

Analysis of the Characters' Personalities in *Everyday Use* from the Perspective of Violating the Principle of Cooperation

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Abstract: This study examines the personality traits of characters in *Everyday Use* through the lens of violating the cooperative principle. The purpose is to analyze how characters' communication behaviors reflect their individual personalities. The methods include identifying examples of violating the cooperative principle in the text and analyzing their implications for character traits. The findings suggest that the characters' communication behaviors reveal their unique personality traits by violating the cooperative principle, which contributes to the understanding of literary analysis.

Keywords: *Everyday Use*, Character Personalities, Conversation, Principle of cooperation.

1. Introduction

Effective communication is a crucial aspect of human interaction, and it requires adherence to the principle of cooperation. The principle of cooperation suggests that speakers should provide useful, truthful, relevant, and clear information while listeners should actively listen based on this information. However, in literary works, such as novels, plays, and poems, dialogues that violate the principle of cooperation can often be used to highlight the characters' personality traits and add complexity to the story plot. In this paper, the short story *Everyday Use* by Alice Walker from the perspective of violating the principle of cooperation will be analyzed and how the characters' personalities are shaped by their communication styles will be explored. Through this analysis, we hope to provide insights into the novel's literary significance and its contribution to the broader cultural discourse.

2. The Principle of Cooperation and Its Violation

Grice proposed the principle of cooperation to ensure smooth conversation between people. It consists of four maxims: quantity, quality, relation, and manner, which are designed to help speakers communicate with their listeners in the most direct and effective way. However, in everyday communication, the principle of cooperation is often not strictly followed or intentionally violated. Listeners have to infer the speaker's true intention from the words and context, which is known as "implicature." In literature, authors often use violations of the principle of cooperation to develop characters and create a humorous atmosphere [2]

In most cases, the principle of cooperation is either not strictly adhered to or intentionally violated. In these cases, listeners must infer the speaker's intended meaning from the words and context. This implied meaning that is inferred in speech communication is called "implicature." In some literary works, authors often arrange dialogues that violate the principle of cooperation to highlight a character's personality traits, and readers can appreciate the story plot by inferring

the implicatures of the character's lines. Although the principle of cooperation is a general rule that must be followed in verbal communication, people often do not strictly adhere to it or intentionally violate it in real life. In such situations, listeners need to listen carefully and look for the speaker's true intention in the implicit meaning, which is the "implicature." [3]

3. Violations of the Principle of Cooperation in *Everyday Use*

Everyday Use is a short story by American writer Alice Walker, which tells the story of a daughter who returns to her rural home to visit her mother and sister, and their disagreements over family cultural heritage. According to Grice's principle of cooperation, the two parties should engage in conversation with a cooperative attitude to achieve mutual understanding and effective communication. However, in *Everyday Use* many dialogues violate this principle, resulting in special implicatures that highlight the characters' personality traits to some extent.

(a) Violation of the Quantity Maxim

The quantity maxim states that we should provide an appropriate amount of information when we speak. Insufficient information can lead to inaccurate conveyance of meaning, while too much information can interfere with the speaker's intentions.

"But they're priceless!" she was saying now, furiously; for she has a temper. "Maggie would put them on the bed and in five years they'd be in rags. Less than that!" [1]

In this example, Wangero (Dee) strongly opposes Maggie's use of the family quilts and asserts that they are priceless. However, she did not provide enough information or examples to support her point, such as why using the quilts would turn them into rags, or how she measures "priceless." From the perspective of Grice's quantity maxim, Wangero did not give enough information to support her argument, making it difficult for others to understand and accept her point of view. At the same time, her emphasis on her own position may make the audience feel unable to interact or generate resistance.

This dialogue reflects Wangero's self-centered and arrogant personality. She emphasizes her own views too much, lacks consideration for others' positions and feelings. At the same time, her emotions are easily aroused, indicating that she has an irritable personality. In addition, Wangero also shows a self-important attitude, believing that she is the only one who truly understands the value of the family quilts, while others do not appreciate them. She even refuses to give the quilts to Maggie to use, indicating that she is more concerned with her own interests than the needs or desires of others.

(b) Violation of the Quality Maxim

The quality maxim requires us to tell the truth and not say what we do not believe or have no evidence for. However, in daily life, people often intentionally violate the quality maxim by using rhetorical devices such as irony, metaphor, and exaggeration to say things that are baseless or false. This is especially common in literary works.

"Maggie can't appreciate these quilts!" she said. "She'd probably be backward enough to put them to *everyday* use." [1]

Dee believes that these quilts should be cherished and preserved as cultural heritage, rather than being used like Maggie does. When the mother tries to give these quilts to Maggie, Dee objects and says that Maggie cannot appreciate them, so she should keep them. This statement still violates Grice's quality maxim because it ignores the emotional significance of these quilts to Maggie and does not provide enough reasons or evidence to support Dee's point of view. In this story, Dee represents a new, modern cultural concept, believing that these beautifully crafted handmade quilts should be protected and displayed, not used in daily life like Maggie does. In contrast, the mother and Maggie believe that these quilts are an important part of their family history and cultural heritage, which should be fully understood and used, not just appreciated as works of art.

This statement reflects Dee's personality traits of arrogance and misunderstanding of traditional culture. Dee did not consider that these quilts are a very important part of Maggie and her mother's lives, representing the family's history and cultural heritage. She also failed to realize the practical value of these quilts in daily life and only saw them as works of art or artifacts. This shows that Dee lacks a true understanding of family heritage and culture, as well as respect and understanding for other people's different perspectives.

(c) Violation of the Relation Maxim

To achieve effective verbal communication, both parties should abide by the relation maxim. This principle requires that relevant information be provided during the conversation, and responses should be coherent and appropriate to promote the continuity of the dialogue. However, in reality, some people are unwilling or unable to give clear answers, violating the relation maxim. Nevertheless, we can still understand their meaning through context and achieve effective communication.

"Aunt Dee's first husband whittled the dash," said Maggie so low you almost couldn't hear her. "His name was Henry, but they called him Stash."

"Maggie's brain is like an elephant," Wangero said, laughing. "I can use the churn top as a centerpiece for the alcove table," she said... [1]

In this excerpt, the statement "Maggie's brain is like an elephant's" violates the relation maxim. The remark is

irrelevant to the current topic and seems to belittle Maggie's intelligence. Therefore, it may cause confusion or discomfort to other speakers, and may interfere with the coherence of the conversation.

It reflects Wangero's personality traits of being somewhat arrogant and not good at interacting with others, perhaps lacking sensitivity. She does not seem to consider that her words may offend or make other participants uncomfortable, and behaves in a self-righteous manner during the conversation. These personality traits may lead to inappropriate behavior that affects other people's emotions and participation. At the same time, this example also shows Maggie's character traits, which are introverted, shy, and even somewhat insecure. After hearing Wangero's comment, she did not respond directly but quietly spoke a sentence about Aunt Dee's first husband. She prefers to stay quiet and avoid conflict or challenging authority.

(d) Violation of the Manner Maxim

The manner maxim requires speakers to convey sufficient and truthful information using concise and clear language, avoiding long or ambiguous wording. However, in real communication, both parties often express themselves too subtly, violating the manner maxim, making listeners confused and bewildered.

"Take one or two of the others," I said to Dee. But she turned without a word and went out to Hakim-a-barber. "You just don't understand," she said, as Maggie and I came out to the car. [1]

This excerpt violates Grice's manner maxim. When the mother asked Dee which quilt she wanted to choose, Dee did not answer her question directly but turned to find her boyfriend. This response not only did not provide relevant information about the question but also failed to establish logical relations and relevance with other participants.

In addition, when Dee turned back to her mother and said, "You just don't understand," she also violated the manner maxim because her response was not clear and had a vague meaning. She did not explain her point of view or provide more information to support it, but just made an ambiguous statement that could increase misunderstandings and mistrust among other people.

In this excerpt, Dee's behavior and speech reflect a stubborn, self-centered, and poor communication personality. The whole conversation presents a tense and uneasy atmosphere, reflecting the complex emotions and cognitive dynamics between family members. In this example, the communication difficulties between Dee and other family members indicate the differences and conflicts between different cultural backgrounds and life experiences. Meanwhile, her stubbornness and self-centered traits affect the interaction and understanding among family members.

4. Conclusion

This study analyzed how the communication behaviors of characters in *Everyday Use* reflect their personality traits from the perspective of violating the cooperative principle. The study found that in *Everyday Use* the dialogue between the characters is the main narrative device, and the violations of the cooperation principle provide a special and rich meaning to the conversation, where the author cleverly uses these phenomena of violating cooperation principles to portray the characters' personalities, creating realistic and vivid images

that allow readers to better understand each character's inner thoughts and emotions. Furthermore, this unique literary research method has also discovered the close connection between linguistics and literature. By combining knowledge of pragmatics to analyze literary works, it opens new research perspectives and depths for literary studies.

References

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