of Mr. Peter, a very respectable man.

In this example, TPF is triggered by the existential presupposition represented by the personal pronoun 'him' (referring to Surface), in addition to introducing some of his features.

Only the relevance principle is employed in the SB. The cognitive level is achieved so easily, as Lady Sneerwell mentions the relevant things only (See the example itself). At the communicative level, she intends to communicate the idea that in spite of his bad features (selfishness and malice); Surface still has some good ones like prudence and benevolence, consequently he is not that bad person as one might be deceived at first.

The E is engendered by positively evaluating the communicative-intent issuer himself. This is expressed by praising him to be a man of sentiment, which is a basic motivation to treat others with such good features as prudence and benevolence that Surface already has, and hence meaning that he is a wise and tolerant man.

Situation (3): SURFACE. But--Madam--let me caution you to place no more
confidence in our Friend Snake the Libeller--I have lately detected him in
frequent conference with old Rowland [Rowley] who was formerly
my Father's Steward and has never been a friend of mine.
LADY SNEERWELL. I'm not disappointed in Snake, I never suspected
the fellow to have virtue enough to be faithful even to his own
Villany.

Lady Sneerwell and Surface are questioning Snake's, the former's hireling, loyalty to them.

The TPF, in this example, is engendered by the existential presupposition represented by the proper name 'Snake', who is introduced by the gossiper (Surface) as someone that must be warned of.

The SB embraces both relevance and one of the rhetorical devices: irony. As regards relevance, it works effectively, yet not easily as the preceding examples, at the cognitive level. That is, what is mentioned about Snake (i.e. being detected in frequent conference with Rowland, the steward, who is not a friend of Surface) makes no direct relevance to why should Snake be warned of. But with a little cognitive processing, it will soon become clear that since someone (who is supposed to be at your side) is detected (and not just normally found) with some other one who is not a friend, then it means that such a person must be put under the consideration of caution. Consequently, what is intended at the communicative level is that Snake's loyalty is not purely oriented to the gossipers (Surface and Lady Sneerwell), thus they must be cautious about that.

The E is pejoratively oriented to the communicative-intent issuer himself (Snake). This is expressed by criticizing him for being not virtuous and unfaithful.

Situation (4): **LADY SNEERWELL**. Nay but we should make allowance[--]Sir Benjamin
is a wit and a poet.
MARIA. For my Part--I own madam--wit loses its respect with me,
when I see it in company with malice.--What do you think,
Mr. Surface?
SURFACE. Certainly, Madam, to smile at the jest which plants
a Thorn on another's Breast is to become a principal in the mischief.
LADY SNEERWELL. Pshaw--there's no possibility of being witty
without a little [ill] nature--the malice of a good thing
is the Barb that makes it stick.--What's your opinion, Mr. Surface?
SURFACE. Certainly madam--that conversation where the Spirit of
Raillery is suppressed will ever appear tedious and insipid--
MARIA. Well I'll not debate how far Scandal may be allowable--
but in a man I am sure it is always contemtable.--We have Pride,
envy, Rivalship, and a Thousand motives to depreciate each other--
but the male-slanderer must have the cowardice of a woman before
He can traduce one.

Lady Sneerwell, Surface, and Maria, Sir Peter's ward, are discussing Sir Benjamin's, Sneerwell's friend, features as to whether they should be considered as vices or virtues.

The TPF is motivated by the existential presupposition represented by the proper name 'Benjamin', with some features about him (especially his wit).

The SB employs both relevance and metaphor. Just like the preceding example, relevance at the cognitive level does not work easily; rather, it needs further processing. This is so due to the employment of the metaphor (thorn on another's breast) to indicate clearly Benjamin's malice. So, what is intended at the communicative level is that Benjamin's wit is not to be viewed positively as the general attribute suggests: he, actually, maliciously employs it with others.

The E is, also, pejoratively oriented to the communicative-intent issuer himself (Benjamin). This is expressed by explicitly criticizing him for traducing others via attributing 'woman cowardice' to a 'man'.

 Situation (5):LADY SNEERWELL. Beg her to walk in. Now, Maria[,] however here is a Character to your Taste, for tho' Mrs. Candour is a little talkative everybody allows her to be the best-natured and best sort of woman.

MARIA. Yes with a very gross affectation of good Nature and Benevolence--she does more mischief than the Direct malice of old Crabtree.

SURFACE. Efaith 'tis very true Lady Sneerwell--Whenever I hear the current running again the characters of my Friends, I never think them in such Danger as when Candour undertakes their Defence.

The same gossipers in the preceding example turn their exchange to gossip about another friend of Sneerwell's, Candour, who is well known for her interest in gossiping about others.

The TPF, here, is started by the existential presupposition 'Candour', with some of her bad features such affectation of good nature and benevolence.

The SB employs the relevance principle only, where the cognitive level is easily processed as Maria (the gossiper) mentions only relevant things directly (See the example itself). At the communicative level, on the other hand, she intends to communicate that Candour not only has 'gross affectation…benevolence', she is in fact worse than that, for she does more mischief than malice alone.

The E is pejoratively oriented to the communicative-intent issuer herself (Candour). It is expressed by implicitly dispraising her for being the worst person to defend others. That is to say, Candour is too bad a person whose defense cannot be trustworthy at all; on the contrary, if she defends someone, then s/he is to be considered at real danger from such a 'talkative' woman.

> **Situation (6)**: **MRS. CANDOUR**. So they are Child--shameful! shameful! but the world is so censorious no character escapes. Lord, now! who would have suspected your friend, Miss Prim, of an indiscretion Yet such is the ill-nature of people, that they say her unkle stopped her last week just as she was stepping into a Postchaise with her Dancing-master.
> **MARIA**. I'll answer for't there are no grounds for the Report.
> **MRS. CANDOUR**. Oh, no foundation in the world I dare swear[;] no more probably than for the story circulated last month, of Mrs. Festino's affair with Colonel Cassino--tho' to be sure that matter was never rightly clear'd up.
> **SURFACE**. The license of invention some people take is monstrous indeed.
> **MARIA**. 'Tis so but in my opinion, those who report such things are equally culpable.

Candour, Maria and Surface, in the presence of Sneerwell, are tackling different issues about different people, and conclude with the idea that gossip bearers are to be blamed as gossip makers themselves.

The TFP, in this situation, is, also, triggered by the existential presupposition 'Prim', tackling her behavior which is described by indiscretion.

In the SB, Candour (the gossiper) employs only the relevance principle. At the cognitive level, she makes things easily processed by mentioning directly relevant things to indiscretion (i.e., Prim's going with her dancing-master). Consequently, at the communicative level, Mrs. Candour intends to communicate that Prim is not a very well-behaved girl and that her manner is to be suspected.

The E is pejoratively, yet politely, oriented to the gossiper herself (Mrs. Candour). This is expressed by implicitly blaming her for reporting other people's private things, which is addressed via the use of the utterance 'culpable'. The PP, in its turn, is activated by the very indirect blame oriented to the gossiper.

Conclusions

On the basis of what has been investigated, this study has come up with the following conclusions:

1. The developed model has proved its validity in pragmatically analyzing gossip.

2. In the SB, relevance has been shown to be more significant than the rhetorical devices, due to the fact that relevance has been employed in all the situations, whereas only two rhetorical devices (viz. metaphor and irony) in only three situations (out of six) have been employed.

3. There is no clear-cut distinction between TPF and SB. Consequently, it can be said that in the normal course of things, TPF is embedded within SB.

4. Existential presupposition, represented by the proper name, is the only kind of presupposition that is used to initiate TPF. As a matter of fact, this makes sense due to the fact that whenever anyone endeavors to gossip, s/he will definitely specify who the gossipee is in order to keep communicating as easily as required. Thus, there is no need for further indirectness since the one to be backbitten is not present, and hence one can feel freely to mention her/his name to make things clearer.

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