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Analyzing Communication Failure In Gandhi & Jinnah's Talks: A Socio-Cognitive Perspective On Gricean Cooperation Principles

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Abstract

Socio-cognitive approach (SCA) is an important perspective on Gricean pragmatics. In Gricean pragmatics, it is supposed that interlocutors intentionally flout or violate four maxims and create confusion that leads to failure of communication. However, to Kecskes, communication failure and misunderstanding between interlocutors are often caused by the egocentrism of both the speaker and the hearer. Considering the correspondence between Gandhi and Jinnah as a conversation between two political leaders, I have investigated what kind of egocentrism Gandhi and Jinnah bring during the talks and why the communication between the interlocutors failed. I have interpreted flouting or violation of maxims in Kecskesian model of egocentrism. As a qualitative study, it uncovers how egocentrism offers adequate explanation for dynamic interconnection among intention, attention and salience. The findings of the study show that interlocutors could not reach any agreement because each of them both as a speaker and hearer could not create rapport between them. The parallel study of the questions one leader asks with the answers provided by the other reveals that there are several instances of flouting of every maxim.

Introduction

The partition of the sub-continent into two nation states Pakistan and India is considered as one of most impactful events of modern political history. Since the very idea of partition, let alone its ideological foundation, has always remained conflicting, the political leaders who were central characters in the scheme are often the subject of hostile criticism. The year 1940 in which Lahore Resolution was passed becomes a starting point of vehement political opposition between the League and the Congress. In the political arena, the political parties were fighting to assert and secure their identity for which they had devised certain schemes. The country was rife with social and political dissensions. The public had set high hopes on the decision of Jinnah and Gandhi to engage in talks that could offer any peaceful solution of the dilemma in which the country was stuck. During such talks, the leaders' flexibility to understand the perspective of the negotiating partner plays a key role in reaching an agreement that is acceptable to the conflicting parties. Since the negotiations were utter failure, it is pertinent to study the correspondence between Gandhi and Jinnah as an instance of human conversation where the interlocutor's non-observance of cooperative principle in the form of flouting of different maxims played a key role in hardening the differences rather than leading to better understanding between them. Doubtless, talks between political leaders of different countries have always remained central in finding peaceful solutions of the issues of public concern.

Statement of the Problem

The communication between Jinnah and Gandhi at the critical juncture of partition met failure and the failure on intercultural level still goes unexplained from the perspective of socio-cognitive approach.

Research Questions

1. What kind of intercultural egocentrism do Gandhi and Jinnah bring during the talks?
2. Why does the communication between Gandhi and Jinnah fail?

Literature Review

Grice (1991) suggested that people follow four principles during their conversations. He named them Cooperative Principles. In the explanation of his theory, he asserted that people "make their 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 they are engaged" (p. 45). In accordance to that, he suggested that if people were to have a successful and smooth conversation, they should follow this principle which is associated to four conversational maxims. The conversational maxims are: Maxim of Quality, Maxim of Quantity, Maxim of Relation, and Maxim of Manner. Brief explanation is given below.

- Maxim of Quality : One should not say anything about a topic in which he/she lacks adequate evidence of; one is not allowed to lie or say what he/she believes to be false; the key word of this maxim is truth or instatement;

- Maxim of Quantity: One should not make the contribution to the conversation less or more informative than is required. In other words, make the contribution as informative as required for the purpose of the conversation;
- Maxim of Relation: One is required to say something relevant to the topic;
- Maxim of Manner: One should avoid ambiguity and obscurity of expression and he/she should be brief and orderly.

Socio-cognitive approach (SCA) is one of three major perspectives on Gricean pragmatics. While the other two focus separately on either social or cognitive (individual), SCA attempts to integrate Gricean cooperative principle with Kecskesian cognitive view of egocentrism. In Gricean pragmatics, it is proposed that interlocutors intentionally flout or violate four maxims and create confusion that leads to failure of communication. However, to Kecskes, communication failure and misunderstanding between interlocutors are often caused by the egocentrism of both the speaker and the hearer (Kecskes, 2014).

Arofah and Mubarak (2021) conducted a descriptive study in which the conversation between English teacher and students in the class was used as data. The scholars' aim was to analyze the type of flouting or violation each Grice's maxims was subjected to during classroom interactions. Collecting data through observation, the scholar proceeded to the analysis and used the technique which is suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994, as cited in Arofah & Mubarak, 2021) that consists of data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusion or data verification. The result of the study demonstrated that not only the students but also their teacher was found to flout some time and other time violate different maxims.

Jasmins (2021) in her Master's thesis explored tweets of American president Donald Trump and incorporated Grice's maxims in the study design. She found that not only during the Covid but also after it, the president had quite diplomatically manipulated language and devised a strategy that could produce the intended impact on the public around the globe.

The study by Asif, Zhiyong, Majeed, Rasool, and Nisar (2019) analyzed the language used by the interviewer and the interviewee to find who was violating and who was flouting any of Grice's maxim. The purpose was to merely describe the frequency of each flouting or violation of the maxim by Imran Khan, one of the popular political leaders of Pakistan. They found that there were large number of flouting and violation instances in the interview.

Ayasreh & Razali (2018) conducted discourse analysis of Bashar Al-Assad's interview during the Arab Spring and applied Grice's theory. The scholars illustrated some maxims that were flouted by the Syrian leader. Analysis of the maxims of the Arab leader's interview revealed that the main reason for Assad's violation of the maxims was to convey meanings in his favour. It can be implicated that political leaders flout maxims to produce particular shades of meanings which may not always be conceivable to all parties in order to gain the support from masses.

Zebua, Rukmini, & Saleh (2017) investigated the flouting and violation of Grice's maxims by male and female participants in the Ellen Degeneres Talkshow. After collecting the data from six episodes in the newest edition in 2016, they analyzed it and found that the male participants mostly flouted the maxims whereas the females were more than often violating them.

From the review, it is clear that speeches, statements and interviews of political leaders are important area where Gricean maxims may be applied. Since Jinnah and Gandhi are important historical figures, the study of their correspondence at the critical time of partition in Kecskesian model can offer insights to understand how often intercultural egocentrism leads to misunderstandings and communication failure.

Methodology

The research design of this study is qualitative in its nature. Using content analysis design, the collected data will be analyzed to answer the research questions. Since qualitative analysis entails subjective interpretation by the researcher, the validity demands require that data analysis follows a systematic coding and identifications of relevant categories (Schreiber, 2013). Content analysis was also motivated by the detailed description of the phenomenon under study combined with theory driven inferences.

Jinnah - Gandhi correspondence that took place on the subject of partition of the sub-continent forms the research data. The letters have been read and coded systematically. The analysis identified phrases and clauses where the writers have flouted or violated any conversational maxim. The reasons for flouting and violating have been associated with intercultural egocentrism. The coding includes Maxim of Quality (MQL), Maxim of Quantity (MQN), Maxim of Manner (MM), and Maxim of Relevance (MR).

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Cooperative Principles explained in Grice (1991) has been used as a theoretical framework. Since Gricean pragmatics pivots on cooperation, its primary focus is on the social aspect of communication. Without ignoring the social side of communication, socio-cognitive approach incorporates "individually privatized social experience" into social interaction and provides solid foundation for the explanation for the complex phenomenon. The proponents of SCA claim that during social interaction, interlocutors' subconscious motivation of intention and the resultant communicative action are closely linked to "the socio-cultural environment and social factors in which the interaction takes place". In SCA, social cooperation as suggested by Grice can be better understood as a blend of an intention-directed activity and the interlocutors' egocentrism. To Kecskes, egocentrism is an individual's salience dominated attention-oriented trait. In this model, not only the production but also the comprehension of any utterance was a site where three types of knowledge are simultaneously activated: "collective prior knowledge, individual prior knowledge and actual situationally co-created knowledge". The dialectical perspective adopted in SCA does not consider cooperation and egocentrism to be conflicting; rather, it "envisions a dialectical relationship between intention and attention in the construal of communication".

SCA explains communication as active and fluid interplay of intention and attention. The social aspect of communication is that the speaker's intention to produce an utterance meaningful to the hearer is driven by their cooperative drive. However, what they actually produce is primarily governed by their attention to the phenomenon under discussion. Attention, though social in its demand, and directly governed by individual egocentrism in its very nature is cognitive as it "is the result of salience". There are three major categories of intention: "a priori intention, salience-charged intention and emergent intention", but they are three different phenomena; rather, they are "three sides of the same phenomenon that may receive different emphasis at different points in the communicative process".

Data Analysis

The first four letters of Jinnah to Gandhi and the latter's reply to them were analyzed. The letters consist of a set of important questions Jinnah poses to Gandhi for clarification. Subsequently Gandhi writes the letter to clear the ambiguities that are creating confusions in Jinnah's mind. I have set every questions and its answer parallel to each other and analysed the two utterances as a single act of communication. In this way, seven acts of communication that are found in first two letters (one by Jinnah and one by Gandhi) were analyzed.

(Letter 1) Mr. Jinnah's letter dated September 10, 1940

Dear Mr. Gandhi,

With reference to our talk yesterday, ... make any headway with it (Panhwar, 2018)

Analysis: The writer's (Jinnah) prior knowledge of the conflict between the Muslims (Us) and the Hindus (Them) governs his egocentrism and his attention on legal rights of his community drives his intension to demand someone who has the representative authority of either the community or the political party to which he belongs. With high salience of representative character of the negotiating partner, Jinnah feels sceptic whether they can reach any agreement unless his partner has the representative status. Secondly, the writer's preplanned intention drives him to show that Hindu-Muslim conflict cannot be postponed to the time after the independence. Since the protection of the Muslims' legal rights before the independence is more salient to the writer, he creates a charged salience of representative character of his negotiating partner.

Nevertheless, I explained ... the proposals embodied in that formula (Panhwar, 2018).

Analysis: The writer's prior intention to give no importance to any other solution than Lahore Resolution drives him to foreground the resolution. However, when the response from his reader (Gandhi) shows that there was little chance of reaching an agreement on the resolution, his salience-triggered intention shifts to ask his partner to disambiguate some important terms. The dynamic blend of prior intention and salience-triggered attention leads to the writer's emergent intention to demand such a formula that can satisfy his primary objective of finding a constitutional protection of the Muslims' legal rights. We can see that the writer's egocentrism does not remain static; it integrates prior intention with salience-triggered intention and dynamically shifts to emergent intention. If the writer had not been cooperative, he would have remained adamant on the acceptance of Lahore Resolution. His readiness to consider the formula proposed by the other party shows that he is not rigid in his attitude.

(Letter 2) Gandhi's letter dated September 11, 1940

I received your letter ... the substance and given it a shape (Panhwar, 2018).

Analysis: The reader of the previous utterance on becoming the writer comprehends the information given to him with his prior knowledge of the conflict between the Hindus (Us) and the Muslims (Them). From the prior knowledge of his reader's feelings towards him, it seems relevant to him to start with the expression that shows his eagerness to please his negotiating partner. However, the reader's prior knowledge that that the writer is not trustworthy processes the information as completely irrelevant. The writer's egocentrism drives him to reiterate that he is negotiating as an individual. Furthermore, he employs hyperbole that it was the sole mission of his life to create religious and political harmony between the Muslims and the Hindus. Contrary to it, the reader's egocentrism processes the information as a threat to his claim that the two communities were separate nations. Since to the reader, the solution of the problem was not the harmony envisaged by the writer, he is interested more in knowing whether the writer's scheme corporates the fundamental points of Lahore Resolution.

After some discussion, you ... answered this in the foregoing (Panhwar, 2018).

Analysis: For Jinnah, the representative status of his negotiating partner and the legal position of the agreement they are proposing is highly salient. That is clear from his repetition of his reluctance to start negotiations on individual level. Even in his salience triggered intention that he was ready to attempt a solution he makes it clear that his willingness to continue talks does not mean that he accepts his partner's legal position. However, as a responsible member of human community, he moves to the emergent intention and shows his willingness to consider any possible solution of the conflict between the Hindus and the Muslims. Contrary to Jinnah, to Gandhi, the representative status has little importance. That can be seen from his response in which he merely refers to his previous statement that neither does he consider it important to be a representative of the community or the political party, nor he is convinced of the argument that for negotiating partners, it was incumbent to have a representative authority. We can see that in Gandhi's view, Jinnah is violating MQN by providing him the information that was unnecessary and superfluous. On the other hand, to Jinnah, Gandhi was violating MQN by withholding the necessary information. Furthermore, to him, Gandhi was also violating MM because

he was not elaborating his stance in clearly intelligible terms. Jinnah also believes that his hearer was intentionally creating ambiguity and was violating MR.

(2) *Clause 1: With regard to "the constitution for a free India" ... between the League and the Congress* (Panhwar, 2018).

Analysis: Again Jinnah's egocentrism drives him to focus more on the constitutional terms used in the Formula which his negotiating partner encourages him to accept as the final solution of the major conflict between the two communities. We can see that to Jinnah, clarity in the meanings of terms was necessary for the security of the legal rights of the community for which his political party has taken an unwavering stance in the form of idea of Pakistan and Hindustan. Moreover, as a president of the League and strict follower of constitution, he asserts that he cannot make any commitment to endorse the Formula unless it is in accordance with the creeds the League declares to follow. However, Jinnah's insistence on the clarification of such minute details was superfluous and was merely complicating the understanding between the parties.

(Letter 3) Mr. Jinnah's letter dated September 11, 1940

You say the "first condition of the exercise of the right of self-determination is ... "all parties means parties interested (Panhwar, 2018)."

Analysis: Since Jinnah's a priori intention is clear every ambiguity that surrounds the Formula presented to him. Soon, his salience-driven intention grips him and he starts posing a host of queries to his interlocutor about the appointment of commission, meaning of absolute majority, the details of proposed plebiscite. The minute details surrounding every query demonstrate that the speaker's production is driven by emergent intention. In other words, egocentrism drives him to focus more on the constitutional terms used in the Formula which his negotiating partner encourages him to accept as the final solution of the major conflict between the two communities. We can see that to Jinnah, clarity in the meanings of terms was necessary for the security of the legal rights of the community for which his political party has taken an unwavering stance in the form of idea of Pakistan and Hindustan. Moreover, as a president of the League and strict follower of constitution, he asserts that he cannot make any commitment to endorse the Formula unless it is in accordance with the creeds the League declares to follow. However, the speaker's insistence on the clarification of such minute details was superfluous to Gandhi and was merely complicating the understanding between the parties.

Summary of Findings

The results of the study show that for both Jinnah and Gandhi egocentrism remained a major hurdle to successfully negotiate a solution for the political deadlock they confronted. Since Jinnah's mind was totally pre-occupied by the security of political rights for the Muslims, he was focusing more on the legal status of the terms being used in the Formula and demanded in-depth clarification for which his utterances were characteristically marked by strict adherence to formality and constitution. On the other hand, Gandhi's a priori intention was the unity of the Muslims and the Hindus as one nation. Therefore, his salience charged intention was to persuade Jinnah to accept him as the true well-wisher of the Muslims. Since the emergent intention of both remained antagonistic, the ultimate communication failure was evident in the very first letter.

Conclusion

Jinnah-Gandhi talks failed because the interlocutors' conversation could not clear up intercultural confusions. We have seen that SCA offers important tools to interpret political conversations and understand better the causes of communication failure. It also provides clues to political leaders and the public to overcome limitations in intercultural conversations.

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Appendix

(Letter 1) Mr. Jinnah's letter dated September 10, 1940

Dear Mr. Gandhi,

With reference to our talk yesterday, September 9th, I understood from you that you had come to discuss the Hindu-Muslim settlement with me in your individual capacity, and not in any representative character or capacity on behalf of the Hindus or the Congress nor had you any authority to do so. I naturally pointed out to you that there must be someone on the other side with authority holding a representative status with whom I can negotiate and, if possible, come to a settlement of the Hindu-Muslim question, and that for the position you had adopted there was no precedent, and that this raises great difficulties in my way.

As you know, I can only speak on behalf of Muslim India and the All-India Muslim League, as the President of the organization which I represent, and as such I am subject to and governed by its constitution, rules and regulations. I think you realize and will admit that the settlement of the Hindu-Muslim question is the foremost and the major hurdle and unless representatives of these two nations put their heads together, how is one to make any headway with it? (Panhwar, 2018)

Nevertheless, I explained to you the Lahore resolution of March 1940, and tried to persuade you to accept the basic and fundamental principles embodied in it, but you not only refused to consider it but emphasized your opposition to the basis indicated in that resolution and remarked that there was "an ocean between you and me". When I asked you what was then the alternative you suggested, you put forward the formula of Mr. Rajagopalachari approved by you. We discussed it and as various matters were vague and nebulous, and some required clarification, I wanted to have a clear idea of what it really meant and what were its implications, and asked you for explanation, and clarification regarding the proposals embodied in that formula (Panhwar, 2018).

(Letter 2) Gandhi's letter dated September 11

I received your letter yesterday at 3-30 p.m. I was in the midst of appointments. I hasten to reply at the earliest opportunity (MR) (MQN). I have said in my letter to you, it is implied in the Rajaji formula and I have stated publicly (MQN) that I have approached you as an individual. My, life mission has been Hindu-Muslim unity which I want for its own sake (MR) but which is not to be achieved without the foreign ruling power being ousted. Hence the first condition of the exercise of the right of self-determination is achieving independence by the joint action of all parties and groups composing India. If such, joint action is unfortunately impossible, then too, I must fight with the assistance of such elements as can be brought together (Panhwar, 2018) (MM).

I am glad, therefore, that you did not break off our talks when I refused to assume or accept representative capacity (MR). Of course, I am pledged to use all the influence I may have with the Congress to ratify my agreement with you (MQL). May I remind you that the Rajaji formula was designed in the first instance for your acceptance and submission thereafter to the League? It is true that I said an ocean separated you and me in outlook (MM). But that had no reference to the Lahore resolution of the League. The Lahore resolution is indefinite (MM). Rajaji has taken from it the substance and given it a shape (Panhwar, 2018).

After some discussion, you requested me to formulate in writing my points that I thought required, or called for, an explanation and clarification and to communicate with you and that you would reply in writing before our next meeting on Monday, September, 11, at 5-30 p.m. I am, therefore, submitting to you the following points which require clarification:

(1) With regard to the preamble: in what capacity will you be a consenting party if any agreement is reached between you and me?

1. I have already answered this in the foregoing (Panhwar, 2018). (MQL) (MQN) (MM) (MR)

(2) Clause 1: With regard to "the constitution for a free India" referred to in this clause, I should like to know first—what constitution do you refer to, who will frame it and when will it come into being? Next, it is stated in the formula that "the Muslim League endorses the Indian demand for independence." Does it mean the Congress demand for independence as formulated in the August Resolution of 1942 by the All-India Congress Committee in Bombay or, if not, what is the significance of this term, for you know the Muslim League has made it clear not only by its resolutions but by its creed, which is embodied in its constitution, that we stand for the freedom and independence of the whole of this sub-continent, and that applies to Pakistan and Hindustan.

Next, it is stated that the Muslim League "will cooperate with the Congress in its formation of a provisional interim Government for the transitional period" I should like to know the basis or the lines on which such a government is to be set up or constituted. If you have a complete and definite scheme, please let me have it.

2. The constitution will be framed by the provisional government contemplated in the formula or an authority specially set up by it after the British power is withdrawn. The independence contemplated is of the whole of India as it stands. The basis for the formation of the provisional interim government will have to be agreed to between the League and the Congress (Panhwar, 2018). (MQL)(MQN)(MM)

(Letter 3) Mr. Jinnah's letter dated September 11

You say the "first condition of the exercise of the right of self-determination is achieving independence by the joint action of all parties and groups composing India. If such joint action is unfortunately impossible, then too I must fight with the assistance of such elements as can be brought together"

This, in my opinion, is, as I have repeatedly said, putting the cart before the horse, and is generally opposed to the policy and declarations of the All-India Muslim League. You are only holding on firmly to the August Resolution of 1942.

In order to achieve the freedom and independence of the peoples of India it is essential, in the first instance, that there should be a Hindu-Muslim settlement. Of course I am thankful to you when you say that you are pledged to use all the influence that you have with the Congress to ratify your agreement with me, but that is not enough in my judgment, although it will be a very valuable help to me. I once more ask you please to let me know what is your conception or basis for the formation of a provisional interim government. No doubt, it will be subject to, agreement between the League and the Congress, but I think in fairness you should at least give me some rough idea or lines of your conception, for you must have thought it out by now and I would like to know what are your proposals or scheme for the formation of a provisional interim government, which can give me some clear picture to understand it.

You have omitted to answer my question as to who will give effect to the findings of the commission, and also it is not clear to me what you mean by absolute majority, when you say it means "a clear majority over non-Muslim elements as in Sindh, Baluchistan or the Frontier, Province." You have not even replied to my question as to who will decide the form of the plebiscite and the franchise contemplated by the formula.

The answer to the fourth point does not carry any clear idea when you say "all parties means parties interested (Panhwar, 2018)."

(Letter 4) Mr. Jinnah's letter dated September 13

Dear Mr. Gandhi,

When you arrived here on the morning of the 12th to resume our talks you were good enough to inform me that you had not had time to attend to my letter of September 11th, which reached you the same day at 10-30. p.m. We met again today without having received your reply, and I am still waiting for it. Please therefore let me have your reply as soon as possible with regard to the various points mentioned in my letter to you of September 11th. I have your letter of 13th instant. I understood from our talks that you were in no hurry for my answer. I was therefore taking the matter in a leisurely fashion even hoping that as our talks proceeded and as cordiality increased, mutual clarification would come of itself and that we would only have to record our final agreement. But I understand and appreciate the other viewpoint. We should take nothing for granted. I should clarify your difficulties in understanding the Rajaji formula and you should do likewise regarding yours, i.e., the Muslim League Lahore resolution of 1940. With reference to the Lahore resolution, as agreed between us, I shall deal with it in a separate letter. Perhaps at the end of our discussion we shall discover, that Rajaji not only has not put the Lahore resolution out of shape and mutilated it but has given it substance and form. Indeed in view of your dislike of the Rajaji formula, I have, at any rate for the moment, put it out of my mind and I am now concentrating on the Lahore resolution in the hope of finding a ground for mutual agreement. So much for the first paragraph of your letter. As to the second, I do hold that unless we oust the third party we shall not be able to live at peace with one another. That does not mean, that I may not make an effort to find ways and means of establishing a living peace between us. You ask for my conception of the basis for a provisional interim government. I would have told you if I had any scheme in mind. I imagine that if we two can agree it would be for us to consult the other parties. I can say, this, that any provisional government to inspire confidence at the present moment must represent all parties. When that moment arrives, I shall have been replaced by some authoritative person, though you will have, me always at your beck and call when you have converted me or I, you; or by mutual conversion we have become one mind functioning through two bodies. As to the third point, the provisional government being the appointing authority will give effect to the findings of the commission. This I thought was implied in my previous answer. Rajaji tells me that absolute majority is used in his formula in the same sense as it is used in ordinary legal parlance wherever more than two groups are dealt with. I cling to my own answer. But you will perhaps suggest a third meaning and persuade me to accept it. The form of the plebiscite and franchise must be left to be decided by the provisional interim government unless we decide it now. I should say it should be by adult suffrage of all the inhabitants of the Pakistan area. As to the fourth, "all parties" means you and I and everyone else holding views on the question at issue will and should seek by peaceful persuasion to influence public opinion as is done where democracy functions wholly or in part (Panhwar, 2018).

(Letter 5) Mr. Gandhi's letter dated September 14:

Dear Qaid-e-Azam,

I have your letter of 13th instant. I understood from our talks that you were in no hurry for my answer. I was therefore taking the matter in a leisurely fashion even hoping that as our talks proceeded and as cordiality increased, mutual clarification would come of itself and that we would only have to record our final agreement. But I understand and appreciate the other viewpoint. We should take nothing for granted. I should clarify your difficulties in understanding the Rajaji formula and you should do likewise regarding yours, i.e., the Muslim League Lahore resolution of 1940.

With reference to the Lahore resolution, as agreed between us, I shall deal with it in a separate letter. Perhaps at the end of our discussion we shall discover, that Rajaji not only has not put the Lahore resolution out of shape and mutilated it but has given it substance and form. Indeed in view of your dislike of the Rajaji formula, I have, at any rate for the moment, put it out of my mind and I am now concentrating on the Lahore resolution in the hope of finding a ground for mutual agreement. So much for the first paragraph of your letter.