



Silences that Speak: A Gricean Analysis of Implicature and Interpersonal Conflict in The Holdovers (2023)

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how conversational implicature is constructed through verbal and non-verbal communication in *The Holdovers* (2023) and how it contributes to the development of interpersonal conflict. Although previous studies have extensively examined conversational implicature in film discourse, they have primarily emphasized spoken dialogue, while the pragmatic role of silence remains relatively underexplored. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, this study analyzes seven purposively selected conflict-related scenes based on Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle, particularly the flouting and violation of conversational maxims. The findings indicate that conversational implicature is generated through the interaction between verbal utterances and silence, with silence functioning as an active pragmatic strategy rather than merely the absence of speech. Rather than functioning merely as the absence of speech, silence operates as a meaningful pragmatic strategy that conveys implied meanings and shapes interpersonal relationships through contextual interpretation. The analysis further demonstrates that conversational implicature contributes to the development, intensification, and resolution of interpersonal conflict by expressing emotional states that are left implicit rather than explicitly verbalized. These findings extend previous studies by demonstrating that silence functions not only as a cinematic device but also as an active pragmatic resource in constructing meaning and interpersonal conflict in film discourse.

Keywords: Conversational Implicature, Gricean Maxims, Silence, Interpersonal Conflict, Film Discourse

1. Introduction

Not all forms of conflict necessarily use words to express themselves since there are some situations when silence can better communicate certain feelings than words can. In movies, pauses, hesitation, and lack of response often have an underlying meaning that helps create a feeling of dramatic conflict between the characters or adds another layer of emotional tension. This approach is especially prominent in *The Holdovers* (Payne, 2023), which is a film that features the themes of isolation, sorrow, and interpersonal conflict through indirect and restrained communication. In particular, *The Holdovers* takes place in a boarding school during winter vacations in the 1970s and features Paul Hunham, a tough classics teacher; Angus Tully, a conflicted student and Mary Lamb, a cafeteria manager mourning for her dead son. In other words, most of the information about the characters' experiences and inter-personal relations is provided indirectly.

Human communication does not always involve direct and overt expression. Speakers often make their communication indirect in day-to-day life, which forces the listeners to draw inferences regarding the communicated message in light of the context, not in its literal form. This type of indirectness allows speakers to express attitude, emotion, intention, or evaluation of something without directly expressing it. Thus, the success of communication involves both what is communicated as well as its interpretation in the specific context (Grice, 1975; Thomas, 2014; Yule, 1996).

Explanation of this situation can be provided through the theory of conversational implicature proposed by Grice (1975) based on the Cooperative Principle. According to the theory, successful communication should

follow four conversational maxims: quantity, quality, relation, and manner. Participants are supposed to be informative, truthful, relevant, and clear in their speech. Nevertheless, participants might intentionally violate those rules in order to make a communication convey additional meanings beyond the literal understanding of their statements. Those implied meanings are called conversational implicatures and are derived from the context and common knowledge of interlocutors, not from language forms (Allot, 2018; Levinson, 1983). In Saifudin's (2020) opinion, the principle of conversational implicature represents the listener's capacity to interpret meaning in the light of both linguistic forms and communicative context.

Earlier researches have shown how significant a role conversational implicature performs in establishing implied meanings in different communication situations, especially in movie discourse. According to Agsa & Ambalegin (2022), the conversational implicatures of Central Intelligence always occur through indirect answers and non-literal speech which is interpreted on the basis of the context. The same idea was expressed by Akmal & Yana (2020): the breaking of maxims in the Kingdom of Heaven leads to misunderstanding and formation of the conflict between characters. Hidayati & Mahmud (2022) prove that the conversational implicature in *Green Book* serves as an effective tool of expressing additional meanings and emotions.

Conversational implicatures have also been researched outside of the film genre. According to Pertiwi et al. (2023), implied meanings are mainly obtained through contextual analysis and by violating conversational maxims in Banyumasan jokes on YouTube. Likewise, Liliyan et al. (2023) explored conversational implicatures in students' conversations in the classroom and found that participants used indirect meanings in order to reach their objectives in communication. In terms of the Indonesian films, Yulianti & Utomo (2020) state that implied meanings in the movie *Laskar Pelangi* are usually expressed indirectly.

Contemporary investigations further support the importance of conversational implicature within cinematic communication. According to Ainiyah & Sholichah (2025), whose investigation is dedicated to the film *The Holdovers*, conversational implicatures can be derived from spoken dialogue and flouting/maxim-violating conversational rules. Similarly, the work of Firdaus & Satria (2025) concerning the film *Uglies* (2024) showed that conversational implicatures are mostly perceived via contextual interpretation of spoken dialogue. Thus, it can be concluded that contemporary investigations reveal the relevance of conversational implicature research in different communicative contexts. Nevertheless, while the object of investigation and methodological approaches are varied, all the scholars pay significant attention to the spoken utterance as the major source of conversational implicature.

Conversational implicature has also been confirmed in recent researches in cinematic conversation. According to Pinayungan et al. (2024), in their study of *The Silence of the Lambs*, it was found that conversational implicature arises when the maxims formulated by Grice are violated and that the context can be used for understanding the intended meaning of the speaker. In a similar vein, it was discovered by Haromain et al. (2023) in their study of *Antares* that indirect statements and violations of maxims are important in understanding the intentions and emotions of characters.

While these studies have made significant contributions to our knowledge of conversational implicatures in films and other communicative situations, they mainly concentrate on implicatures derived from oral speech. Studies, which focus on the significance of context, still consider verbal language as the main medium for deriving conversational implicatures. Therefore, the function of silence in the communicative process has been given very little attention, especially when discussing the concept of Grice's Cooperative Principle. The use of silence in films is mostly understood as an artistic or emotional tool rather than a pragmatic one.

However, even if these researches have contributed greatly to our understanding of conversation implicatures in movies and other communication processes, these studies have focused on the implicatures of oral communication only. Studies, which pay attention to the importance of the context, continue to regard the language as the primary tool for the generation of conversation implicatures. This means that the role of silence as a part of the communicative process has not been taken into consideration sufficiently enough, especially concerning the idea of Grice's Cooperative Principle.

The role of silence in communication has already been extensively explored by pragmatic and interpersonal communication scholars. Instead of being considered simply the lack of speech, silence could be viewed as a communicative act itself, which is determined by the context in which it occurs. According to Jaworski (1993), silence may have different interpersonal meanings, such as grief, resistance, doubt, detachment, and embarrassment. In her turn, Sifianou (1997) asserts that silence can be used as a means to achieve politeness, to avoid conflict, to control emotions, and to speak indirectly. Kurzon (2007) states that pragmatically valued silence is possible when the verbal response is socially appropriate, although consciously omitted. Finally, Tannen (1985) says that often silence conveys the meaning which cannot be conveyed by words, especially in emotionally intense situations.

Conversational implicature has been shown to occur in recent studies conducted on cinematic conversation as well. As noted by Pinayungan et al. (2024), from their analysis of *The Silence of the Lambs*, conversational implicature occurs where there is a violation of the maxims stated by Grice and where context may be used to derive the intended meaning of the speaker. Similarly, as reported by Haromaini & Kusuma (2023) in their analysis of *Antares*, it has been shown that indirect speech and violations of maxims help in deriving the intentions and emotions of characters.

Despite this divergence in their conceptualization of silence, however, both agree that silence is used as a deliberate form of communication rather than merely lack of verbal articulation. However, most of these researches look at silence from sociolinguistic or interpersonal viewpoints without associating it with implicature formation in relation to the Cooperative Principle put forward by Grice (1975). There is thus a lack of literature on how silence can be used along with verbal speech in constructing conversational implicatures and interpersonal conflict in cinematic discourse. It is for this reason that the current study, which considers silence as an active pragmatic tool and the Cooperative Principle as its major framework, is justified.

On account of the above-mentioned research gap, the current study examines how verbal utterances and silence together work to create conversational implicatures in *The Holdovers* (2023) and the role of the conversational implicatures in the creation of interpersonal conflict among the characters of the movie. Applying Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle to the analysis of the movie, particular attention is paid to the flouting and violation of conversational maxims and more specifically the maxim of quantity. Seven conflict scenes involving verbal utterances and silence have been selected purposefully for the analysis. The study thus adds to the existing literature on conversational implicature in film discourse in the sense that it shows how silence can be regarded not just as the absence of speech but as a pragmatic strategy for implying meaning, showing emotions, and creating interpersonal conflict.

2. Method

In this research, a qualitative descriptive methodology has been used for linguistic pragmatics analysis of how conversational implicature is created through speech and silence in conflicts of *The Holdovers* (Payne, 2023). A qualitative descriptive approach is suitable because it aims to provide a comprehensive description of a phenomenon within its natural context (Lambert & Lambert, 2012). Qualitative research has been chosen due to the fact that this study revolves around understanding context, indirect communication, and meanings behind the words in the form of communication (Creswell, 2019). This research will utilize Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle, especially maxims of quantity, quality, relation, and manner; however, focus will be placed on the construction of conversational implicature due to flouting and violation of maxims. Here, the silence will be regarded as a communicative act where meaning can be inferred despite the lack of verbal communication.

The main data source was *The Holdovers* (Payne, 2023). The data included verbal utterances and non-verbal aspects of communication, such as silence, pauses, hesitation, partial responses, and changes in tone that emerged within interactions related to conflict. Through purposive sampling, seven conflict-related scenes that contained conversational implicature were selected for analysis. Data were collected through watching the film several times, observing the dynamics of characters' behavior, and manually transcribing the relevant scenes with the help of subtitles. Data were sorted into data sheets where scenes were described along with their utterances, types of silence used, maxim violated, and implicated meanings.

The analysis of data was done in four steps: detection of utterances and silences that involved implicature, classification based on violated Gricean maxim and its type, interpretation of implicated meanings depending on context, and study of the implications' communicative roles in connection with interpersonal conflict. The results are illustrated in table format.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Results

3.1.1 Overview of Conversational Implicature in *The Holdovers*

Findings on Conversational Implicature from *The Holdovers* (Payne, 2023) will be provided in this part. The results will be arranged based on the selected conflict scenes which met the criteria for analysis in this research. Selected scenes were those that either had maxim flouting or maxim violation, and how the utterances and silence contributed to conveying implications in the interpersonal conflicts.

Unlike regarding silence as mere absence of talk, this research treats silence as a meaningful act of communication that helps build conversational implication every time there is an expectation of verbal reaction but not delivered. Thus, verbal communication as well as non-verbal acts of communication like pauses, hesitation, partial response, and silence were considered in this research.

In order to ensure systematic analysis, the following criteria are used to analyze each scene, namely scene description, participants in the scene, utterance or silence, kind of silence, maxim violated, kind of maxim, pragmatic function, and contextual meaning of silence. Scene description is an analytical category provided by the researcher which serves to describe the core communicative event in each chosen scene. However, the classification of silence is determined by the communicative function of silence in the interaction in accordance with the views of Jaworski (1993), Kurzon (2007), Sifianou (1997), and Tannen (1985). Results are described separately in order to ensure clear explanation of conversational implicatures conveyed through utterances and silences.

3.1.1.1 Silence as Emotional Rejection

The first selected scene takes place after Paul Hunham and Lydia Crane spend time together during the Christmas holidays. Believing that their relationship may develop further, Hunham expresses his feelings by saying, *"You're a very sweet person."* Instead of responding verbally, Lydia quietly leaves the room without saying anything. Her silence becomes the central communicative act in the interaction, requiring Hunham to infer her response from her behavior rather than from explicit words.

Table 1. Silence as Emotional Rejection

Category	Description
Scene Description	Hunham's Confession Scene
Characters Involved	Paul Hunham, Lydia Crane
Utterance/Silence	Hunham: <i>"You're a very sweet person..."</i> (Ms. Crane leaves without responding.)
Maxim Involved	Quantity
Type of Maxim	Maxim Flouting
Pragmatic Function	Emotional rejection; avoidance of direct confrontation
Contextual Meaning	Ms. Crane's silence implicitly communicates that she does not reciprocate Hunham's feelings, despite never expressing rejection verbally.

Interpretation

First of all, it becomes clear that the conversational implicature occurs due to the absence of the verbal response. Thus, after the declaration made by Hunham about his feeling towards Ms. Crane, she leaves without uttering anything. Unlike the explicit rejection or acceptance, she makes no verbal response leaving it up to him to understand the meaning behind her absence of response.

From the viewpoint of the theory of Cooperative Principle offered by Paul Grice, this case could be considered as the flouting of the maxim of quantity since the required conversational contribution is not offered. Despite the fact that less information is conveyed, the meaning of the conversation can still be understood based on the situational context.

Silence serves as a vital means of communication that allows to reject someone without using any aggressive manner of communication. In this way, the implicature can be seen not as a result of verbal message, but as the result of the contextual meaning and silence.

3.1.1.2 Silence as an Expression of Grief

Mary's emotional breakdown occurs after she recalls the death of her son, Curtis, who was killed during the Vietnam War. The conversation takes place while Mary, Hunham, and Tully are spending Christmas together. As Mary remembers her son, she quietly says, *"He's gone,"* before breaking down in tears. Rather than responding verbally, Hunham remains silent and allows Mary to express her grief. This interaction demonstrates how silence becomes an essential communicative resource in conveying emotional meaning beyond spoken language.

Table 2. Silence as an Expression of Grief

Category	Description
Scene Description	Mary's Emotional Breakdown Scene
Characters Involved	Mary Lamb, Paul Hunham, Angus Tully

Utterance/Silence	Mary: <i>"He's gone."</i> (Mary cries while Hunham remains silent.)
Maxim Involved	Quantity
Type of Maxim	Maxim Flouting
Pragmatic Function	Expression of grief and emotional restraint
Contextual Meaning	Hunham's silence implies empathy and acknowledges Mary's grief without attempting to comfort her verbally.

Interpretation

This conversation shows how implicatures of speech acts are created via the interaction of verbal speech act and silence. Following the statement "He's gone," made by Mary, the conversation consists of crying and the silence of Hunham. The speaker does not provide any response in order to make the emotional content of the statement uttered by Mary important for the conversation.

According to Grice's Cooperative Principle, the silence of Hunham constitutes the flouting of the maxim of quantity as the speaker does not make any contribution to the conversation, but the intended meaning is clear due to the emotional background of the speakers.

Silence expresses empathy, emotional control and respect towards Mary's feelings. By remaining silent, Hunham accepts the fact that the situation is beyond the scope of language and cannot be described with words. Therefore, it can be stated that the implicature is created via the interaction of speech act of Mary and silence of Hunham.

3.1.1.3 Implicature through Quality Maxim Violation

During a conversation with Hunham and Mary, Tully unexpectedly claims that his father has died by saying, *"My father's dead."* In reality, his father is still alive but is undergoing psychiatric treatment. Tully deliberately provides false information to conceal his personal circumstances and avoid discussing his complicated family situation. This scene illustrates how conversational implicature may arise not only through silence but also through the intentional violation of conversational maxims

Table 3. Implicature through Quality Maxim Violation

Category	Description
Scene Description	Tully's False Statement
Characters Involved	Angus Tully, Paul Hunham, Mary Lamb
Utterance/Silence	Tully: <i>"My father's dead."</i>
Maxim Involved	Quality
Type of Maxim	Maxim Violation
Pragmatic Function	Concealing personal circumstances and avoiding emotional disclosure
Contextual Meaning	Tully deliberately provides false information to avoid revealing the truth about his father's condition and his family problems.

Interpretation

In contrast to the earlier examples, conversational implicature in this case occurs through verbal communication rather than non-verbal communication by means of silence. Tully consciously informs Hunham and Mary about his dead father although he knows that it is not true. In other words, Tully's utterance violates the maxim of quality since it does not provide accurate information.

The false information in this case cannot be considered a mere lie since it is an instrument of indirect communication. Namely, by lying about his dead father, Tully manages to avoid explaining the painful truth about his mentally ill father whom he did not see for a long time. In other words, lying helps the character to conceal his vulnerability and stop further questioning of him concerning his family.

Implicature generated in this conversation should be interpreted as something more than just a mere statement. After learning the truth about Tully's father in the later part of the film, the earlier statement can be understood as defensive one. In conclusion, the given example shows how conversational implicature may occur due to the violation of the maxim of quality when speakers provide false information.

3.1.1.4 Silence as Disappointment and Broken Expectations

This scene takes place when Tully secretly visits his father in Boston despite his mother's explicit prohibition. Before the silence occurs, Tully enthusiastically tells his father about his academic achievements and school experiences, hoping to receive recognition and rebuild their relationship. However, instead of responding to Tully's stories, his father appears detached from reality and says, *"I think they're putting something in my food."* Realizing his father's mental condition, Tully remains silent. His silence reflects his shock, disappointment, and painful realization that the relationship he longs for cannot be restored, making this moment one of the film's most significant instances of interpersonal and emotional conflict.

Table 4. Silence as Disappointment and Broken Expectations

Category	Description
Scene Description	Tully Visits His Father Scene
Characters Involved	Angus Tully, Tully's Father
Utterance/Silence	Father: <i>"I think they're putting something in my food."</i> (Tully remains silent.)
Maxim Involved	Quantity
Type of Maxim	Maxim Flouting
Pragmatic Function	Expression of disappointment and emotional restraint
Contextual Meaning	Tully's silence implies shock and disappointment upon realizing his father's mental condition and the impossibility of having the reunion he had hoped for.

Interpretation

This example shows how conversational implicature arises as a result of silence which follows an emotionally important exchange. Prior to the silence, Tully expresses himself about his accomplishments at school to his father in hopes to gain some recognition and restore the relationship between the two. But instead of joining into the conversation, his father tells him *"I think they're putting something in my food,"* which means that he is unable to have a normal dialogue with Tully.

From the viewpoint of Grice's Cooperative Principle, Tully's silence implies the breaking of the maxim of quantity in that Tully refuses to make his contribution in the conversation despite the fact that it is expected from him.

In this case, the silence serves as an implication of disappointment, shock, and resignation, which means that Tully understands that his desire to become closer to his father is impossible due to his father's illness. Thus, Tully conveys emotions through the lack of speech, which means that the conversational implicature arises as a result of conveying emotional meaning implicitly.

3.1.1.5 Silence as Emotional Understanding

This scene takes place after Tully's visit to his father. While spending time together, Tully opens up to Hunham about his personal life. He explains that his parents are divorced and reveals that his mother forbade him from visiting his father because she believed the visit would only cause further emotional pain. Reflecting on the situation, Tully says, *"Maybe when she looks at me... she sees him,"* referring to his father. Instead of interrupting or immediately responding, Hunham remains silent and attentively listens. His silence allows Tully to express his emotions freely and marks a turning point in their relationship, as it conveys empathy and mutual understanding rather than emotional distance.

Table 5. Silence as Emotional Understanding

Category	Description
Scene Description	Tully Confides in Hunham Scene
Characters Involved	Angus Tully, Paul Hunham
Utterance/Silence	Tully: <i>"Maybe when she looks at me... she sees him."</i> Hunham remains silent while listening.
Maxim Involved	Quantity
Type of Maxim	Maxim Flouting
Pragmatic Function	Expression of empathy and emotional understanding
Contextual Meaning	Hunham's silence implies empathy, attentive listening, and acceptance of Tully's emotional disclosure without interrupting or judging him.

Interpretation

It illustrates the process through which conversational implicature arises as a result of the interaction of Tully's emotional revelation and the silence of Hunham. Having stated the reason for his parents' separation and how his mother restricted him from seeing his father, Tully analyzes his situation emotionally, stating, "Maybe when she looks at me...she sees him". His utterance shows that he recognizes his mother may see him as his father due to painful memories associated with him.

In contrast to Tully's reaction, Hunham does not react quickly to what Tully had just revealed, but chooses silence to give Tully an opportunity to pour out his heart. In light of Grice's Cooperative Principle, Hunham flouting of the maxim of quantity since he refuses to provide the contribution of words that he would be expected to say. Nevertheless, in spite of the lack of any reaction, the context allows interpreting the silence.

The silence functions as an implicit expression of empathy and emotional understanding. By choosing to listen rather than interrupt, Hunham acknowledges Tully's vulnerability and provides emotional support without relying on spoken words. The resulting implicature suggests that genuine understanding and acceptance can be communicated through silence, allowing the interaction to strengthen the relationship between the two characters.

3.1.1.6 Silence as Empathy and Emotional Support

This scene takes place outside the headmaster's office after Tully learns that he may be expelled from Barton Academy and transferred to a military school. He explains that the consequence results from secretly visiting his father in Boston despite his mother's prohibition. While expressing his fear and uncertainty about his future, Tully receives no verbal response from Mary. Instead, Mary quietly sits beside him, gently holds his hand, and looks at him with concern. Her silence becomes a meaningful communicative act that conveys emotional support without the need for spoken words.

Table 6. Silence as Empathy and Emotional Support

Category	Description
Scene Description	Outside Headmaster's Office Scene
Characters Involved	Angus Tully, Mary Lamb
Utterance/Silence	Tully explains that he may be expelled and transferred to a military school. Mary remains silent and gently holds Tully's hand.
Maxim Involved	Quantity
Type of Maxim	Maxim Flouting
Pragmatic Function	Tully explains that he may be expelled and transferred to a military school. Mary remains silent and gently holds Tully's hand.
Contextual Meaning	Mary's silence implies compassion, concern, and emotional support without requiring verbal reassurance.

Interpretation

Here, we can see how conversational implicature arises from the interplay between the speech act performed by Tully and the silent act performed by Mary. When Tully tells her that he might be expelled from Barton Academy due to his visit to his father, Mary decides not to speak back to him but just holds his hand and looks at him sympathetically.

In relation to Grice's Cooperative Principle, this is an example of the maxim of quantity being flouted since Mary does not make any verbal utterance despite the fact that one should have been made in response to the previous one. Despite her silence, Mary is able to convey her message in a physical form using her facial expression and gestures.

Thus, in this case, silence becomes an implicit form of showing empathy and care. Since Mary is not able to provide any comforting words for Tully, she uses her silence as a way of communicating her message without using the verbal means of communication.

3.1.1.7 Silence as Acceptance and Reconciliation

This scene takes place at the end of the film when Tully and Hunham meet for the last time before going their separate ways. Tully learns that Hunham has sacrificed his own position at Barton Academy by taking responsibility for Tully's unauthorized trip to Boston, allowing Tully to remain at the school while

Hunham is dismissed from his job. During their conversation, they exchange words of encouragement and gratitude, reflecting the close relationship they have developed throughout the story. As they prepare to leave, both characters briefly pause before simply saying, "See ya." The silence surrounding their farewell conveys emotions that neither character expresses directly, making it a meaningful communicative act beyond spoken language.

Table 7. Silence as Acceptance and Reconciliation

Category	Description
Scene Description	Final Farewell Scene
Characters Involved	Paul Hunham, Angus Tully
Utterance/Silence	Hunham: "Keep your head up, all right? You can do this." Tully: "Yeah, I was gonna tell you the same thing." (Both pause.) Tully: "See ya." Hunham: "See ya."
Maxim Involved	Quantity
Type of Maxim	Maxim Flouting
Pragmatic Function	Expression of mutual understanding, acceptance, and emotional reconciliation
Contextual Meaning	The shared silence implies gratitude, affection, and mutual respect that neither character chooses to express explicitly before parting.

Interpretation

This scene demonstrates how conversational implicature is generated through the interaction between brief utterances and shared silence. Although Hunham and Tully exchange a few words before parting, both characters avoid explicitly expressing their gratitude, affection, or sadness. Instead, these emotions are conveyed through a prolonged pause before they simply say, "See ya."

From the perspective of Grice's Cooperative Principle, the silence represents the flouting of the maxim of quantity because both characters intentionally provide less verbal information than would normally be expected in a farewell after the significant experiences they have shared. Rather than openly discussing their emotions, they rely on the surrounding context to communicate meanings that extend beyond their literal words.

This common silence represents a form of implication of understanding, acceptance and emotional resolution. The sacrifices made by Hunham on account of Tully and the recognition by Tully of these sacrifices has already set a strong emotional bond between both of them. As such, their farewell is symbolic of emotions much deeper than those expressed through their words alone, and implies feelings of gratitude, respect, and good wishes for one another's future. It can thus be seen that the conversation implicature is generated by what is left unsaid.

To summarize, the analysis identified seven conflict-related scenes containing conversational implicature in *The Holdovers*. Six scenes demonstrate the flouting of the maxim of quantity, while one scene involves the violation of the maxim of quality. The findings indicate that conversational implicature in the film is predominantly constructed through the interaction between utterances and silence, with silence functioning as a meaningful communicative resource in most conflict situations. These findings provide the basis for the following discussion on how conversational implicature contributes to the construction of interpersonal conflict in the film.

3.2 Discussion

3.2.1 Utterances and Silence in Generating Implicature

Indeed, the results show how conversational implicature in *The Holdovers* is produced by the combination of oral utterances and silence. Not being perceived as a mere lack of speech, silence becomes a powerful communication means allowing the characters to convey certain meanings without verbal communication. This proves the concept by Grice (1975), who stated that the principle of cooperation suggests the idea of flouting the expectation of the conversational rules by the speaker that forces the hearer to find out the meaning from the context.

As for the second research question, the findings prove that the maxim of quantity becomes the most common one among the flouted maxims and appears in six out of seven analyzed scenes. In these scenes, the characters deliberately give less information to their conversation partners than expected, leaving space for

silence, pauses, and incomplete answers to convey the meaning in the context. Silence does not lead to a lack of communication but rather helps the participants and the audience create the meaning using context, emotions, and relationships between people.

Indeed, these results are in agreement with Jaworski's (1993) theory stating that silence is a form of communication and should be treated as a social action and not communicative breakdown. The story is full of instances when silence carries meanings that cannot be conveyed using spoken language alone. When characters face challenging emotional situations, they tend to remain silent, thus letting the viewers deduce their emotions like grief, disappointment, empathy, uncertainty, and reconciliation. As a result, silence becomes a form of communication complementing verbal communication.

One of the examples of silence conveying meaning is Mary's Emotional Breakdown Scene. In this scene, after saying "He's gone" in a quiet voice, Mary stops speaking and starts crying without explaining her emotions with words. Using Gricean approach, we may say that silence in this case is a violation of the maxim of quantity since Mary provides information in lesser quantity than is usually expected from the speakers in this conversation. However, in this case, the context of the conversation allows Hunham, Tully, and the viewers to interpret the meaning of this silence. Thus, silence becomes a way for conveying intense grief and fatigue, implying that some emotions cannot be conveyed with words.

There are many similarities in the Implication in Tully Visits His Father Scene. Before traveling to Boston, Tully had hopes to reunite with his father after a long time. Nevertheless, during his conversation with him, his father shows evident signs of a mental disorder and does not show any capacity for rational communication. After that, Tully stays silent because of his father's phrase, "I think they're putting something in my food." It happens due to the fact that Tully understands that the reality contradicts all his expectations and experiences an emotional shock because of the impossibility to talk with his father as he wanted to do before. Thus, the implicature appears not because of some phrases but due to the intention of the person to remain silent. As Kurzon (2007) claims, there can be understood as pragmatically interpreted only in case when there was a possibility of speaking, but it was deliberately omitted.

Silence is also used to convey a message of empathy rather than emotional detachment. This is seen in Tully Confides in Hunham Scene where Tully talks about his parent's divorce and says, "Maybe when she looks at me... she sees him." Hunham, rather than immediately giving any suggestion, stays quiet and listens to him carefully. Silence here does not reflect indifference but reflects empathy, understanding, and respect towards Tully's emotional vulnerability. The Conversational Implicature here is formed due to the silence of Hunham as he does not give any interruption or verbal reply. This study is in accordance with Sifianou (1997) who says that silence can also be considered a way of being polite and emotionally controlled.

In a similar manner, the Outside the Headmaster's Office Scene reveals that silence can serve as a means of conveying sympathy. When Tully tells Mary that he might be expelled from Barton Academy for his unscheduled meeting with his father, Mary does not react by saying anything. Rather, she silently takes Tully's hand and gazes at him. Without any verbal assurance, she succeeds in making Tully understand that she is sharing his emotional burden through her action and her silence. In other words, the communicative message comes through context, rather than through words, which is consistent with the idea put forward by Grice (1975) that effective communication involves not just linguistic expression, but contextual understanding as well.

The final farewell between Hunham and Tully provides another important example of silence functioning as a pragmatic strategy. Before parting, both characters exchange only a few brief utterances before pausing and simply saying, "See ya." Despite the simplicity of the dialogue, the surrounding silence communicates gratitude, mutual respect, emotional acceptance, and reconciliation. After everything they have experienced together, neither character needs to explicitly express appreciation because these meanings are already understood through their shared experiences. Their silence therefore strengthens rather than weakens communication, demonstrating that conversational implicature may emerge from what remains unsaid.

Though most of the findings deal with the use of silence, it can also be noticed that there is an implication made by spoken language in one particular instance. In Tully's False Statement scene, Tully makes the statement, "My father's dead," which is actually not true. This statement is a violation of the maxim of quality because it involves the intentional sharing of incorrect information. But in this case, the statement does not serve as deception; it indirectly conveys Tully's anger, frustration, and emotional rejection of his father.

The above-mentioned results contribute to existing investigations related to the concept of conversational implicature within films. Earlier researches done by Agsa & Ambalegin (2022), Akmal & Yana (2020), and Hidayati & Mahmud (2022) have proved the common use of maxim flouting and violations within oral conversations as means to achieve conversational implicature. Similarly, Ainiyah & Sholichah (2025), and Firdaus & Satria (2025) who investigated *The Holdovers* and *Uglies* respectively have emphasized the

significance of verbal utterances as the primary tool of conveying conversational implicature. Although these researchers succeed in explaining the creation of indirect meanings within conversations, they give little attention to silence as an independent communicative act.

The current study therefore adds to the existing literature by proving that silence can also be used as a pragmatic tool for creating conversational implicature. As opposed to the mere presence of silence alongside speech, it is revealed in the current study that silence plays an active role in the creation of meaning through the expression of emotions, managing interpersonal relations, and making interpretations of the context.

In general, it can be noted that both utterance and silence go hand-in-hand in creating conversational implicature in *The Holdovers*. As speech forms the meaning of interaction, which is stated explicitly, silence serves as something that adds more meaning to this interaction by being intentionally unsaid. Thus, this film shows that conversational implicature is created not only through the use of verbal communication but also through non-verbal communication when characters do not say things on purpose. Therefore, the study supports the idea that silence is to be considered an active pragmatic technique used in creating conflicts in films.

3.2.2 *Implicature and Interpersonal Conflict*

The findings further highlight the extent to which the concept of conversational implicature is important for the construction of interpersonal conflict in the movie, *The Holdovers*. Instead of using only direct ways of communicating to create conflict, the movie also uses indirect communication methods to construct conflicts. Indirect communication methods used include the use of silence, pauses, partial answers, and other implications. Conflict therefore arises not only due to the things the characters directly communicate, but also due to the things that the characters do not communicate.

One important contribution of conversational implicature is the creation of misunderstanding and communicative disruption. This is most clearly illustrated in Tully's False Statement Scene, where Tully falsely claims that his father is dead. From the Gricean point of view, this statement breaches the Maxim of Quality, since it is intentionally conveying false information. Nevertheless, the value of such an utterance is more profound than mere lying. Instead of deceiving other participants of the dialogue, Tully conveys through this statement his feelings of disappointment, anger, and rejection towards his father. Lack of any clarification only reinforces misunderstanding by making other participants try to reveal the concealed emotional meaning of the statement. Thus, the interpersonal conflict presented in this scene arises from both the untrue information and emotions conveyed implicitly in it. This fact supports the results of the researches conducted by Agsa & Ambalegin (2022) and Akmal & Yana (2020) who state that violations of conversational maxims are often used as pragmatic tools for conveying implicit meanings.

Conversational implicature also plays an important role in generating the emotional conflict by enabling characters to express emotions which cannot be verbalized directly. Such an observation can be made in connection with Mary's Emotional Breakdown Scene, during which Mary whispers, "He's gone" and then remains silent crying. The silence itself expresses grief and sorrow on Mary's part; instead of continuing the conversation, the silence indicates a deep sense of grief and sadness experienced by the character. Despite the fact that no disagreement emerges between the characters in question, emotional conflict is generated due to the inability of Hunham and Tully to provide proper responses to Mary's distress. In this case, the conflict does not emerge due to the disagreement, but rather on account of the emotional overload that the interaction generates. The results obtained coincide with the position of Jaworski (1993) who defines silence as a communicative act.

Likewise, conversational implicature can be used by characters to express their inner psychological conflict, as in the case of Tully Visits His Father Scene. Prior to the visit, Tully was hopeful that he could reunite with his father after being separated from him for many years. During the conversation, his father's irrational statements show how seriously ill his mind is. Tully does not respond verbally, but stays quiet instead. His silence demonstrates the disappointment, frustration, and the breaking down of his hopes and expectations. Instead of stating explicitly what he feels, Tully avoids interaction; thus, it is possible for the viewer to understand his feelings through context clues. As Kurzon (2007) notes, silence gains pragmatic meaning when there is an expectation for verbal communication, yet it is consciously avoided.

However, the study also shows that the use of implicature through conversation may not necessarily escalate the interpersonal conflict. In some scenes, silence becomes a way of showing support and solving conflict. For instance, in *Outside the Headmaster's Office Scene*, Mary does not speak up when Tully tells her about his fear of expulsion from school. She just gives him a silent hug by holding his hand and looking at him with empathy. In doing so, she is able to communicate empathy and support more through silence than through speech. In addition, in the *Final Farewell Scene*, Hunham and Tully exchange only a few words before they

bid each other a quiet good-bye. Their silence in saying good-bye symbolizes their appreciation, respect, acceptance, and reconciliation for the fights that they went through in the film. Thus, it becomes evident that these results corroborate the claims of Sifianou (1997) on the use of silence as an act of politeness and interpersonal solidarity.

Together, these results indicate that the pragmatic value of silence is strongly shaped by its conversational context. It all depends on the relationship between the communicators and the situation in which the communication occurs whether the same communication technique conveys grief, disappointment, empathy, or reconciliation. In other words, silence is not something that simply lacks speech, but rather something actively done as a communicative process to negotiate interpersonal meanings. At the same time, this observation corroborates Tannen's (1985) claim that silence often conveys meanings that are difficult to communicate verbally.

From the above observations, it can be concluded that the pragmatic use of silence greatly depends on the conversational context within which silence is used. Everything depends on the interaction between the communicators and the communicative situation, within which a certain communication strategy is used to express grief, disappointment, empathy, and reconciliation. In this case, silence should not be understood as the absence of verbal communication, but as a special form of active verbal communication process. At the same time, it confirms the assumption made by Tannen (1985) about the meaning of silence being hard to communicate verbally.

Overall, the review of the conversation suggests that conversational implicature performs a dynamic function in the whole movie, since it helps to form misunderstandings, tensions, conflicts, empathy, and finally reconciliation. Instead of being seen as lack of words, silence appears to be an integral part of pragmatic communication that makes it possible for the characters to build their interpersonal relationships via implied meaning. All these facts support the idea that the construction of conversational implicature in the film occurs due to the interaction of utterances and silence, both of which are important for forming the interpersonal conflict and its resolution.

4. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that conversational implicature in *The Holdovers* is constructed through the interaction between verbal utterances and silence, with the flouting of the maxim of quantity emerging as the most dominant conversational pattern across the seven conflict-related scenes analyzed. The findings reveal that silence functions not merely as the absence of speech but as an active pragmatic strategy through which characters communicate implied meanings, emotions, and interpersonal intentions that are interpreted through contextual understanding. Furthermore, conversational implicature contributes significantly to the development of interpersonal conflict by generating misunderstanding, expressing emotional and psychological tension, fostering empathy, and facilitating reconciliation, depending on the interactional context. These findings extend previous studies on conversational implicature in film discourse by demonstrating that silence should be regarded as a meaningful pragmatic resource rather than simply a cinematic or emotional device. By incorporating both verbal and non-verbal communication within a Gricean framework, this study provides a broader understanding of how conversational implicature operates in character-driven films. Future research may further explore the pragmatic functions of silence in different film genres, cross-cultural communication, or other forms of audiovisual discourse to enrich the understanding of non-verbal meaning construction.

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