


Death-Related Conversational Implicature in Genshin Impact: A Pragmatic Analysis of Hu Tao's Character Dialogue in the Papilio Charontis Story Quest

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A B S T R A C T

Death is a sensitive topic commonly expressed through indirect language such as euphemism, metaphor, and irony, yet how conversational implicature systematically conveys death-related meanings within a single character's discourse in interactive digital narrative remains theoretically unaddressed. This study examines how death-related conversational implicatures are realized in Hu Tao's dialogue in the Papilio Charontis story quest of Genshin Impact, which Gricean maxims are flouted to generate them, and how these implicatures convey indirect references to death. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach grounded in Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle, data were collected through document analysis of the quest transcript and analyzed by identifying indirect expressions, determining maxim violations, and interpreting death-related meanings through pragmatic inference. The analysis of 33 utterances reveals that metaphorical expression, euphemism, and irony are the dominant strategies, with the maxim of manner most frequently flouted, and 32 of 33 implicatures classified as particularized. The findings confirm that Grice's framework is applicable to interactive digital narratives and that conversational implicature functions as a core mechanism of character identity construction in video game discourse.

Keywords: *Conversational Implicature, Death Euphemism, Gricean Maxims, Video Game.*

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INTRODUCTION

Language is not merely a system of signs conveying literal meanings; it also involves nuanced meanings that arise through use in context. One central concern of modern linguistics is understanding how speakers convey and listeners infer meaning beyond the literal content of utterances. In pragmatics, this notion is formalized in the concept of conversational implicature, which refers to meaning implied by a speaker but not explicitly expressed in the sentence itself. This concept is based on Grice's Cooperative Principle and the conversational maxims of quantity, quality, relation, and manner (Grice, 1975).

Pragmatics has become increasingly significant because meaning is not fully determined by words alone. While semantics focuses on literal meaning, pragmatics emphasizes how meaning is interpreted through context and inference (Yule, 2020). Conversational implicature has therefore been widely discussed in studies of spoken discourse, media communication, and institutional interaction. Recent studies continue to explore the classification and contextual interpretation of implicature in various communicative situations.

According to Grice (1975) theory, conversational implicature is meaning that a speaker implies but does not express directly. Since the concept is predicated on the assumption that interlocutors are cooperating, when a speaker seems to flout a maxim, the hearer deduces a meaning that reinstates the assumption of cooperation rather than concluding that communication has failed. Grice distinguishes two categories of conversational implicature.

Generalized conversational implicature (GCI) emerges without the need for particular contextual knowledge and can be inferred by any hearer in any typical situation. Conversely, particularized conversational implicature (PCI) is highly context-dependent and necessitates particular situational or background knowledge for accurate decoding (Grice, 1975; Levinson, 1983).

Grice (1975) proposes that effective communication is governed by four conversational maxims. The maxim of quantity requires speakers to provide information that is as informative as required, neither more nor less than necessary. The maxim of quality requires speakers to be truthful and to avoid saying what they believe to be false or what they lack sufficient evidence for. The maxim of relation requires speakers to make their contributions relevant to the ongoing exchange. The maxim of manner requires speakers to be clear, brief, and orderly, avoiding obscurity of expression and ambiguity. Together, these four maxims constitute the cooperative framework within which ordinary communication operates and against which deviations can be identified and interpreted.

The interpretation of implied meaning is also closely related to Searle (1969) theory of indirect speech acts. According to Searle, speakers frequently communicate one intention through another form of expression, requiring hearers to infer meaning beyond the literal utterance. Similar to conversational implicature, indirect speech acts rely on shared knowledge and contextual interpretation. In discussions of sensitive topics such as death, speakers often prefer indirect forms of communication to reduce discomfort while still conveying the intended message. Therefore, Grice's theory of conversational implicature and Searle's theory of indirect speech acts provide complementary frameworks for understanding how hidden meanings are produced and interpreted.

When a speaker intentionally and overtly violates one of these maxims, this is referred to as flouting. Unlike other types of maxim non-observance such as violation or opting out, flouting occurs when a speaker deliberately breaks a maxim in a way that is visible to the hearer, expecting the hearer to recognize the deviation and seek an alternative interpretation (Thomas, 1995). Rather than constituting a communicative failure, flouting is a pragmatic strategy – a calculated choice to say something indirect so that the hearer will infer the intended meaning beyond the literal content of the utterance. It is precisely through this mechanism of flouting that conversational implicature is generated.

Death has long been regarded as one of the most sensitive and socially restricted topics in human communication. Because direct references to death may evoke discomfort, speakers often employ euphemistic and indirect language when discussing mortality. Allan & Burridge (1988) argue that euphemism functions as a linguistic strategy for mitigating taboo topics, while Linfoot-Ham (2005) notes that death is among the most frequently euphemized subjects across cultures. Expressions such as "pass away," "depart this world," and similar alternatives allow speakers to discuss death indirectly. These forms of expression frequently generate conversational implicatures because their intended meanings must be inferred rather than explicitly stated.

In this study, euphemism, metaphorical expression, and irony are the forms of indirect expression through which conversational implicature is realized. Euphemism is the replacement of a harsh, taboo, or socially unacceptable expression with one that is mild or indirect, especially when discussing sensitive subjects such as death (Linfoot-Ham, 2005). Metaphorical expression enables speakers to conceptualize one area of experience in terms of another, allowing complex or uncomfortable ideas to be conveyed through more familiar or abstract frames. Irony involves expressing meaning through a statement whose literal content is inconsistent with the speaker's intended meaning, frequently accomplished by inverting expected emotional registers or applying a tone that contrasts with the seriousness of the subject matter (Thomas, 1995). All three forms of expression serve as pragmatic strategies that generate conversational implicature by prompting hearers to move beyond the literal meaning of an utterance toward its implied significance.

Research on the language of death has consistently demonstrated that euphemism and metaphor are the two most dominant strategies through which speakers avoid direct reference to mortality. Crespo-Fernández (2023) examines euphemism and metaphor in gravestone inscriptions, finding that most metaphorical expressions draw on source domains of rest, peace, new life, and journey – all of which frame death as an optimistic transition rather than a termination. This finding is particularly relevant to the present study, as the same source domains recur systematically in Hu Tao's dialogue, where death is consistently framed as a crossing, a journey, or a return to rest. A 2024 study on Vhavenda death language similarly confirms that euphemism functions not only to soften the psychological impact of death but also to reflect cultural beliefs about the relationship between the living and the dead, particularly the role of the deceased as active agents who retain power over the living. Together, these studies establish that death euphemism is not merely a stylistic convention but a culturally and cognitively meaningful practice – one whose mechanisms are directly observable in Hu Tao's systematic indirect references to mortality throughout the Papilio Charontis quest.

Despite the theoretical importance of conversational implicature, most empirical studies still focus on spoken language discourse, films, television shows, or online communication. According to Indarti (2024) conversational implicature frequently appears in multimodal and cross-cultural interaction, but research concerning interactive digital narratives remain limited. Similarly, studies by A'maliyah et al. (2025) and Ainiyah & Sholichah (2025) demonstrate that implicature in films often emerges through the flouting of Gricean maxims to produce humor, indirect refusal, or implied meanings. However, those studies mainly analyze static scripted dialogue and do not explore interactive narrative contexts such as video games.

Conversational implicature has also been explored in digital online media. Pertiwi et al. (2025) examine Banyumasan humorous utterances on YouTube and discover that implicature is often generated through maxim violations to create humor and social bonding. And also, Mulyani et al. (2025) analyze conversational implicature in Indonesian YouTube channels and show that implied meanings are closely related to informal communication context. Nevertheless, these studies focus on spontaneous online interaction rather than narrative-driven character dialogue.

Recent scholarship has increasingly recognized video games as legitimate sites of discourse and linguistic inquiry. Ensslin (2012) argues that game discourse is a complex and multilayered phenomenon involving not only the language used by characters but also the meanings communicated through narrative, interaction, multimodal design, and player interpretation. From this perspective, video games function as communicative systems in which dialogue contributes significantly to the construction of narrative themes and character identities.

Subsequent research has expanded the scope of video game discourse analysis. Ensslin & Balteiro (2019) demonstrate that video game discourse can be examined through linguistic approaches focusing on lexis, interaction, and textuality. Their work highlights how language in games performs narrative, social, and ideological functions comparable to those found in other forms of discourse. Rather than serving merely as narrative support, dialogue becomes an essential mechanism through which games communicate meaning and shape player interpretation.

Beyond structural analysis, recent research has begun to examine pragmatic dimensions of video game discourse more directly. Stainton et al. (2023) analyze the localization of pragmatic features in the Mass Effect series, demonstrating that video game dialogue encodes sociopragmatic distinctions – such as formality and social distance – that are deeply consequential for player experience and character construction. Their study confirms that pragmatic meaning in game dialogue is not incidental but is systematically designed and culturally embedded, making it a legitimate and productive site for linguistic analysis. Wildfeuer & Stamenković (2022) further propose a multimodal discourse semantics approach

to video game analysis, arguing that meaning-making in games involves pragmatic inference processes comparable to those found in other discourse types. Taken together, these studies confirm that video game discourse is linguistically sophisticated and analytically tractable – yet none of them extends this analysis to the specific mechanism of conversational implicature or to the thematic domain of death within character-centered dialogue.

Despite these developments, relatively few studies have examined conversational implicature in video game dialogue. Existing research primarily focuses on discourse structure, multimodality, characterization, and speech acts, while the role of conversational implicature in constructing thematic meanings remains underexplored. In particular, little attention has been given to how implicatures contribute to the representation of death and mortality in character-centered narratives. Therefore, the present study addresses this gap by investigating death-related conversational implicatures in Hu Tao's dialogue in the Papilio Charontis story quest of Genshin Impact.

Digital narrative media such as video games provide a unique environment for pragmatic analysis because character dialogue contributes significantly to narrative meaning and player engagement. One notable example is Genshin Impact, an open-world role-playing game developed by miHoYo in 2020. The game contains extensive narrative dialogue delivered through story quests and character interactions. One of its character, Hu Tao, frequently uses indirect language involving euphemism, metaphor, humor, and, irony when discussing death. As the director of Wangsheng Funeral Parlor, Hu Tao rarely refers to death explicitly. Instead, she employs indirect expression that require players to infer meaning contextually.

Therefore, this study investigates death-related conversational implicature in Hu Tao's dialogue in the Papilio Charontis story quest of Genshin Impact. The research specifically examines how Gricean maxims are flouted to generate implicature and how indirect references to death are conveyed through pragmatic inference. This study is expected to contribute theoretically to pragmatics by demonstrating that conversational implicature operates systematically within interactive design discourse. Practically, the findings may provide insights for games narrative design by illustrating how indirect language contributes to character identity and player interpretation.

METHOD

A qualitative descriptive research design is used in this study. Creswell (2014) asserts that qualitative research is suitable for studies that prioritise contextual understanding, interpretation, and meaning over numerical measurement. A qualitative technique enables the researcher to thoroughly analyse utterances within their pragmatic and narrative context because this study looks at conversational implicature and implicit meaning in character discourse. The descriptive approach is employed to methodically illustrate how Hu Tao's dialogue flout Gricean maxims and realises conversational implicatures.

The data source of this study is Hu Tao's character dialogue in the Papilio Charontis story quest from the video game Genshin Impact. The dialogue is selected because it contains many indirect references to death expressed through euphemism, metaphor, irony, and humorous expressions. This study uses scripted dialogue as linguistic data because fictional dialogue can still represent meaningful pragmatic interaction. According to Dynel (2011) dialogue in audiovisual media may function as valid pragmatic data since it reflects communicative strategies found in real-life interaction. Therefore, the analysis focuses on Hu Tao's verbal utterances and their implied meanings within the narrative context.

The data were collected through several stages. First, the researcher repeatedly observed the Papilio Charontis story quest to understand the context of interaction and character communication. Second, Hu Tao's dialogue was documented and transcribed from in-game subtitles and text. Third, the transcript was carefully reviewed to identify utterances containing conversational implicature and indirect references to death. The selected utterances were then classified based on the flouting of Gricean maxims and the type of implied meaning

produced. Each implicature is further classified as either generalized conversational implicature (GCI) or particularized conversational implicature (PCI) based on the degree of contextual dependency required for its interpretation. Generalized conversational implicatures are those that can be inferred without relying heavily on specific contextual information, whereas particularized conversational implicatures require particular contextual knowledge to be correctly decoded (Grice, 1975). The data analysis applies Grice's theory of conversational implicature Grice (1975) by examining how the maxims of quantity, quality, relation, and manner are flouted to generate implied meanings. Finally, the researcher interprets the implicatures through pragmatic inference by considering contextual and narrative factors in the dialogue, the results of this analysis are presented descriptively in the findings section.

To ensure the credibility and consistency of the analysis, several validation procedures were applied throughout the research process. First, the researcher conducted multiple rounds of data screening, revisiting the complete transcript on separate occasions to verify that all identified utterances genuinely contained death-related conversational implicature and that no relevant instances were overlooked or misclassified. Second, the classification of maxim flouting was cross-checked against Grice (1975) original definitions of each maxim to ensure that each identified violation corresponded to a clearly definable departure from the cooperative norm, rather than a subjective interpretive judgment. Third, the distinction between generalized and particularized conversational implicature was applied through a consistent diagnostic test: for each datum, the researcher asked whether the death-related meaning could be inferred without specific knowledge of Hu Tao's identity as a funeral director. If the answer was no, the implicature was classified as PCI; if yes, as GCI. This criterion was applied uniformly across all 33 data points. Fourth, member checking was approximated through peer consultation, in which the researcher discussed selected data points and their classifications with colleagues familiar with pragmatic theory to confirm that the interpretations were reasonable and defensible within the theoretical framework. Finally, all analytical decisions – including the identification of expression types, maxim violations, and implied meanings – were documented transparently in the data table, allowing the analytical trail to be traced and evaluated independently. These procedures collectively strengthen the internal validity of the findings and reduce the risk of interpretive inconsistency across the dataset.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of Hu Tao's dialogue throughout the Papilio Charontis story quest in Genshin Impact yielded a total of 33 utterances containing death-related conversational implicatures. These utterances were drawn from the complete transcript of the quest and represent every instance in which Hu Tao conveys a meaning related to death through indirect linguistic strategies rather than direct reference.

Table 1. Distribution of Expression Types, Maxims Flouted, and Implicature Types Across 33 Utterances

Category	Sub-category	Frequency	Percentage
Expression Type	Metaphorical Expression	24	72.7%
	Euphemism	20	60.6%
	Irony	18	54.5%
Maxim Flouted	Manner	26	78.8%
	Quality	21	63.6%
	Relation	19	57.6%
	Quantity	10	30.3%
Implicature Type	PCI (Particularized)	32	97.0%
	GCI (Generalized)	1	3.0%

Note: Percentages exceed 100% in expression type and maxim flouted categories because many utterances involve more than one expression type and more than one maxim simultaneously.

Manner**Datum 1 Manner + Quality (Euphemism + Irony)****Dialogue:**

Paimon: "funeral... funeral... oh! the Wangsheng funeral parlor Zhongli is a consultant there. They deal with this stuff a lot, right?"

Hu Tao: "Oh you know Zhongli, well that saves me a lot of explaining. I'm Hu Tao, the current director of the Wangsheng Funeral Parlor, responsible for...well, trifling matters having to do with immortality."

Hu Tao introduces herself to the Traveler for the first time at Wuwang Hill using euphemism and irony. The maxim of manner is flouted because her self-description is deliberately vague and obscure: she does not say she runs a funeral parlor or manages death, but instead uses the phrase "trifling matters having to do with immortality." The maxim of quality is simultaneously flouted because the claim is literally false – funeral work is neither trivial nor concerned with immortality in any positive sense. The indirectness and factual inversion together signal to the hearer that the literal meaning must be discarded in favour of an implied one. The inferred meaning is that her entire profession revolves around death and funerary management – and that she is deliberately downplaying its gravity through ironic minimization. In terms of death representation, this utterance constructs death as something that can be euphemized into its opposite: "immortality" stands in for mortality, and "trifling" ironically frames the management of death as routine and unremarkable. Death is represented here not as something frightening or solemn but as a professional domain so familiar to Hu Tao that she can reduce it to a casual aside. (PCI)

Datum 2 Manner + Quality (Euphemism + Irony)**Dialogue:**

Paimon: "What do they buy and what do they get?"

Hu Tao: "A solid and durable second home of course, they may not need it right away, but it won't start deteriorating before you finish doing so yourself."

Hu Tao describes coffins as a promotional free gift in her buy-one-get-one funeral sale. The maxim of manner is flouted through the deliberate use of an obscure euphemism: a coffin is called a "second home," a substitution so indirect that it requires the hearer to recognize both the referent and the morbid implication embedded within it. The maxim of quality is simultaneously flouted through dark irony – the phrase "deteriorating before you finish doing so yourself" presents the buyer's own bodily decomposition after death as though it were a product guarantee, inverting the expected register of a commercial transaction. The inferred meaning is that the promotional item being offered is a coffin, and that its durability is guaranteed precisely because the human body will decompose before the coffin does – a grim acknowledgment of physical death embedded in cheerful marketing language. In terms of death representation, this utterance constructs death as something that can be commodified and packaged into consumer discourse. Bodily decomposition – among the most confronting physical realities of death – is normalized through commercial framing, representing death as an ordinary, schedulable event rather than a taboo or terrifying one. (PCI)

Quality**Datum 1 Quality + Manner (Euphemism + Irony)****Dialogue:**

Paimon: "Yeah, if we were looking for wangsheng funeral parlor's help, this is hardly the place we would come to."

Hu Tao: "Wangsheng Funeral Parlor welcomes advanced reservations..... Speaking of dates, if you're struggling to decide, please do come and talk it over. I'd hate to see you still alive and kicking when your big day comes."

Hu Tao enthusiastically encourages the Traveler to pre-book a funeral date, treating it as a commercial transaction. The maxim of quality is flouted through ironic inversion: saying

she would "hate to see you still alive and kicking when your big day comes" directly contradicts the conventional social wish for someone to remain alive and well. The statement is literally false in the sense that it inverts the socially expected sentiment, signaling to the hearer that the intended meaning is the opposite of what would normally be said. The maxim of manner is simultaneously flouted because "big day" is a deliberately ambiguous euphemism – a term normally associated with positive milestones such as weddings – here applied to the day of one's death. The inferred meaning is that death is a certain and scheduled event in everyone's future, and that Hu Tao is professionally anticipating the opportunity to conduct their funeral. In terms of death representation, this utterance constructs death as a fixed appointment – a "big day" that is not to be avoided but booked in advance. The ironic inversion of a conventional social wish strips death of its taboo quality and reframes it as a predictable milestone requiring the same logistical preparation as any major life event. (PCI)

Datum 2 Quality + Relation (Irony + Metaphorical Expression)

Dialogue:

Loucheng: "I also didn't expect that, but still...I'd like to thank you."

Hu Tao: "Don't mention it. I found a way to deal with your fears this time, but I can't do it over and over again. So I'd appreciate it if you try not to give in to superstitions in the future."

Hu Tao advises the recently cured patient after revealing that the exorcism was entirely fabricated. The maxim of quality is flouted through deep self-contradiction: the advice to avoid superstitions is delivered by someone who routinely communes with the spirits of the dead, making the claim factually and contextually inconsistent with the speaker's own established reality. The maxim of relation is simultaneously flouted because advising against superstitions feels disproportionate and tangential to the post-treatment context. Together, these violations compel the hearer to recognize the irony and seek the implied meaning beyond the literal instruction. The inferred meaning is that the problem is not belief in the supernatural per se – because the supernatural, in Hu Tao's world, is real – but rather the misidentification of ordinary illness as demonic curse, which is the actual superstition she is cautioning against. In terms of death representation, this utterance constructs death and the afterlife as verifiable realities that Hu Tao has direct professional access to, while simultaneously marking the boundary between genuine death-related phenomena and unfounded fear. Death is represented as something that exists within a rationally manageable framework – real, but not the indiscriminate threat that superstitious thinking makes it out to be. (PCI)

Relation

Datum 1 Relation + Manner (Metaphorical Expression)

Dialogue:

Hu Tao: "All right I get it you want to bargain a little more but our offer as it stands is already quite a good deal don't you think? Just think about it. An adventurer's life is full of unexpected threats. It's only natural to take precautions. Mend the roof before it rains, as they say."

Lan: "Yeah no, i'm not so sure that saying applies in this context. Speaking of precautions, I'd rather focus on keeping my adventures safe in the first place"

Hu Tao is advertising her funeral parlor services to the Adventurers Guild. The maxim of relation is flouted through the application of a proverb about household maintenance – "mend the roof before it rains" – to a context involving funeral pre-planning. The proverb is not literally relevant to the commercial negotiation underway, and the in-story interlocutor himself recognizes this, responding that he is "not so sure that saying applies in this context." This in-narrative acknowledgment of irrelevance confirms that the maxim of relation has been deliberately flouted. The maxim of manner is simultaneously flouted through the indirect, proverb-based reasoning that requires decoding. The inferred meaning is that "rain" represents death, and "mending the roof" represents arranging a funeral before dying – death

is the predictable natural disaster for which one must prepare in advance. In terms of death representation, this utterance constructs death as a foreseeable and inevitable natural event, analogous to rain: not if it will come, but when. The use of a commonplace domestic proverb normalizes death as something as ordinary and expected as weather, requiring practical preparation rather than fear or avoidance. (PCI)

Datum 2 Relation + Quantity (Irony + Metaphorical Expression)

Dialogue:

Paimon: "Uh... If Paimon understood all that correctly, it seems like she's trying to sell them the funeral parlor's services."

Traveler: "This will get us nowhere."

Hu Tao: "Aiya, Nothing left to do here. Let's go back to Wangsheng Funeral Parlor. Rejecting a once in a lifetime opportunity. It's their loss. Some things are inevitable. It's only a matter of time."

Hu Tao reflects calmly after the Adventurers Guild formally rejects her business proposal. The maxim of relation is flouted because her remarks – "some things are inevitable" and "it's only a matter of time" – appear to be about business rejection but carry a meaning that extends far beyond the immediate commercial context. The maxim of quantity is simultaneously flouted because more is said than strictly necessary for a simple business reflection, signaling that a deeper implication is being communicated. The inferred meaning operates on two levels simultaneously: on the surface, she is conceding that the Guild has rejected her proposal; at the implied level, she is invoking the inevitability of death itself – the Guild's members will need her services one day regardless of their refusal. In terms of death representation, this utterance constructs death as the ultimate inevitability that renders all human resistance temporary and meaningless. No matter what choices are made in life, death cannot be refused or negotiated away. Hu Tao's calm, almost amused tone represents death not as a threat but as a patient certainty – something she can afford to wait for. (PCI)

Quantity

Datum 1 Quantity and Manner (Irony Expression)

Dialogue:

Paimon: "Stop adding little afterthoughts like that! Creeps people out!"

Hu Tao: "Hee-hee, just a joke, sorry. Everything you see is everything that's present. For the moment, at least."

Hu Tao responds playfully after Paimon becomes uncomfortable with her ominous remarks about life and death. The maxim of quantity is flouted because after apologizing – which should be sufficient – Hu Tao adds "for the moment, at least," providing more information than the apology requires and reintroducing exactly the unsettling implication she appeared to be withdrawing. The maxim of manner is simultaneously flouted through the deliberate ambiguity of "for the moment, at least," which is syntactically minimal but semantically loaded. The inferred meaning is that the visible, living world is only temporary – that what is "present" now will not always be present, and that absence, disappearance, or death is the natural endpoint of all current existence. In terms of death representation, this utterance constructs death as the silent background condition of all living experience. By adding "for the moment, at least" to a statement about what can be seen, Hu Tao implies that presence is always already provisional – that death is not an interruption of life but its constant companion. Death is represented here as ambient and inevitable, woven into the texture of ordinary existence rather than confined to dramatic moments. (PCI)

Datum 2 Quantity + Relation (Metaphorical Expression + Euphemism)

Dialogue:

Hu Tao: "Hee-hee, just a joke, sorry. Everything you see is everything that's present. For the moment, at least"

Traveler: "Comforting."

Hu Tao: "Ah, lighten up! The way I see it, People make death scarier than it really is. What people truly fear about departing this world is suffering and regret. To deal with the trauma they let their imaginations run wild with notions of ghosts and evil spirits. All baseless fantasies."

Hu Tao launches into an unprompted philosophical reflection on why people fear death. The maxim of quantity is flouted because the extended philosophical digression far exceeds what the conversational context – a casual exchange following a tense situation – requires. The maxim of relation is simultaneously flouted because the shift from practical activity to existential philosophy occurs without a clear conversational trigger. The inferred meaning is that Hu Tao's understanding of death is far deeper and more intimate than that of an ordinary person. Her ability to distinguish between the fear of death itself and the fear of "suffering and regret" implies direct, personal familiarity with the dying process – knowledge that no one who has not worked closely with death and the dead could possess. The phrase "departing this world" functions as a euphemism for dying, softening the explicit reference while preserving the death-related meaning. In terms of death representation, this utterance constructs death as fundamentally misunderstood by ordinary people. Rather than representing death as something terrifying, Hu Tao reframes it as a neutral transition whose horror is manufactured by human imagination rather than intrinsic to the experience itself. Death is represented as something that becomes less frightening the more one understands it – and Hu Tao understands it better than anyone. (PCI)

Generalized Conversational Implicature

Datum 1 Manner (Euphemism + Metaphorical Expression)

Dialogue:

Traveler: "I don't think we fall in to the "client" category."

Hu Tao: "Ah but you see, I wasn't referring to clients in business sense. Everyone who enters this mortal realm will be a client of mine. Sooner or later."

Hu Tao clarifies the scope of her clientele after the Traveler pushes back against being categorized as a funeral parlor client. The maxim of relation is flouted because extending the definition of "client" to encompass every living being goes far beyond the ordinary commercial meaning of the term, making the statement feel disproportionate to the immediate conversational context. The maxim of manner is simultaneously flouted through the indirect, euphemistic framing of a universal truth – "everyone who enters this mortal realm" is an elaborate way of saying "every living person." The inferred meaning is that every living being will eventually die and will therefore eventually require funeral services – death is universal and inescapable. This implicature is classified as GCI because it does not require specialized knowledge about Hu Tao's identity or role to be decoded. The hearer needs only to understand what a funeral parlor is and what mortality means. In terms of death representation, this is the only utterance in the dataset that represents death as a universal, self-evident fact accessible to all human understanding without contextual scaffolding. Death is represented here in its most fundamental form: not as a professional domain, a commercial opportunity, or a philosophical puzzle, but as the one shared destination of every living being, stated calmly and without drama. (GCI)

Realization of Death-Related Conversational Implicatures

Across the 33 data points, death-related conversational implicatures are realized through three primary forms of indirect expression: metaphorical expression, euphemism, and irony. Metaphorical expression is the most dominant strategy, appearing in 24 out of 33 utterances. Euphemism appears in 20 utterances, and irony in 18. Many utterances combine two or even all three strategies simultaneously, which reflects the layered and deliberate nature of Hu Tao's communicative style. This overlapping pattern confirms the theoretical prediction that indirect references to death are rarely realized through a single strategy alone;

rather, they emerge from the interaction of multiple linguistic choices working together to generate meaning (Linfoot-Ham, 2005; Thomas, 1995).

Metaphorical expression is the backbone of Hu Tao's death-related language. In Manner Datum 1, Hu Tao describes her profession using the word "immortality" to stand in for death – a conceptual substitution that frames her work as the inverse of what it literally names. In Relation Datum 1, the proverb "mend the roof before it rains" maps the concept of death onto "rain," constructing dying as a predictable natural event that one can and should prepare for. In Relation Datum 2, phrases such as "some things are inevitable" and "it's only a matter of time" map the concept of death onto business language, using commercial inevitability as a vehicle for mortality's inevitability. These metaphors do not merely decorate Hu Tao's speech – they constitute the core conceptual framework through which she, and by extension the player, understands and navigates death throughout the narrative.

Euphemistic expressions replace direct reference to death, dying, or the dead with softer, more oblique alternatives. In Manner Datum 1, the word "immortality" substitutes for death itself, and "trifling matters" minimizes the gravity of funeral work. In Manner Datum 2, a coffin is called a "second home," and bodily decomposition is embedded in what sounds like a product durability guarantee. In Quality Datum 1, the phrase "big day" replaces the day of one's death, and in Quantity Datum 2, dying is referred to as "departing this world." Each of these substitutions requires the listener to draw on contextual knowledge – primarily the knowledge that they are speaking with the director of a funeral parlor – to correctly infer the death-related meaning. This confirms the finding that the majority of implicatures in Hu Tao's dialogue are particularized conversational implicatures, a point taken up in greater detail below.

Irony operates differently from the other two strategies. Where metaphor and euphemism work by replacing one term with another, irony works by establishing a gap between what is said and what is meant – specifically by applying a cheerful, commercial, or casual register to subject matter that would conventionally demand gravity. In Quality Datum 1, Hu Tao says she would "hate to see you still alive and kicking when your big day comes" – a statement that inverts the conventional social wish for someone to remain alive, forcing the hearer to reject the literal meaning entirely. In Quality Datum 2, a funeral director who routinely communes with spirits earnestly warns her patient not to "give in to superstitions" – a self-contradictory claim whose absurdity compels the hearer to infer the real message: that genuine death-related phenomena exist, and it is only false superstitions that are the problem. In Quantity Datum 1, Hu Tao apologizes for unsettling Paimon and then immediately undermines her own apology by adding "for the moment, at least" – reintroducing death's imminence through what appears to be a throwaway remark (Thomas, 1995).

Gricean Maxims Flouted

All four Gricean maxims are flouted across the 33 utterances, though with notably different frequencies. The maxim of manner is the most frequently flouted, appearing in 26 out of 33 utterances. The dominance of manner flouting in Hu Tao's dialogue is not incidental but reflects a fundamental pragmatic logic that is specific to the thematic domain of death. The maxim of manner requires speakers to be clear, brief, and orderly, avoiding obscurity and ambiguity (Grice, 1975). Death, however, is precisely the kind of topic that speakers across cultures systematically avoid naming directly. As Crespo-Fernández (2023) observes, the unwillingness to speak openly about death compels speakers to resort to indirect linguistic strategies as a form of psychological and social protection. For Hu Tao, this avoidance is not driven by personal fear – she is demonstrably comfortable with death – but by a professional and social awareness that death cannot be named openly without unsettling her interlocutors or violating conversational norms. The maxim of quality is flouted in 21 utterances, the maxim of relation in 19, and the maxim of quantity in 10. This distribution reflects the fundamental nature of Hu Tao's communicative strategy. The manner maxim requires speakers to be clear,

brief, and orderly, avoiding obscurity and ambiguity (Grice, 1975). Hu Tao systematically flout this maxim because the entire point of her death-related language is to be indirect, poetic, and ambiguous – to say death without saying death.

The manner maxim is therefore the most natural target for flouting in death-related discourse: to speak of death at all while maintaining social acceptability, a speaker must be indirect, ambiguous, and oblique, which is precisely what manner flouting enables. Every euphemism, every metaphor, and every ironic understatement that Hu Tao employs constitutes a violation of manner in that it substitutes a clear, direct reference to death with something less transparent. This is evident across both Manner representative data points: in Manner Datum 1, calling funeral work "trifling matters having to do with immortality" is maximally obscure; in Manner Datum 2, describing a coffin as a "second home" whose durability outlasts its owner's body is indirect to the point of requiring multiple inferential steps. The high frequency of manner flouting therefore reflects the structural relationship between indirectness and death as a taboo topic – the more consistently a speaker avoids naming death, the more consistently they must flout the maxim of manner. In this sense, manner flouting is not merely a pragmatic strategy in Hu Tao's dialogue; it is the primary linguistic mechanism through which death is made speakable at all.

The flouting of the manner maxim is illustrated most clearly in Manner Datum 1 and Manner Datum 2. In Manner Datum 1, Hu Tao introduces herself by calling her work "trifling matters having to do with immortality" – a description so deliberately obscure and misleading that it flouting both clarity and truthfulness simultaneously. A listener who does not yet know she runs a funeral parlor would have no way of decoding this utterance as a reference to death. In Manner Datum 2, calling a coffin a "second home" and embedding a reference to bodily decomposition inside a product guarantee requires the hearer to perform several inferential steps before the death-related meaning becomes clear. Both cases demonstrate that the manner flouting is not accidental but is the primary mechanism through which Hu Tao avoids naming death directly.

The flouting of the quality maxim is most prominent in ironic utterances. In Quality Datum 1, saying she would "hate to see you still alive and kicking when your big day comes" inverts the conventional social wish for someone to remain alive – the literal meaning is socially unacceptable, which signals to the hearer that the intended meaning must be something else entirely. In Quality Datum 2, the self-contradictory advice to avoid superstitions, delivered by someone who regularly communes with spirits, forces the listener to recognize the irony and infer the deeper truth: that real death-related phenomena exist, and only false superstitions are the problem. These quality flouting do not mislead the listener in a harmful way; rather, they function as pragmatic signals that a different, implied meaning should be pursued – which is precisely how irony generates conversational implicature (Thomas, 1995).

The flouting of the relation maxim occurs when Hu Tao's utterances appear tangential or disproportionate to the immediate conversational context. In Relation Datum 1, the proverb "mend the roof before it rains" is applied to justify pre-arranging funerals – a lateral connection that requires the listener to map "rain" onto death. Notably, the Guild representative's response – "I'm not so sure that saying applies in this context" – confirms within the narrative itself that the maxim of relation has been flouted, since even the in-story interlocutor recognizes the apparent irrelevance. In Relation Datum 2, after the Guild rejects her proposal, Hu Tao reflects that "some things are inevitable" and "it's only a matter of time" – remarks that appear to be about business but, from a funeral director, carry the unmistakable implication that death itself is what is being invoked.

The flouting of the quantity maxim, while the least frequent at 10 out of 33 utterances, produces some of the most expansive implicatures. In Quantity Datum 1, after apologizing to Paimon for her unsettling comments, Hu Tao adds "for the moment, at least" – an addition that exceeds what the apology requires and reintroduces the implication that existence is temporary and death is always approaching. In Quantity Datum 2, she launches into an

extended philosophical digression about why people fear death – far exceeding what the conversation requires – concluding that what people truly fear about "departing this world" is suffering and regret rather than death itself. The excess of information in both cases signals that something beyond the surface narrative is being communicated: a worldview in which death is ever-present, inevitable, and entirely unremarkable to Hu Tao.

How Implicatures Convey Indirect References to Death

Of the 33 implicatures identified, 32 are classified as particularized conversational implicatures (PCI) and only 1 is classified as a generalized conversational implicature (GCI). The overwhelming dominance of PCI is the single most significant finding of this study. It means that almost all of Hu Tao's death-related implied meanings are dependent on one specific piece of contextual knowledge: that she runs a funeral parlor. Without this foundation, utterances such as "I'd hate to see you still alive and kicking when your big day comes" (Quality Datum 1) or "it won't start deteriorating before you finish doing so yourself" (Manner Datum 2) would be uninterpretable as death-related – or would simply seem incoherent.

The sole GCI in the dataset arises when the Traveler says they do not consider themselves a client of hers, and Hu Tao responds: "*Ah, but you see, I wasn't referring to clients in the business sense. Everyone who enters this mortal realm will be a client of mine – sooner or later.*" This implicature is classifiable as generalized because the implied meaning – that everyone will eventually die – does not require specialized knowledge about Hu Tao's role to be decoded. It draws on the universally shared human understanding that all living beings are mortal, making it interpretable even for a hearer who has never encountered Hu Tao before and knows nothing about her funeral parlor. The hearer needs only to understand what a funeral parlor is and what mortality means to arrive at the death-related implication. This stands in direct contrast to all 32 PCI instances in the dataset, where the death-related meaning is entirely inaccessible without character-specific context.

The asymmetry between one GCI and 32 PCIs is analytically significant. It suggests that the universal truth of death – the simple fact that all humans die – is the only death-related meaning Hu Tao communicates that requires no interpretive scaffolding. Every other death-related meaning she conveys is context-dependent, character-specific, and discursively constructed across the length of the quest. This confirms that Hu Tao's indirect language is not merely a stylistic quirk but a systematically constructed communicative identity – one that only becomes fully legible through sustained engagement with her character. Her professional identity is not background information; it is the essential decoding key for nearly every implicature she produces.

Taken together, the 33 implicatures form three thematic clusters that reveal the conceptual architecture underlying Hu Tao's death-related language. The first cluster – death as universal and inevitable – is most clearly represented by the GCI datum and Relation Datum 2, both of which establish that mortality is a condition from which no living being is exempt and no refusal is permanent. The second cluster – death as transition and journey – is represented by Relation Datum 1, where death is framed as a foreseeable destination one must prepare for, and by the recurring spatial metaphors across the dataset that construct death as a crossing rather than an ending. The third cluster – death as manageable and commercial – is represented most vividly by Manner Datum 1 and Manner Datum 2, where funeral services and coffins are promoted through the cheerful language of consumer products, and by Quality Datum 1, where the day of one's death is reframed as a bookable "big day." Together, these clusters construct a coherent philosophy of death that is never stated directly anywhere in the quest but emerges entirely through the accumulated weight of Hu Tao's conversational implicatures – confirming that implicature here is not merely a pragmatic feature but a structural mechanism through which character identity is built and communicated (Ensslin, 2012).

CONCLUSIONS

This study demonstrates that death-related conversational implicature in Hu Tao's dialogue in the *Papilio Charontis* story quest of *Genshin Impact* is a systematic communicative practice rather than an incidental linguistic phenomenon. The findings reveal that metaphor, euphemism, and irony consistently co-occur across 33 utterances, with the flouting of the maxim of manner emerging as the dominant strategy. This pattern indicates that indirect language serves as the primary means through which Hu Tao expresses her professional identity and philosophical perspective on death. The analysis further shows that 32 of the 33 identified cases are particularized conversational implicatures, highlighting the importance of contextual knowledge and character identity in interpreting meaning. This finding extends pragmatic theory by suggesting that, within interactive digital narratives, character identity and pragmatic inference are mutually constitutive: implicature shapes character construction, while character identity enables the interpretation of implicature. Practically, the study offers insights for game narrative design and localization. The findings illustrate how a character's worldview can be conveyed through consistent patterns of indirect language rather than explicit exposition. They also emphasize the importance of preserving pragmatic meaning during translation, particularly when implicatures depend on culturally specific knowledge. Future research may examine other characters, game genres, or localized versions of *Genshin Impact* to explore how pragmatic meanings are maintained or transformed across languages and contexts.

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