

Main Character Analysis in “Great Expectations” Based on Cooperative Principle Theory

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Abstract: “Great Expectations” is one of representative novels written by the British writer Charles Dickens. It shows the growth of the protagonist Pip. Compared with Dickens’s other works, predecessors have done less research on “Great Expectations” and mainly focused on the theme and personalities. However, few studies analyze the personalities of the main characters in “Great Expectations” from the perspective of pragmatics through conversations in the novel. This thesis attempts to use Cooperative Principle to explore the four main characters of Pip, Estella, Joe, and Havisham. The study finds that the use of the four maxims of Cooperative Principle can effectively grasp the pragmatic strategies of the main characters in *Great Expectations*, revealing the different personalities of the main characters in this novel, and help readers understand and appreciate “Great Expectations” better.

Keywords: Cooperative Principle; Great Expectations; Dialogue Analysis; Personalities

1. Introduction

Charles Dickens was a famous British novelist in the 19th century. He was born in a poor petty bourgeois family. When he was 12 years old, his father was imprisoned because of debts. Due to family difficulties, he had to work as a child laborer. The experience of suffering left a trauma to his young mind. It not only made him deeply care for the unfortunate children, but also prompted him to fight for poverty. Dickens wrote many novels throughout his life. His works extensively and vividly reflect the British capitalist society in the 19th century and portray the spiritual outlook of the Victorian era.

Great Expectations is a relatively famous work in the late stage of Dickens' creation [1,2]. It

uses the first-person narrative to show the growth of the protagonist Pip. The novel successfully describes the protagonist’s life experience and psychological development, vividly revealing his various expectations for a superior life and his moral feelings and spiritual reflection process after disillusionment. Western scholars are interested in *Great Expectations*, and they have formed mixed reviews. Admirers believe that *Great Expectations* is one of Dickens's most influential novels, but opponents accuse this work of unreasonable plot structure and illogical characterization. Domestic research on Dickens' works started relatively early, but it was limited to the field of translation and introduction of foreign materials. Independent research has not yet been carried out.

Cooperative Principle was proposed by the British linguist Grice in 1967. He believes that the reason why people's conversations are smooth and without misunderstandings is because people tacitly abide by some principles in the conversation. It contains the maxim of quality, quantity, relevance and method. The four maxims of the cooperative principle play an important role in different forms of communication [3,4].

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze the personalities of the four main characters in *Great Expectations*, namely Pip, Joe, Estella and Miss Havisham, based on the dialogue of *Great Expectations*, combined with Grice's theory of cooperative principle.

2. Cooperative Principle

Cooperative Principle was proposed by the British linguist Grice in 1967. He believes that the reason why people's conversations do not produce misunderstandings is because people tacitly abide by some principles in the conversation. It contains the principle of quality, quantity, relevance and method.

Since Grice (1967) proposed the theory of

Conversational Implicature, many foreign linguists have continuously improved and proposed new theories on his basis, mainly including the following aspects: the British linguist Leach proposed the principle of politeness to compensate for the Cooperative Principle. The principle of politeness is mainly composed of six criteria, including strategy criterion, generosity criterion, praise criterion, humility criterion, approval criterion and sympathy criterion; Hoorn proposed that there are only two principles in pragmatics and summarized them as Q Principles and R principles; Levinson put forward a triple model theory based on Hoorn's, namely Q principle, I principle and M principle [5-7].

There are several research results carried out by the domestic scholars. The first one is the reflection on the meaning of Grice's conversation, which mainly includes the deficiencies and limitations of the Cooperative Principle; the second is the application field of the cooperative principle. The research on the cooperative principle in China usually appears together with the polite principle, which is mainly used to analyze spoken language; the thirdly is studying the humorous effect produced by violating the principle of cooperation, and through pragmatic analysis of the sitcom text, finding out how the humorous effect is produced by violating the principle of cooperation; the fourthly is studying the principle of cooperation and the principle of politeness in teaching Application, and its role in cross-cultural communication.

Grice pointed out that in daily conversations, not all people strictly abide by the principles of cooperation and its guidelines. For example, the speaker may lie, but the listener may not be aware of it and actually treat it seriously. Although the conversation can go on at this time, the result will cause the listener to be deceived. This kind of conversation shows that the party who violates the principle of cooperation, while the real party abides by the principle of cooperation and mistakenly believes that the other party has always abide by the principle of cooperation. However, not all speakers do not follow the principle of cooperation to lie. Sometimes he may say something that violates the principle of cooperation out of courtesy or the need for context. When the other party realizes that the other party's words do not comply with the

principle of cooperation, he will force himself to ignore the superficial meaning of the other party's words and try to understand the deep meaning, thus producing conversational meaning.

3. Main Character Analysis of *Great Expectations*

3.1 Dialogue Analysis of *Great Expectations*

(1) Example 1

Mr. Pumblechook: What did you play at, boy?

Pip: We played with flags. Estella waved ...and I ...

The conversation took place in Pip's childhood when a lonely widow with a large fortune invited Pip to her house to relieve her boredom. It was the first time that Pip went to a rich man's house, and the surrounding environment and decoration had a great influence on him. After returning home, his sister and uncle couldn't wait to ask about the results of this visit, and they were all very curious about Ms. Havisham. Through the context, we can know that this game of playing flags, including the process of playing flags, was fabricated by Pip. His answer violates the quality principle in Grice's cooperative principle. The quality principle requires the speaker not to tell lies. In fact, Pip's experiences at Miss Havisham's house was not so good, and it was not as warm as Pip described.

(2) Example 2

Biddy: How helping him ...?

Pip: Well, Joe ... good fellow...but he is rather backward in ...

The conversation happened on the eve of Pip's trip to London. Pip was funded by a mysterious man and got an unexpected fortune. He will set off to study and live in London. Pip will go to a strange place to live alone. Pip's answer violates the quantity principle of cooperative principle, which requires the speaker to provide enough information and not to say extra words. In this conversation, Pip did not answer Biddy's question directly, but changed the subject. In fact, Pip can directly ask Biddy to teach Joe to read, write and be so worldly, instead of enumerating some Joe's character defects.

(3) Example 3

Sister: What's the matter now?

Joe: Pip, You will ...a mischief.

The dialogue took place during Pip's childhood.

Pip met a strange stranger in the cemetery, and the stranger threatened Pip to bring him food. In the evening, Pip pretended to eat quickly and hid a whole piece of buttered bread. Joe found out and was surprised. The sister noticed their unusual condition and asked what happened to Joe. Joe didn't answer his wife directly, but told Pip not to eat too fast, or he would choke. Joe's answer obviously violates the Relevance Principle in Grice's Cooperative Principle, which requires the speaker to say something related to the subject. In this conversation, Joe did not directly answer his wife, but tried to change the topic. From this detail, we can see Joe's humor and Joe's concern for Pip.

(4) Example 4

The stranger: Son of yours?

Joe: Well, no. No, he ain't.

The stranger: Nevvy?

Joe: He is not—no, not to...you, he is not—my nevvy.

The dialogue took place during Pip's childhood. Joe took Pip to the tavern for a drink, and a stranger greet Joe. The stranger asked Joe if Pip was Joe's son, and Pip vaguely said no. The stranger asked Pip if he was Joe's nephew, and Joe vaguely said that he was not. Joe's answer violates Grice's manner maxim of cooperative principle, which requires the speaker to say as concisely and clearly as possible, and not to say vague words. In this conversation, the stranger's intention was to ask about the relationship between Pip and Joe. Joe did not answer directly but hesitated and deliberately obscured the answer to this question. It can be seen from this detail that Joe answered this way on purpose. When faced with strangers, Joe behaved very cautiously [8-10].

3.2 Personality Analysis of *Great Expectations*

3.2.1 Personalities of Pip

(1) Hypocritical

First, Pip violates the quality maxim of Grice's cooperative principle. It was the first time Pip visited the home of the "superior". Facing the huge gap between rich and poor, he felt a deep sense of inferiority. At the same time, his heart desires to be a "superior person." Therefore, when his sister and uncle asked about the specific situation of Miss Havisham's house, he chose to lie. He not only fabricated the

content of the game, but also fabricated a relaxing and enjoyable game experience. From this detail, we can see that Pip's self-esteem is very strong. Childhood experience and family environment cause Pip to care more about his identity than the average person. He cares about the opinions of others, especially Estella. It was his vanity that indirectly contributed to his ambition. In other words, his hypocrisy cannot be separated from the external environment and internal factors, and the impact of hypocrisy may be positive or reverse.

Second, Pip violates the quantitative principle in Grice's principle of cooperation. Pip was funded by a mysterious man and got a large fortune. He will set off to live and study in London. On the eve of leaving, he asked Biddy to take good care of Joe and teach him how to read and understand the rules. Biddy was very surprised by this, and she felt that Joe did not need to change. It can be seen from this detail that Pip became dissatisfied with his past life after he became a "superior". Joe was the most important person in Pip's childhood. He not only took good care of Pip in life, but also taught Pip some life principles. Pip's dissatisfaction with Joe's character and behavior precisely illustrates Pip's hypocrisy.

(2) Inferior

First, Pip violates the quality principle of Grice's cooperative principle. Pip fell in love with Estella at first sight, but Estella's arrogant attitude made Pip very sad. At the second meeting, Estella slapped Pip and asked why Pip didn't cry. Pip said he would never cry for Estella again. Pip lied and he often cried because of Estella. During this relationship, Pip has always been in a state of one-way giving. He deeply loves Estella, but he feels inferior because of his "inferior" status.

Second, Pip violates the quantitative principle of Grice's principle of cooperation. Pip left his hometown for the first time and lived alone in London. His past living habits and lifestyle were completely different from those in big cities, so when Jaggs asked him how much money he wanted, Pip could never give an accurate figure. On the one hand, it is because Pip is not used to the life in a big city, and on the other hand, it reflects Pip's inferiority complex. Even if he changes his identity, Pip is still that unconfident countryman.

3.2.2 Personalities of Joe

(1) Kind

First, Joe violates the quality principle of Grice's Cooperative Principle. Pip learned to write for the first time and tried to write to Joe. Despite the crooked writing of the letter, Joe still praised him and called Pip a "scholar". It can be said that Joe brought the greatest warmth to Pip's childhood, and Joe used his own way to motivate Pip to move forward. Although Pip lost his parents, he has an enthusiastic and kind "friend."

Second, Joe violates the quantitative principle of Grice's principle of cooperation. Pip's sister has a particularly bad temper and treats Pip very harshly. Once Pip ran out to play and went home very late, his sister went out to find Pip very angrily. When Pip returned home, he was scared and asked Joe where his sister had gone. Joe described her sister's state in a very exaggerated tone, and comforted Joe not to be afraid and told him to hide quickly. From this detail, we can see that Joe's love for Pip. Although Joe is also very afraid of his wife, he still does his best to protect Pip.

Third, Joe violates the association principle of Grice's principle of cooperation. Pip was threatened by a stranger and had to bring him food, so Pip hid his dinner. This scene was seen by Joe, who had always cared about him. The sister saw Pip's unusual and asked Joe what happened. Joe did not answer his sister's questions directly, but kept asking Pip's status in an attempt to change the subject. From this detail, we can see that Joe's love for Pip. Joe knew that Pip had done a "bad thing", but he still helped Pip cover.

(2) Cowardly

Joe violates the quality principle of Grice's Cooperative Principle. When Joe visited Miss Havisham for the first time, he was very embarrassed. When the sister asked about the content of the visit, Joe lied to his wife. He said that Miss Havisham invited her sister as a guest. In fact, Miss Havisham only asked about Pip. Joe lied to her sister because he was afraid of his wife. It can be seen from this detail that Joe is cowardly.

3.2.3 Personalities of Estella

(1) Arrogant

First, Estella violates the quantity maxim of Grice's principle of cooperation. Pip was invited to visit Miss Havisham, and Estella went out to greet him. When Pip's uncle asked if he could visit Miss Havisham, Estella

refused mercilessly. Uncle's original intention was to know more about Miss Havisham, but Estella did not provide sufficient information. From this detail, it can be seen that Estella is an arrogant person who treats strangers very coldly.

Second, Estella violates the relation maxim of Grice's Cooperative Principle. When Estella met Pip for the second time, she slapped Pip and asked two irrelevant questions. Estella's purpose is not to know the answer to the question, but to make fun of Pip. From this detail, it can be seen that Estella is also merciless, cold-blooded and arrogant towards people who like her.

(2) Lonely

According to the example, Estella violates the quantity maxim of Grice's principle of cooperation. When Estella and Pip met for the first time, she led Pip to visit Madam Havisham's house. Pip was very curious about the structure and decoration of the house, and asked about other names of the house, Estella answered him in detail. Estella is essentially an arrogant and cold-blooded person, but in this conversation, she seemed to violate her own nature and said "excessive" words to Pip. From this detail, we can see Estella's loneliness.

3.2.4 Personalities of Miss Havisham

(1) Sane

According to the example, Miss Havisham violates the quality principle of Grice's Cooperative Principle. A few people Pip met in Miss Havisham's house and they complained to Miss Havisham about the unsatisfactory life, trying to make Miss Havisham feel pity for them. Miss Havisham found their tricks at a glance, and said something that was obviously unrealistic. From this detail, we can see the sane of Miss Havisham. Although Miss Havisham suffered a huge blow in her early years and lived in a gloomy environment for a long time, she still stayed sober occasionally [11-15].

(2) Maniac

According to the example, Miss Havisham violates the relation maxim of Grice's Cooperative Principle. When Pip came to Miss Havisham's house for the second time, Miss Havisham told Pip that it was her birthday. When Pip was going to congratulate her, Miss Havisham interrupted him impatiently, and then mentioned her death. According to normal understanding, birthdays are generally related

to warmth and happiness, but in Miss Havisham's opinions, birthdays represent disaster and death. From this detail, it can be seen that Miss Havisham has lost control of her emotions and mind.

4. Conclusion

Based on the previous analysis and argumentation, this thesis mainly has the following two findings. First of all, about the violation of Grice's cooperative principle. Pip often violates the quantity and quality maxims. As far as the quality principle is concerned, the specific manifestation is that he lied to his sister and uncle, fabricated the actual situation of his first visit to Miss Havisham's house, and when he faced Estella's question, he chose to cover up his true inner thoughts. As far as the principle of quantity is concerned, there are two specific changes. One is the change of his attitude towards Joe. On the eve of his trip to London, Pip asked Biddy to teach Joe well; the other is his mental state towards Mr. Jaggs. Faced with Jaggs's question, he dared not express his true thoughts. Joe often violates the quantity, quality and relation maxims. As far as the quality maxim is concerned, the specific manifestation is that he praised Pip in an exaggerated tone, he lied to his sister and fabricated the facts. For the principle of quantity, the specific manifestation is that he provided "extra" information when describing the states of his wife to Pip. For the principle of relation, Joe did not answer the sister's question directly, but deliberately changed the subject. Estella often violates the quantity and relation maxims. As far as the principle of quantity is concerned, Estella often treats strangers coldly, especially "inferior people", and provides very little information. As far as the principle of relation is concerned, Estella often speaks unrelated words to Pip in accordance with her own nature. Miss Havisham often violates the quality principle of Grice's cooperative principle. She often said something unfounded and unrealistic.

Secondly, about the character characteristics of the main characters. Pip's main character traits are hypocrisy and low self-esteem. He was dissatisfied with his status as a "inferior person" and yearned to become a respected "inferior person." The change of his attitude towards family and friends also reflects Pip's selfishness, hypocrisy and arrogance. Pip's low self-esteem is mainly reflected in two aspects.

In terms of family and social status, he has always been in a state of losing confidence. In terms of love, no matter whether his identity has changed or not, he always feels that he is not worthy of the love of the beautiful and elegant Estella. Joe's main character traits are kindness and cowardice. Whether facing family members or strangers, Joe is always enthusiastic, kind and compassionate. However, excessive kindness may go to the other extreme, which is cowardice. When facing his "cruel" wife, he did not fight back, and when visiting the upper-class Miss Havisham, he was loyal, and he didn't even dare to speak. Estella's main character traits are arrogance and loneliness. Her arrogance and cold-blood have a lot to do with Miss Havisham's teaching, and her loneliness is due to her childhood experiences. Miss Havisham's main character traits are sane and madness. Due to the tragic experiences in her early years, her body and mind was greatly suffered. On the one hand, she saw through the nature of the world and the vicious human heart, so she looked at the things around her soberly; on the other hand, she suffered long-term mental torture, which led to emotions. Often out of control.

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