



**Checkmate!**  
**Winning the Game of Communication: A Study of Conversational Principles**

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## Checkmate! Winning the Game of Communication: A Study of Conversational Principles

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### Abstract

Managerial communication in organizations can well be studied by using drama as a heuristic device to gain an understanding of the complexities governing structure of communication, goals of participants and application of conversational principles. The technique of learning/understanding communication by application of conversational principles and maxims to drama/theatre was applied to dialogue in three absurd plays, namely, *The Zoo Story*, *Endgame*, and *The Chairs*. Analysis indicated that principles and maxims of cooperation and politeness are essential but not necessary prerequisites for communication. Violations of one, namely, politeness principle do not lead to cessation of communication. Communication continues despite violations, for fructification of a higher goal than is evident at the textual level of the dialogue. Extrapolating the findings in the context of the managerial situation, we found the context/situation to be the most significant variable in determining violation of conversational principles.

## Checkmate!

# Winning the Game of Communication: A Study of Conversational Principles

### Introduction

Use of various methodologies for teaching management disciplines, has, in the last decade, sparked interest in academia. Literature and films are fast gaining ground as innovative methodologies for teaching managerial skills as they have the added advantage of action and excitement woven in (seeming) real life tales (Chatterjee, 2000, Carson, 1994, Kennedy and Lawton, 1992, Nilakanta, R., & Ehlinger, C. J. 2003). The “formative power” (Novitz, 1998) of literature has been used to teach and develop concepts of leadership and ethics. Interestingly, structure of conversation, principles governing communication and goal of protagonists in drama/theatre have to date not been used as a tool for understanding communication in the managerial scenario. The present study explores the possibility of analyzing, comprehending and enhancing managerial communication skills through a study of drama.

### Literature and Management Studies

The question raised by many critics “Why Literature?” is well justified and requires an understanding of what literature can and does offer to the practitioners of managerial communication. As Sampat Singh puts it, human life holds a lot of mysteries and it is not possible to explore all. Rather it would benefit man if some of these realities are accepted unquestioningly as they help making life easier. Only Literature can help man understand these irrationalities (Singh, 2003, p. 45). To elaborate, on a broad canvas, literature helps us understand the nuances governing human conduct in all situations, be they managerial or non-managerial.

As we begin to narrow our focus from life to communication, we find theatre/drama, as a genre of literature, aid in understanding and analyzing dialogue/discourse. Application of conversational principles and maxims to the written text in drama yields results which can be extrapolated for an understanding of real-life talk. One may argue against the extension of discourse/dialogue analysis in plays to first, real-life talk and second, real-life talk in management. To a certain extent the argument is justified. More so if the analysis is restricted to syntax and semantics of dialogue. However, we do not restrict ourselves to syntactical or semantic analysis of dialogue but extend our understanding of communication by closely observing the interplay of the two conversational Principles, namely Cooperative and Politeness and their maxims.

To address the second issue: management and managers require a combination of perspectives, values and beliefs combined with a balance of responsibility and competitive attitude. These attitudes are close to human understanding of relationships as found in art, literature, philosophy and ordinary experiences (Singh, 2003, p. 40). Art and literature help in self development which gradually evolves into a world view including the ability to interpret life, versatility and an objective understanding of things. For instance, William Shakespeare in *Othello* explores the subtle difference between reality and make belief. Hans Anderson in *The Ugly Duckling* studies the importance of self esteem. Emphasizing the importance of literature, Tony McAdams (1993) argues that literature is a “...provocative instrument for raising a variety of enduring ethics/values, themes so long as we recognize that we are doing so via the mediating influence of a particular author in a particular time and place”(p. 658). Extending the definition of McAdams to a study of communication principles through drama/theatre we can argue that effective communication in the business world requires competencies that can be perfected through a study and comprehension of dialogue which combines multiple perspectives found in inordinate degree in simulated talk.

Stankiewicz (1960) in his account of the poetic language suggests an approach to the study of poets and their styles, which can, in our opinion, be extended to drama – all forms of literature, literary dialogue – and real life. “The student of poetry is in no position to describe and explain the nature of poetic language unless he takes into account the rules of the language which determine its organization.”(quoted in Burton, 1980, p.5)

Following from this premise, a study of principles governing language in naturally occurring talk forms the basis of the paper. Burton (1980) discussing the two-fold purpose of her book, *Dialogue and Discourse* suggests a theoretical framework which forms the basis for discussion in the paper: “firstly, using discourse analysis findings to explain effects in simulated talk, and secondly, using this simulated talk as a heuristic device to suggest modifications and innovations in the analysis of spoken discourse”(p. 168). We have adopted the purpose specified by Burton for an in depth comprehension of spoken dialogue in managerial situations.

We applied the Cooperative Principle (CP) and Politeness Principle (PP) to dialogue in three absurd plays: *The Zoo Story* by Edward Albee, *The Endgame* by Samuel Beckett and *The Chairs* by Eugene Ionesco for an understanding of the nature of communication, the manner of approach, and the prerequisites for effective communication/conversation.

One might argue against the choice of absurd plays for the given purpose. This may arise partly from the fact that the absurd plays are generally viewed as distinct deviations from conventional plays in several ways: in theme, in the vision of life they project, the organization of events, manipulation of characters, the use of language, etc. By implication, they must be even more different from ordinary conversation. Hence the application of Principles to simulated talk in absurd theatre apparently does not hold good. On the contrary, in support of our choice of absurd plays, we argue that if it is found that dialogue in absurd plays generally corresponds to ordinary conversation in structure, goals, adherence to maxims then it means that the special effect of the absurd plays lies elsewhere, in theme, in vision and the like. Although absurd plays differ from ordinary conventional plays and further, the fact that simulated talk in absurd plays yields an effect different from the same that the conventional plays and naturally occurring talk yield, it is by no means obvious that the special effect can be located in these specific parameters.

We propose that the so-called “absurd effect” may be due to a host of reasons but definitely not due to a difference in conversational principles, goals etc. Hence the applicability of the result of our study to real – life talk stands justified.

Before we proceed to a discussion of the theoretical constructs, we would like to emphasize the point that while analyzing the dialogue and situation in the plays, the perspective of the playwright must be kept separate from that of the characters. For an accurate understanding of the dialogue and the intentions of the characters at the time of delivering their lines, the text is to be read devoid of the influence of the playwrights. In the first stage, we must assume that the characters have come to life and are talking naturally as is expected in a particular situation. The words, thoughts and actions are all their own. In the second stage apply rules, principles and norms governing communication and study patterns generated therein.

### **The Constructs/Principles – Cooperative and Politeness**

#### ***Cooperative Principle***

Grice (1975) observes that a conversational exchange is a succession of interrelated remarks which are a result of the “co-operative effort” of the participants who recognize a “common purpose” or a “mutually accepted direction”. He further states: “Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged.” (p. 45) He formulated four maxims – quantity, quality, manner and relation - which all conversationalists need to observe, for the interaction to be cooperative.

Deliberate flouting of a maxim by a speaker (S) in the course of an exchange generates conversational implicatures. The hearer (H) is then faced with a problem: How should he/she treat the violation? Is S observing the CP and if so, what are the intentions of S when he/she flouts a maxim? For the CP to be operative, it is essential that H be able to work out the conversational implicatures.

### ***Politeness Principle***

Goffman (1955), Brown and Levinson (1978) have done extensive work on politeness as a face-saving ritual. Goffman defines “face” as “a positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact” (p. 226). By face-work he refers to actions which a person performs, to be consistent with face. Face-work may be either in the form of “defensive orientation” to save his own “face” or a “protective orientation” towards saving the other interactant’s face. For the latter type of orientation, maneuvers like respect, politeness, discretion, circumlocution, deception and phrasing replies with ambiguity are used. When a “face” is threatened, face-work must be done, whether this is done by the initiator or the offender or a mere witness is of secondary importance. Goffman maintains that for normal interaction to proceed, it is essential that there be co-operation at the level of politeness. When “face” is threatened, certain strategies are used which restore the equilibrium of the exchange with minimal discomfort to the interactants.

Brown and Levinson (1978) have extended this line of analysis. They have attempted to analyze and define politeness across cultures and formulate a universal model for the same. They state that co-operation in the interaction is maintained through strategies of politeness.

Robin Lakoff (1977) in her article, “What you can do with words: politeness, pragmatics and performatives” discusses politeness in relation to co-operation among the interactants in a verbal exchange. She states three rules of politeness, namely “formality”, “hesitancy” and “equality and camaraderie”. The wrong application of any one of these rules at a wrong time can create unpleasantness and ill-feelings. While considering the relationship between the rules of politeness and conversation, she states that a speaker or hearer should come to a common agreement as to what is “essential” and “relevant”. As for the relation between the CP and the PP, Lakoff makes the following observation: “Conversational implicature is a specific case of Politeness rule 2 [Hesitancy]; at least conventionally, it gives the addressee leeway in interpreting what is said to him. He need not automatically realize that he has just been told THAT, whatever undesirable thing THAT may be”(p. 100). Like others working on politeness, she indicates the interrelatedness of co-operative behavior and politeness, though she subsumes the former under the latter.

Leech (1983) has argued that there is a close link between the CP and the PP. Both are to a certain extent dependent on each other. The primary concern of Leech is general pragmatics, which he refers to as the study of “general conditions of the communicative use of language.”(p. 10).

Leech emphasizes the role of rhetoric: interpersonal and textual. In a goal oriented speech situation, these two types of rhetoric are used to produce a certain effect through language in the mind of the hearer. In the former, namely, the interpersonal rhetoric, there is an interplay of the CP and the PP. Leech asserts the importance of these two principles in any interaction and attempts to spell out the “trade-off” relationship between the two. CP functions to regulate our utterance into making contributions to some “assumed illocutionary and discourse goal(s).” PP however, has a higher role to play in the interaction than CP; it maintains the social equilibrium and friendly relations among interactants. “To put matters at their most basic: unless you are polite to your neighbor, the channel of communication between you will break down, and you will no longer be able to borrow his mower.”(p. 82). In any well - organized interaction, the functions of CP and PP are as follows: to secure total support from the participants in realizing the goal of the exchange; and to ensure full co-operation from S and H even in instances where there is a conflict as a result of adherence to personal goals. In other words, in all circumstances the CP

and PP serve the function of maintaining and restoring conversational equilibrium. The works of Brown and Levinson (1978), it may be recalled, are similar to the interpersonal rhetoric of Leech. However, while Leech maintains that the CP and PP are two separately acting principles, although they are closely linked and dependent on each other, Brown and Levinson discuss co-operation at the level of politeness.

## **Study**

For the purpose of our paper we have studied PP and its maxims as proposed by Leech and have applied both CP and PP to dialogue in simulated talk. We have used the words conversation and communication interchangeably to mean dialogue between two participants.

## **Methodology**

We applied PP, CP and the maxims to three absurd plays, viz., *The Zoo Story* (Edward Albee), *Endgame* (Samuel Beckett) and *The Chairs* (Eugene Ionesco). We studied and recorded instances of adherence to cooperation, politeness and violations of CP and PP were also recorded. Subsequently we drew comparative tables for the two Principles by quantifying and tabulating manually the number of violations and adherences to CP and PP for in-depth and accurate analysis. Similarities were analyzed in terms of goal of protagonists, situations and application of Principles in the three plays. Subsequently comparisons between theatre – and naturally occurring talk in managerial situations were drawn and conclusions derived.

For the purpose of discussion we have extracted one representative sample of CP and PP from each play.

## **Summary and analysis of the three plays**

### ***1. A Man Caged - The Zoo Story***

The dramatic setting of the play is a park. A major part of the action is centered round the verbal exchange between the two participants – Jerry and Peter. Jerry initiates the interaction with a specific desire to be heard by Peter. However, he does not proceed beyond promising to narrate what happened at the zoo.

The dialogue in the play is totally controlled by Jerry. The play commences with a statement made by Jerry that he “has been to the zoo”. The statement is initially ignored by the only other character on stage, Peter. Jerry resorts to adoption of social niceties, in the form of making polite inquiries about Peter’s personal life, which willy-nilly draw Peter in the communication. Gradually, as the communication proceeds, Jerry begins to probe and breaks all barriers of etiquette by raising indecent queries on Peter’s personal life and reasons for not having any more children.

Temporarily there is a break in the communication between the actors, but the threads are again picked up when Jerry stimulates the imagination of Peter by promising to narrate what happened at the zoo. This sequence of events is followed till Peter thaws and begins to unwind and cooperate. But this is only the beginning, for it gives Jerry an opportunity to narrate many stories but the one with which the communication began, “what happened at the zoo”. Initially Peter obliges by being the passive listener, but soon begins to get restless by the role thrust upon him. Worried that Peter may opt out of the one way communication, Jerry pleads: “Don’t react, Peter; just listen.” Finally, unable to withstand the onslaught of words, Peter declares his inability to understand and expresses unwillingness to be a passive listener to the monologue. Realizing that all his oral persuasive techniques have failed, Jerry whips out a knife with the hope that he will now be able to coerce Peter to listen. Unfortunately the situation gets out of control; Peter snatches the knife and after sufficient goading from Jerry, musters courage to stab him. The play ends with Jerry pacifying and mocking Peter.

The deviant close of the play gives rise to many queries in the minds of the readers: Why does Peter stab Jerry and why does Jerry not stab Peter? How does it relate to the theme of the play? What are the motives of the characters? However in the study we do not make an attempt to answer any of these questions. We focus on a study of principles and maxims are operational in the play.

The interactants in *The Zoo Story* cooperate with one another to the extent of producing coherent, orderly piece of conversation. The mutually accepted course of their dialogue moves from “talk” to questions and then to narration of personal, intimate anecdotes by Jerry. In this conversation, application of CP and PP yields some interesting insights.

As discussed earlier, violation of any one of the maxims of CP leads to generation of conversational implicatures. The in-capacity of the hearer to work out the implicature leaves at least two options for him: either he asks the speaker for clarifications or opts out of the interaction. In the play under consideration, the hearer, that is, Peter, unable to construe the implicature seeks the help of Jerry who at that point in time refuses to provide suitable clarifications. The gradual cumulative effect of the implicatures and questions left unanswered heightens the intensity of the play.

In the following section we analyze some dialogues from the play in which there were violations of CP and PP.

CP:

i)

*Jerry: It's...it's a nice day.*

*Peter [stare unnecessarily at the sky]: Yes, it is; lovely.*

*Jerry: I've been to the zoo.*

*Peter: Yes, I think you said so ... didn't you?*

*Jerry: You'll read about it in the papers tomorrow if you do not see it on your TV tonight. You have TV, haven't you?*

*Peter: Why yes, we have two; one for the children.*

(p. 160)

Here Jerry initiates the topic of the zoo and moves away from it. The sudden conversational switch distracts Peter. This is evident from the ensuing conversation, for very soon Peter questions Jerry on the import of the statement.

ii)

*Peter: What were you saying about the zoo... that I'd read about it, or see...?*

*Jerry: I'll tell you about it soon. Do you mind if I ask you questions?*

(p. 161)

This is an example of violation of the maxim of quantity. Jerry violates the maxim by not providing any or adequate information on the query raised. In this example, Jerry flatly refuses to give an answer to Peter's questions concerning his visit to the zoo. Conversational implicature distracts and puzzles Peter to other less trivial questions: what is the significance of Jerry's visit to the zoo? Why does he prop up a mention of the zoo at regular intervals? Peter is unable to work out the conversational implicature or find a suitable answer to his queries. Cooperation has to and does continue for communication to proceed. Violations are rectified by a '*repair*' mechanism and communication continues for fructification of a higher goal than is evident at the textual level.

PP:

iii)

*Jerry: The way you cross your legs, perhaps; something in the voice. Or maybe I am just guessing. Is it your wife?*

*Peter [furious]: That's none of your business! [Silence] Do you understand?*

[Jerry nods. Peter is quiet now.]  
Well, you are right. We will have no more children.

(p. 161)

This is an example of the flouting of the maxim of approbation. Considering the fact that Jerry has met Peter for the first time, his statements (as the ones cited above) are of an extremely personal nature, involving both Peter’s sexual prowess and his wife. In the dialogue, Jerry deliberately goads Peter, but surprisingly, Peter, though “furious” for a short while, again accepts the inferior, subdued role. Jerry by being impolite to Peter does not drive him away but gently nudges him to cooperate in the communication making process.

The example cited above does not adhere to the “social function” that Leech attributes to the CP and the PP. Throughout the play, Jerry antagonizes Peter to such a great extent that it appears as if Peter will opt out of the interaction. Something in the situation and the topic (of the zoo) keeps Peter glued to the spot. In spite of multiple violations of politeness Peter cooperates, sometimes willingly, at other time unwillingly. He is “tearful”, “sorry”, yet cannot do a thing as he is seemingly “hypnotized” by Jerry and his story telling.

It may be recalled that there exists a close link between the CP and the PP. From a social perspective, both these Principles are essential to any interaction. The interrelatedness of these two Principles and the predominance of one over the other vary in accordance with the situation under analysis. This makes interesting study in the present situation of the play: two strangers in the park. For the conversation to proceed at an easy pace, it becomes essential that the “social equilibrium” between the two interactants be maintained, the absence of which can lead to a complete breakdown of communication. Contrary to conversation in real life situations where interactants are polite and courteous to one another, Jerry, is rude and offensive to Peter. He knows that his rudeness/impoliteness will not drive Peter away from the scene of interaction. And sure enough, Jerry’s assessment of Peter’s response proves to be correct. Peter though free to choose either to opt out of the interaction or stay connected, decides to select the latter option.

Table 1: Number of Violations and Adherences to PP and CP

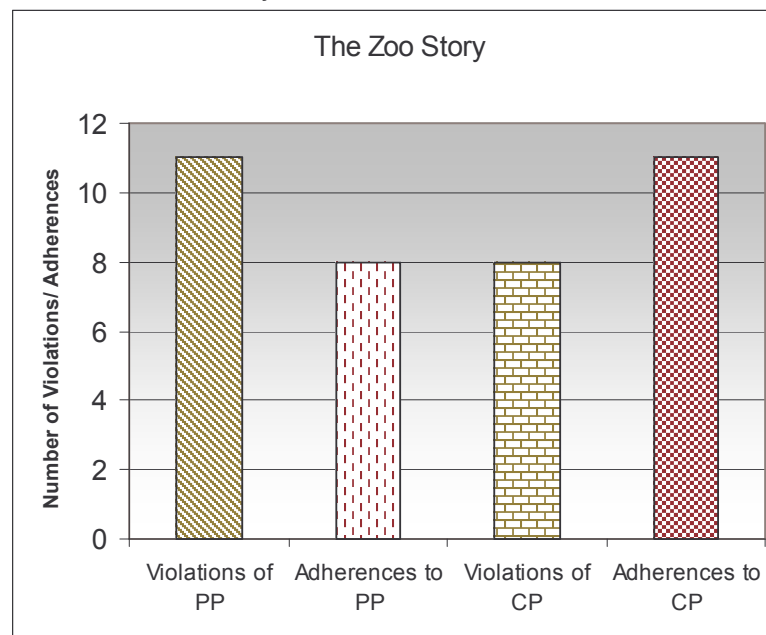


Table 1 gives the Number of Violations and Adherences to the Cooperative and Politeness Principles respectively. It is interesting to note that violations of politeness are of a greater



number than violations of cooperation. From this analysis we can derive that for communication to proceed, cooperation need not be bound to politeness/etiquette. Violations of politeness will be tolerated by the participants for the satiation of a higher mutually acceptable goal, be it interest or curiosity as presented in this play.

## 2. A Silent Reprisal - Endgame

The setting of the play is a small bare room with grey lighting and curtains drawn and two windows overlooking the “corpsed” world. The two principal characters, Hamm and Clov are trapped in a parasitic relationship where one cannot exist without the other. Additionally, the world outside is gradually heading towards an apocalypse, albeit slowly.

The entire play proceeds in the form of disjointed conversation pieces where there are frequent shifts in topic. The principal characters, Hamm and Clov, exhibit low emotional attachment towards one another. This is contrasted sharply with the other two characters, Nagg and Nell closed in bins who converse lovingly with one another in the hope that someday they will be able to narrow/close the chasm between themselves.

The play begins with both Hamm and Clov ruminating on their emotive stance. Almost immediately the scene shifts to an argument between the two where Clov rebukes Hamm, “I can't be getting you up and putting you to bed every five minutes, I have things to do.” Similar frequent shifts in the topic are evidenced throughout the play for the characters realize that they cannot hold on to one topic of conversation for long. Hamm is the principal speaker with Clov either answering or rebuffing his queries. The only binding force in the communication is reiteration of Hamm's query: “Is it not time for my pain-killer?” and Clov threatening to leave Hamm. The speakers keep talking to each other about the approaching apocalypse, “Outside of here it's death”, and maybe rejuvenation. They try to take refuge in nonsensical activities like attempting to look out of the window and admiring inanimate things like a three legged dog.

CP:

Co-operation in the *Endgame* between the characters is not dependent exclusively on what “they say” to each other. It is immaterial to them whether the other interactant is able to grasp what is said. What is important in this dead world, stinking of corpses, is that conversation should continue irrespective of whether something is communicated or not. All the characters seem to be performing this meaningless charade just to while away time. As Clov, at one stage says: “All life long inanities”. Interestingly there is very little innovative conversation that takes place and whatever little is said is manipulated by one interactant, Hamm who prevents Clov from opting out of the interaction by restraining him with the promise of more verbal exchange. In fact when Clov questions Hamm as to what should hold him back, now that all ties and relationships have snapped, Hamm promptly replies: “The dialogue”. At another stage Hamm tells Clov, “You haven't much conversation all of a sudden. Do you not feel well?” Strangely there is little that Clov says which would indicate his desire to continue the exchange, yet, when Hamm makes this statement, Clov does not contradict him. Their relationship is forced as is evidenced through the repetition of statements like: “I'll leave you”, “I can't leave you”, “Let's stop playing!”

In spite of strained relationship the characters in the play are found to cooperate with one another. Cooperation between Hamm and Clov can be partly understood as a dull routine in which they have got fixed and from which they feel too old and tired to break loose and form new habits. This often results in violation of the CP, where habit forces Clov to give routine and monosyllabic replies.

iv)

Hamm: *What time is it?*

Clov: *The same as usual.*

Hamm: *(gesture towards window right). Have you looked?*

Clov: *Yes.*

Hamm: Well?

Clov: Zero.

(p. 4)

This example is a violation of the maxim of quantity in that it lacks a specific and informative answer. Yet the response strangely and temporarily satisfies Hamm. Monosyllabic replies do not hamper communication which continues despite 'routine cooperation'.

PP:

v)

Hamm: (with ardor). Let's go from here, the two of us! South! You can make a raft and the currents will carry us away, far away to other... mammals!

Clov: God forbid!

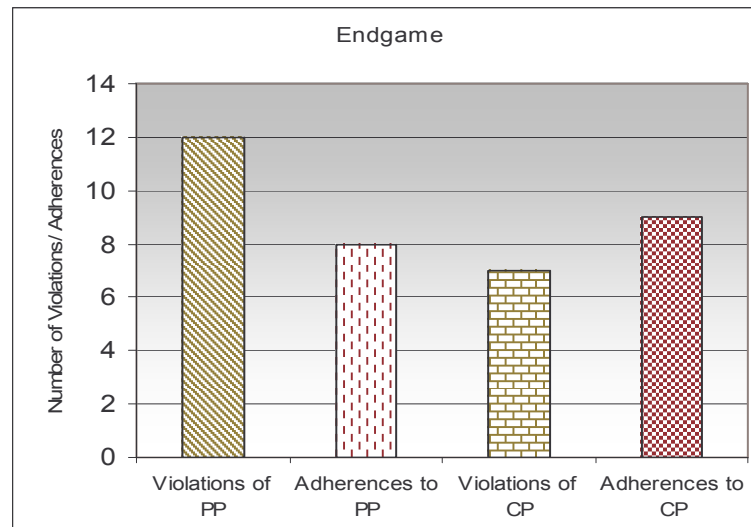
(p. 28)

This is an example of outright violation of tact maxim. On the scale of cost and benefit, this statement of Hamm's can be read as costing Clov a lot more than Hamm when one takes into account Clov's relationship with Hamm. Apart from the forced binding of Hamm and Clov, within the confines of Hamm's house, any other association with Hamm is absolutely intolerable to Clov. The implicature generated as a result of the violation of the maxim of tact can be read as: S is being polite by observing the PP. The fact, the action A [of making a raft and moving away from the dead and corpses world] is favorable to S. A, however, is unfavorable to H. Therefore H impolitely implicates that though A is favorable to S, H does not want A to occur. In this situation, it is worth noting that Hamm is trying his best to be amiable to Clov by offering him a holiday abroad. However, Clov, without giving any thought to the proposal, refuses pointblank.

Hamm is able to work out the implicature and is offended by the sudden burst of animosity for he promptly retorts, "Alone, I'll embark alone! Get working on the raft immediately. Tomorrow I'll be gone forever", thereby indicating that he would not let his plans suffer because of lack of cooperation from Clov. The example cited above is one of the few found in the text where Clov is impolite to Hamm and the latter accepts the rude intonations without much ado. Throughout the play it is Hamm who is rude, abusive and offensive to Clov.

Throughout the play the characters do not make an attempt to observe the "social function" attributed to the PP. Though the characters in the play enjoy being verbally offensive to each other, none of them opts out of the interaction. This needs to be read as more than verbal garbage thrown at one another. The two pairs of characters are so terribly dependent on each other that they cannot afford to bring relationship or communication to an end. As Hamm repeatedly tells Clov, "Gone from me you'll be dead" to which Clov replies, "And vice versa". Hence, each tolerates the nuances, abuses and the impolite innuendos of the co-interactant without opting out of the interaction. As all things: "Pap", "bicycle wheels", "pain killers", etc. have come to an end, the characters are bound together by a 'seeming dialogue' directed towards a higher goal than mere survival.

Table 2: Number of Violations and Adherences to PP and CP



In this play as well, violations of PP far exceed violations of CP. This cooperation in spite of violations of politeness is indicative that for communication to continue, the interactants need to be bound together by a mutually accepted goal or need.

### 3. Babbling about Nothing – The Chairs

The Old Couple, the Old man and the Old woman, aged 95 and 94 respectively are imprisoned in a tower which has windows overlooking the sea. The play begins by presenting the couple at an age when they have both exhausted their potential but still retain their illusions and desires. The Old Woman, in the play, has been totally depersonalized. She has become one with the Old Man in her way of thinking and even way of talking. The Old Man has a message to deliver for which he has invited a number of animate and inanimate guests: the wardens, the bishops, the public buildings, the penholders, the chromosomes, the Pope and the like. Lacking communicative abilities, the Old Man has hired an Orator for the task of delivering the message.

As the couple wait for the arrival of the guests, they recall and relive their inconsequential past. While still in the process of recall they hear the splash of water and the first guest arrives. The Old Man and the Old Woman perform the usual rigmarole to welcome the first guest who is both invisible and non-existent. This first guest is followed by an array of other invisible and non-existent guests.

The stage throughout the interaction remains bare but for the presence of the Old Couple and the chairs that whirl onstage with the ring of every bell. Though the guests arrive in great numbers, the old man refuses to reveal the real secret for his invitation. All characters in the play, the visible and the invisible wait for the arrival of the Orator who has been entrusted with the task of delivering the message. Meanwhile the Old Man voices his grievances against his family, his work, his bosses and the whole world in general which has misunderstood him and his intentions. Towards the close of the play, much to the surprise of the Old Couple and the readers, a real and visible character appears.

Leaving the invisible guests in charge of the seemingly well-equipped Orator, the Old Couple jump out of the window to their watery graves with a lot of fanfare and confetti. The Orator watches the scene impassively, only to gradually reveal his inability to either talk or hear. The old man has left the task of delivering his “message” to the invisible audience in the hands of a deaf and mute Orator. After making a few guttural sounds typical of deaf-mutes, the Orator takes out a piece of chalk from his pocket and writes on the blackboard in capital letters

vi)

*ANGELBREAD**then**NNAA NNM NWNWNW V*

(p. 176)

“Angel’s Bread” has been defined in the Dictionary of Mythology, Folklore and Symbols as “Sacred Knowledge”. What the Orator seems to indicate is that the Old Man had a message, which was ‘sacred’ but by having deliberately chosen a deaf and dumb Orator, he had nullified the impact of the ‘sacred’ message. Communication then was ‘sacred’ which could not be achieved due to either lack of skill (the Old man) or lack of communicative abilities (the Orator).

The Orator turns around to face the non-existent guests and makes a few guttural sounds and points to the blackboard. Dissatisfied, he turns around and scribbles something more on the board and with an enlightened expression on his face, turns and looks at the guests. When he realizes that the responses are not forthcoming he bows ceremoniously and leaves the auditorium filled with empty chairs. The Orator then leaves the stage forlorn, for despite his limitations he had tried hard to communicate but had proved unsuccessful in his task.

No sooner does the Orator leave the stage that the stage is filled with human noises, “snatches of laughter, whisperings, a ‘Ssh!’ or two, little sarcastic coughs; these noises grow louder and louder, only to start fading away...”(p. 177)

*CP:*

In this play the Old Man and the Old Woman talk to one another, using the non-existent guests as the medium. Cooperation between the Old Couple in the play is at its peak as both have willingly entered into the game of receiving invisible guests. However there are instances when there is an apparent breakdown of communication:

vii)

*Old Woman [dialogue completely disconnected, run right down]: Well...**Old Man: To our and to theirs.**Old Woman: To what?**Old Man: I to him.**Old Woman: Him, or her?**Old Man: Them.**Old Woman: Peppermints... you don't say.**Old Man: There aren't.**Old Man: Why?**Old Woman: Yes.**Old Man: I.**Old Woman: Well.**Old Man: Well.*

(p. 151)

In the example cited above, we read a violation of the maxim of relevance. This momentary lapse in the interaction is an indication of the much larger gap in communication which the characters have faced throughout life.

Similar instances of violations are seen in the play. The conversation between the Old Couple in the play gives the appearance of the presence of non-existent guests. Hence, the examples studied are not as isolated monologues but dialogues between the Old Couple and the invisible guests.

On one occasion, the Old Woman evades giving a reply to the guests who wishes to get more information on the message "I'm sorry to say I can't agree with you! ... I'll let you know what I think about all this in time... I have nothing more to say just now!...It's the Orator...we're waiting for him ... he'll be here in a moment - who'll answer for me, who'll explain to you how we feel about everything... he'll make it all clear... when?...when the right time comes... you won't have to wait long..."(p. 161) In this instance, it is a violation of the maxim of quantity. The information requested by the guests is not provided as the Old Woman thinks that the time is not ripe for the deliverance of "the message".

The Old Man on another instance postpones the deliverance of "the message". "Don't be so impatient. You'll hear what my message is in a few minutes". This again is a violation of the maxim of quantity.

Grice (1975) in his article, "Logic and conversation" argues that the overall objective of the interaction should be accepted by both the participants. In the present play, *The Chairs*, the Old Couple, with the mutual consent of each other have invited a number of guests with the explicit purpose of delivering the message. However, the purpose of summoning the guests is questioned by the Old Woman as the conversation becomes more and more disorganized owing to the proliferation of chairs at a fast pace. Of course, this does not amount to violation of the CP, but it does question the purpose for which the interaction was initially started.

PP:

The play provides ample opportunities to the reader to identify instances of adherence and violation of the PP. The Old Man is excited about the anticipated arrival of the invisible guests and ensures that he uses all strategies to make their arrival equally exciting for the Old Woman. The Old Woman on her part tries to get involved in the process but the occasional tantrums of the Old Man, leaves her in a state of despondency but not despair. In this situation where both the characters have no one but themselves to fend for, the *'repair'* is equally prompt. For instance,

viii)

*Old Woman: Come along now, now, dear, come and sit down. Come and sit down. Don't lean out like that, you might fall in. You know what happened to Francis I. You must be careful.*

*Old Man: Another of your historical allusions! I'm tired of French history, my love. I want to look. The boats in the sunshine are like specks on the water.*

(p. 128)

This is an example of violation of the maxim of tact and agreement. It is interesting to note that though the Old Man uses an endearment like, "my love" it does not negate the undercurrent of violation of PP which is both sensed and understood by the reader as an impatient move to get along with activities planned for the day.

Another example in the text is the dialogue between the Old Couple in the process of welcoming invisible guests.

ix)

*Old Woman: So pleased to meet you. A most welcome guest. You are an old friend of my husband's, he's a General...*

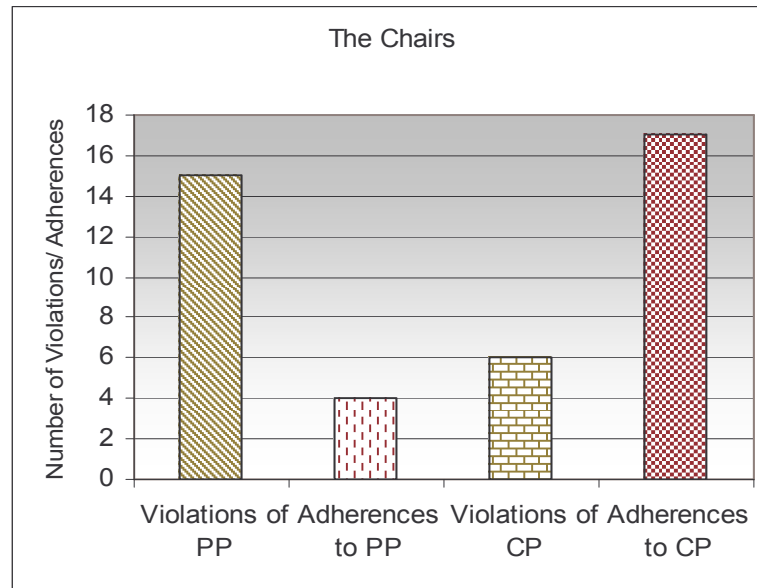
*Old Man [displeased]: Quartermaster, quartermaster...*

(p. 142)

The Old Man violates the maxims of modesty and agreement. The "social function" of PP is not observed by the Old Couple despite their reiterations of endearments. Communication, despite

violations of politeness does not come to a close as the two have only one another to live and interact with. They imagine and try to transfer their imagination on each other and the readers that they will be flooded with guests. Unfortunately, imagination cannot be transcended into reality ... when the Orator, the only live character, apart from the Old Couple, arrives on the scene, the two, the Old Man and the Old Woman, in cooperation jump out of the window into the dark waters below.

Table 3: Number of Violations & Adherences to PP and CP

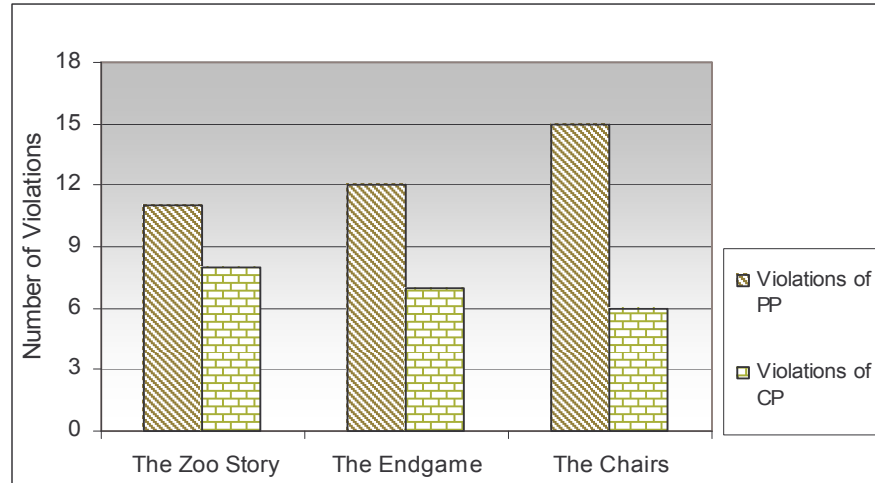


In this play as compared to the other two studied we found maximum adherence to the CP. The Old Man and the Old Woman were crystal clear about the purpose of communication - a message is to be delivered to the guests. In spite of the fact that the guests were invisible, for the Old Couple the *'dialogue'* with the guests was real. The purpose, in this play, of communicating a message and 'listening' to the message is what bonds all the actors (visible and invisible) on stage. The anxiety of the Old Couple while welcoming the guests, seating them onstage and waiting for the arrival of the Orator makes them short tempered and intolerant of one another's idiosyncrasies. Hence, violations of PP outnumber the violations of CP.

## Discussion

Herman (1996) discussing Gricean Principles in *Finnegans Wake* demonstrates how current pragmatic theories, notably those of Grice and Searle can be used as tools for interpreting literary texts. He emphasizes the use of literary dialogues as models for the study of "discourse situations" as they help us "rethink" and "evaluate the linguistic presumptions" in conversation and thereby arrive at the inferential meaning of discourse. Extending the concept proposed by Herman we have applied the theories of Grice and Leech (CP and PP) to drama. The insights derived have been used for an understanding of real life talk in managerial situations.

Table 4: Number of Violations of PP and CP



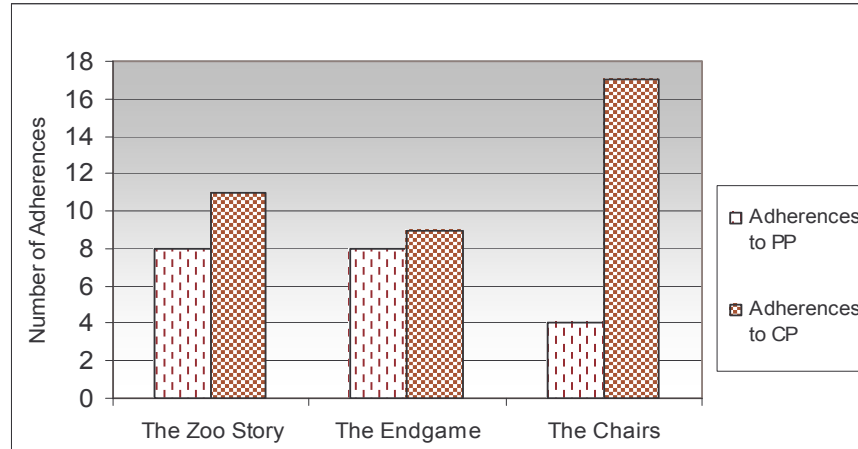
In all the three plays, we studied instances of violation and adherence to the two Principles, namely, PP and CP. We found violations of PP to be of a much higher degree than CP, highest in case of *The Chairs*. In spite of violations of PP however, communication does not come to a close. In two plays, *The Zoo Story* and *Endgame*, some of the maxims of PP namely, Tact and Approbation are constantly flouted. Despite the upheaval of “social equilibrium” resulting from failure to observe the PP, conversation does not cease or come to a close.

Peter, in *The Zoo Story* is constantly ridiculed by Jerry who is a total stranger. Strangely Peter does not opt out of the interaction. Something in the narrative power/context of the dialogue of Jerry keeps Peter rooted to the spot. In *Endgame*, Clov, on more than one occasion is mercilessly hauled by Hamm and is subjected to rude and offensive behavior. But Clov too is unable to leave Hamm because of his need for Hamm which is higher than the need for “saving face”.

The Old Couple in *The Chairs* are at their best behavior in welcoming the invisible and non-existent guests and making them comfortable. While their attitude to the guests is cordial, friendly and cooperative, the same does not apply to their communication with one another. In the play, there are occasions when the two are irritable and snap at one another leading the reader to believe that all ties of communication will snap. However much to the surprise of the readers normalcy in communication is restored by the iteration of the topical line of the story, “And then we arri...”

The observance of the PP in the plays discussed above is different from the same in ordinary conversation. The situation in the plays is conducive to violations of politeness - the forced and deviant situation, in which interaction takes place, leads to violations of the PP which suggest total alienation and isolation of man. We can argue that politeness as a social phenomenon imposes societal bindings on man. In an interaction where all these ties have snapped it is immaterial whether the interactants observe or do not observe this Principle as a building block for furtherance of relationships. The dialogue leaves the conversants untouched and alienated. Language in itself has become a dead thing, and is used by the interactants to spout out fossilized clichés. The conversation in these plays is dissolution of polite interaction and all attempts to process it in those terms proves futile.

Table 5: Number of Adherences to PP and CP



Cooperation among the interactants in the three plays is at a different level from that observed in ordinary conversation. Characters in these plays cooperate with each other not because of a mutually accepted direction of interaction or purpose, but because of something inherent in the situation/ nature of interaction in which communication has lost its significance. In *The Zoo Story*, Peter cooperates with Jerry, because of his desire to gain vicarious experience of life through Jerry's personal anecdotes. The characters in *Endgame* are destined to live together. It is this deviant situation which while binding them, forces them to cooperate with each other. In *The Chairs*, the guests being invisible, and mere figments of the imagination, have little opportunity to leave in the midst of the interaction.

Three interesting findings emerge from this paper, which can be studied in the context of real life talk in the managerial context:

1. The purpose of the talk determines the adherence to or violation of Principles.
2. Adherences to and violations of the CP and PP are contingent on the situation or the context.
3. Violations are almost always followed by a 'repair' mechanism which keeps the communication going.

### ***Dialogue in the Managerial Context***

In organizations, it is appropriate that managers deploy politeness to seek cooperation while communicating with leaders or members. While conceptually, the argument is valid, in real life management situations, the dictum does not always hold true. Excessive cooperation can result in violations of politeness and excessive politeness can herald violation of cooperative principle (Kaul and Kulkarni, 2005) as is evidenced in the plays. What then becomes important in the ultimate analysis is a study of the situation/ context in which communication takes place. The playwrights (Albee, Beckett and Ionesco) use this strategy where the characters cooperate despite the absence of a mutually accepted direction of conversation, to reveal a higher goal/motive for which the conversation/ communication was begun. The dialogue then, governed by the actions becomes "a deliberate choice in a given situation."

Mura (1983) states that the most important aspect of communication is pragmatics, the use of language to communicate: not the linguistic competence of the ideal speaker but the practical use of language in communication. For instance, in task-oriented communication, emphasis is on accuracy of details, factual correctness, with the right quantum of information. In this scenario, maxims of politeness can be forsaken as the ultimate goal is achieving cooperation for completion of tasks. In all the three plays the task ahead of the characters is completion of a goal which at the



superficial level is not evident to the readers. In *The Zoo Story*, purpose of Jerry is to establish contact with Peter, in *Endgame*, the goal of Hamm and Clov is to 'live together' and in *The Chairs*, the goal of the Old Man is to summon the guests and deliver his "message". In all these high intensity tasks, politeness is forsaken at the altar of cooperation. Contrary to this, if the objective of communication is relationship-oriented, perforce politeness and its resulting maxims have to be followed. In such situations, the authenticity of information, for instance, is not important and may in many cases be forsaken.

In all three plays, the violations are almost always covered by a 'repair' situation which appeases the interactants. Strategy of 'repairing' a tension fraught situation is applied in instances where and when the need to communicate is higher than the desire to "save face". Probably that is one of the reasons why all the three plays are loaded with violations of the PP. In comparison the violations of the CP are much less. In real life talk, be it in managerial situation or otherwise, a similar process is observed. Violations, if any, are always 'repaired' by either 'high focus' on the issue at hand or use of apology.

In sum, violations or adherences to the CP and the PP are governed by the purpose of the talk and the situation in which the dialogue takes place. The purpose could be merely to arouse interest and curiosity or a need to stay together as "outside there was death". The change in situation will determine the application/frequency of application of various Principles for the fructification of higher goals than is evident at the superficial level. In this process of adherence and violation of principles and maxims, the strategy of 'repair' is undeniably the most important as it determines the line of action – closure or continuance of the process of communication.

## Conclusion

In this paper we have shown how communication can be better understood when studied through simulated dialogue. For our purpose we have selected two principles governing communication. A similar process can be followed to analyze and learn more about techniques of effective communication. The plays provide us with raw data which can be collectively analyzed for in-depth and robust understanding of Principles that govern communication.

Understandably, it is tough to record and analyze authentic managerial situations. Simulated talk provides us with multiple situations and communication patterns which can be used as a case in point for a discussion and understanding. A study of theatre-talk is the closest we can get to an understanding of the nuances and principles governing communication. Hence, analysis of theatre dialogue becomes an important tool for managers to gain greater comprehension of strategic processes and principles governing managerial communication.

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