



Implicature in the Traditional Malay Theatre Script "Mek Mulung": A Research on Meaning

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ABSTRACT

Every traditional theatre performance usually contains a certain message that is intended to be conveyed to the audience. The effectiveness of delivering this message depends on various factors, especially the aspect of language use. The language spoken in theatre not only functions as a medium of communication but is also able to stimulate the audience's thinking to interpret the implicit meaning. A theatre will look bland if there is no diversity in terms of language style. Therefore, theatre actors should take advantage of language strategies such as the use of implicature. For the Malay community, implicature is considered an art of language because the message is conveyed figuratively and not directly, thus requiring the listener to think to understand the meaning that is intended to be highlighted. This study aims to identify and describe conversational and conventional implicature in the script of the *Mek Mulung* Traditional Malay Theatre *Putera Cahaya Bulan* based on the philosophy of H. P. Grice. The method used is a qualitative approach through content analysis. The findings of the study show that both types of implicature are used in theatre scripts, but the number is still limited. Therefore, to ensure that theatre remains relevant and continues to be of interest to the community, efforts need to be intensified, including enriching the use of implicature as part of the beauty of language art in scripts. Discussions about language are very important to pay attention to because language is a major factor that contributes to the success of a theatre performance.

Keywords: Implicature, Traditional Malay Theatre, Mek Mulung, Pragmatic, meaning

INTRODUCTION

Implicature is a field of study related to the meaning of words, phrases, sentences, and discourse. Confusion about meaning often occurs due to various factors, including the use of implied language. Therefore, emphasis on the meaning of an utterance needs to be given attention so that misunderstandings do not arise. Implicature refers to a meaning that is opposite or contrary to the actual utterance, depending on the context or situation. In Malay society, the delivery of opinions or views usually uses figurative language that carries an implied meaning beyond the literal meaning. This kind of language is used for politeness, especially in conveying opinions, criticism, reprimands or praise so as not to offend the feelings of others (Nursyafieqa 'Ifwat Mohmod Rofik & Maizura Osman, 2024). Therefore, it is important to understand the meaning of the utterance so that there is no misinterpretation of the message conveyed.

Theatre is a form of performance that combines dialogue, movement, emotional expression, music, singing, dancing, lighting, props, costumes and many more. In addition to serving as entertainment, theatre is also a medium for delivering education, information, and cultural values. Theatre forms can be divided into several types such as traditional, modern, contemporary theatre and so on. Each of them will reflect different characteristics, elements, and functions according to local culture. In the context of the Malay community, traditional theatre functions as folk entertainment that reflects the background of the previous society and their cultural values. The elements contained in traditional performances become symbols of cultural identity and serve as a medium of communication and expression of the community. Three important components in



traditional theatre are acting, music and dance. Examples of traditional Malay theatre in Malaysia include *Mak Yong*, *Bangsawan*, *Mek Mulung*, *Menora*, *Wayang Kulit* and many more.

However, this study only focuses on the traditional *Mek Mulung* theatre as a material for analysis. In 2023, *Mek Mulung* was recognized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as an Intangible Cultural Heritage that needs to be protected (RTM News, 2023). *Mek Mulung* is a traditional Malay theatre that is famous in Kedah Darul Aman and is still performed almost every year, especially in Kampung Wang Tepus, Jitra. According to Nurfarhana Idahyu Jaafar (2022), the word *Mek* refers to a call for a girl, while *Mulung* comes from the name of a forest where this performance began. This art is said to have originated from Ligor, Siam, and was introduced in Kedah during the conflict between that state and Siam. The *Mek Mulung* performance combines elements of acting, singing, music and dance. Although this form of performance appears simple, it is loaded with cultural values and traditions that reflect the life of the past society. Therefore, this study was conducted with a special focus on the use of implicature in *the Mek Mulung* script to understand the implicit message.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies on implicature are increasingly developing over time. Among them, the study by Nursyafieqa 'Ifwat Mohmod Rofik and Maizura Osman (2024) revolves around the use of implicature on social media. This study examines the meaning of implicature expressed on social media Twitter and Facebook during the election season. The content analysis method was used in this study by applying the ad hoc conceptual framework in the field of pragmatics. Research on all the data collected shows that there is freedom in the use of impolite words among Twitter and Facebook users during the election season. In addition, the results of the study show that there is a high ability to convey deeper messages to the audience using implicature.

Next is the study by Ayu Husnani (2021) which analyses implicature in drama scripts. According to Ayu Husnani (2021), the purpose or message can be conveyed well when the speaker and the interlocutor communicate clearly. However, there is also communication that is unclear or in other words contains implicit meaning or is called implicature. Therefore, this study was conducted to find out the types of implicature found in the *Enjuku Tonosama no Utage* theatre drama script. This study has applied Grice's theory (1975) through the content analysis method to analyse the research data obtained. The results of the study found that there were 16 data containing implicatures in speech through the script studied, consisting of nine conventional implicatures and seven conversational implicatures, and one of the 16 data was a combination of more than one implicature.

The next study is a study related to implicatures in the field of law and judiciary, namely a study by Aminuddin Saimon and Nur Fatin Afiqah Amran (2024). This study explains that law and judiciary are fields that play a role in upholding justice based on solid evidence. However, during the trial session, speech can be manipulated to hide the real facts. Therefore, there are implicatures in speech that require the court to evaluate the valid facts before deciding. In this regard, this study was carried out to fulfil the study's objective, namely, to analyse the implicatures found in the *Qanun 99* drama based on the Relevance theory by Sperber and Wilson (1986). The results of the study found that the decisions for each case handled by the judiciary and the defence attorneys in the *Qanun 99* drama are relevant because the defence attorneys and the judiciary are very efficient in examining every aspect of implicature.

Next, Nurul Atiqah Md Yusof & Siti Noraini Hamzah (2023) conducted a study entitled Implicit Speech in the Film *Puteri Gunung Ledang*. This study aimed to identify implicit speech in the film's dialogue and analyse its meaning based on Relevance Theory (TR) which emphasizes context, context effects, and efforts to process meaning. Using qualitative methods, the researcher transcribed the dialogue and examined the implicit meaning through the TR approach and Cross-Reference Framework. The results of the study found that 54 implicit speeches were identified, which were categorized into eight forms. The analysis showed that implicit language not only enriches the storytelling of classic films, but also reflects the subtlety and creativity of Malay society's thinking.

These four previous studies prove that the implicature aspect is indeed used throughout life and is a very important aspect in conveying something.



METHODOLOGY

This study uses qualitative methods through a content analysis approach based on the philosophy of H. P. Grice (1967). As explained by Kamarul Azmi Jasmi (2012), qualitative data also includes document analysis. At the initial stage, the script of the traditional Malay *Mek Mulung* theatre entitled *Putera Cahaya Bulan* was read and analysed to identify utterances that contain implicature. Next, based on the philosophical framework of Grice (1967), each utterance was classified as either conversational implicature or conventional implicature. According to Taylor and Bogdan (1984), qualitative data is descriptive and usually takes the form of spoken or written words that describe observable human behaviour. The results of this study successfully recorded nine implicature utterances from selected scripts obtained through the Kedah State Cultural Heritage Movement Association (AKRAB). All the data was then analysed and interpreted based on the context of the sentence to ensure that the implicit meaning in the implicature could be understood more clearly and accurately.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Historically, the study of implicature was introduced in depth by Grice as a response to the weakness of the concept of maxims in the Principle of Cooperation that he had highlighted earlier. This view was also supported by Sadock (1975) who emphasized that these maxims are vague and less effective in explaining the true meaning of an utterance. Therefore, Grice introduced the concept of implicature which is divided into two categories, namely conventional implicature and conversational implicature. Conventional implicature refers to utterances that carry a fixed and customary meaning regardless of the context of the conversation. On the other hand, conversational implicature refers to the implicit meaning or message that is interpreted through two-way verbal interaction.

This section examines the use of implicature in selected theatre scripts that contain implicit meanings aimed at stimulating the audience's thinking. Several data were analysed to explain how implicature is used to convey the true meaning or idea that the characters want to express in the performance. The study findings show that both types of implicature are found in the traditional Malay theatre script *Mek Mulung (Putera Cahaya Bulan)*. The use of implicature is found to be suitable for the characters in the theatre because it conveys the message in a more creative way and encourages the audience to think. The following is the speech data for both types of implicature contained in this selected theatre.

Conversational Implicature

The utterance below occurs when “Wak Nujum” recites a spell to interpret the dream of the younger brother of the “Putera Cahaya Bulan”. The dream is about a white peacock that lands on the hand and then flies away and disappears after he tries to hold it. Based on the example below, it clearly shows the utterance of conversational implicature because it can only be understood based on the context of the communication that occurs. Black (2011) defines conversational implicature as formed from the combination of language and situation.

“Eyy adik Cik Awang mimpi boleh merbuk putih, terbang hinggap di tapak tangan, acu nak genggam terbang melayang ke awan udara, ghaib di hati, hilang dimata”

“Makna dia! Ada musuh nak masuk belah utara musuh bernama Raja Gergasi, yang duduk di Benua Pakkian dia nak masuk bunuh Putera Cahaya Bulan, nak ambik Puteri Nang Mara yang sangat bertuah dan sangat kesakti, hingga dua belas negeri tunduk dekat dia”

“Jadi Cek Awang oi, jika kurang ubat peluru, kena tambah ubat peluru, kalau parit yang cangkat, kena pedalam, kalau lembing yang karat kena perasam asam, kerih yg tumpui kena petajam kena main segala permainan, berjaga tujuh hari, betujuh malam, jangan sapa pun lena eyy”

Wak Nujum's words are conversational implicature in the sentence *“jika kurang ubat peluru, kena tambah ubat peluru, kalau parit yang cangkat, kena pedalam, kalau lembing yang karat kena perasam asam, kerih yg tumpui kena petajam”*. This sentence has an implicit meaning, namely Wak Nujum advises or gives a message to Putera Cahaya Bulan to be alert and ready because an enemy is coming to attack. Wak Nujum in detail uses similes



such as medicine, trench, spear, and dagger as objects that can be imagined. Therefore, the conversational implicature utterance by Wak Nujum can clearly be understood when the listener hears several sentences before and after this implicature utterance. This is because to understand the conversational implicature utterance, the listener needs to consider the elements of language and situation.

Conventional Implicature

Below is the conversation that occurs between the characters *Epong* and *Edeng* when they are both selling medicine. There is the use of conventional implicature in *Edeng*'s dialogue as below:

Epong: Edeng apa la nasib kita ni, jual ubat pun tak laku, habis tu kita nak buat keja apa pulak la Edeng: Tula kalau jual diri ni, berdosa la pulak, habis tu bila kita nak kaya.

The implicature in the dialogue above is on the phrase *jual diri* and it is clearly known to the Malay community. The meaning of *jual diri* conceptually is to surrender oneself to someone or something. Most Malay communities interpret *jual diri* as prostitution. However, the use of *jual diri* is also used in other contexts such as when someone attends an interview and needs to sell themselves to the panel members. In this situation, selling oneself is considered something positive, namely stating the advantages that one has so that the panel members are attracted and choose them.

If we observe the example of conventional implicature speech above, *Edeng*'s character means *jual diri* to make oneself a prostitute. This is because *Edeng* mentions the sin that will be obtained if he sells himself. The audience or listener will also understand the connotation of the above utterance as being a prostitute. Therefore, the use of the implicature *jual diri* is categorized as a conventional implicature because it gives meaning by itself in any form of use and is a common thing. Our society is indeed familiar with this phrase and already knows its meaning. Conventional implicature is the meaning of an utterance that is conventionally or generally accepted and understood by society.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the study of implicature in traditional Malay theatre scripts proves that language plays an important role in conveying profound messages that are loaded with artistic value. Using conventional implicature and conversational implicature, the characters in the theatre not only communicate directly, but also convey implicit meanings that can invite the audience to think and interpret the meaning behind the utterance. This shows that implicature is a significant language strategy in enriching the performance, maintaining cultural authenticity, and ensuring that traditional Malay theatre remains relevant and of interest to the current generation.

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