

Analysis of Stylistic Feature under the Violation of Cooperative Principles in the Novel the Reference

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Abstract: This paper is to reveal the stylistic features of the short story the Reference by analyzing the violation specific maxims of cooperative principles. It is found that the author Donald Barthelme portrays the image of the friend of Mr. McPartland by violating the cooperative principles through his whole text after analysis. He shape the image of the friend of Mr. McPartland that he is an unreliable person by violating the maxim of quality and quantity in his writing, while he give the image of the man that he is illiterate with low social status by violating the maxim of relation and manner.

1. Introduction

Donald Barthelme is a famous short-story writer. He was born in Philadelphia in 1931, and his father had become a professor of architecture in University of Houston after their moving to Texas two years later. Because of the influence from his outstanding father, when he was a student, he was good at writing short stories and therefore he won the Scholastic Writing Award when he studied in University of Houston. At that time, there were wars, cold war and so on. Donald Barthelme was a person who had experienced the flames of wars. Scientific technology has been developing after the Second World War; by the same time, the economy has also been developing. People had changed their thoughts about life after wars and development of technology with economy. Donald Barthelme's writing style had been formed under this kind of social background. Hence people called writers like Donald Barthelme as postmodernist writer. *The reference* is a short novel extracted from *Flying to America: forty-five more stories*, which is written by Donald Barthelme. This interesting story with plenty of stylistic features tells audience that there are two interlocutors talking about another person who is called by them as Shel McPartland. Sometimes readers may be confused by the two speakers because it has no else words to describe these two inerlocutors only with their direct speech. Hence readers can not infer to each charaters, each position and more other information about the two persons exactly. That kind of writing style is what the postmordernist fond of, so as Donald Barthelme. With plenty of the phenomenon of violation of Cooperative Principles, there are some potential meanings hidden in the text.

This paper will focus on the violation of Cooperative Principle in the Reference to find out what

the author really wants to express and the potential stylistic features. And it will be divided into four chapters in this paper. The first one chapter will describe this short story briefly with some social background. Chapter two will focus on the theoretical framework, in other words, it is to introduce the Cooperative Principle. And chapter three in this paper will be concrete analysis; this chapter will be divided into four parts according to four maxims of the Cooperative Principle. The last one chapter comes to the conclusion.

2. Theoretical Framework

Sometimes people will misunderstand each other because people may mean a lot more than what they had said in their dialogue. Paul Grice finds that it must be some certain mechanism to comprehend the conversations. Therefore it is for comprehend better when people are talking, he proposes the Cooperative Principle which of four specific maxims in 1989. The maxim of quality is the first one maxim in these four. Grice tell people that it is better to try to make speakers' contribution one that is true. And also it has two more specific maxims in the maxim of quality; the first one is to tell interlocutors do not say what you believe to be false and the other one is to remind interlocutors that they do not say some without adequate evidence. Generally It means that people cannot tell a lie and tell the untruth when they are talking to other persons. The second maxim is about quantity. It tells people that they must provide some useful information. Do not say something valueless and their information should be informative appropriately. It means that speaker should not tell too more or too less information. The appropriate quantity of information is the best one choice to be afforded when people are talking. Then the next one maxim is about relation. Grice said "Be relevant" under the maxim of relation. How to be relevant is what people do want to know about. It tells people that if they provide some irrelevant information, the one who are listening to may misunderstand what the speaker wants to express. The last one maxim is about the manner. Grice tells people that it should be clear and perspicuous when they are speaking. Do not use obscurity when they talking and people must organize their talking orderly. That means people should know how to organize their conversation and know what should be talked at the first and what should be talked after that. Only obeying these four maxims people will comprehend each other will. Cooperative principle is an effective measure to lessen conversational complicate.

From the aspect of the cooperative principle, some scholars (Liu, 1996; Xie & Zeng, 2011) had done some studies about stylistic features in fictions. Most of them focus on short stories to analyze the stylistic features purely, such as *Pride and Prejudice*, *Blackmail*, *Lunch* and so on. And also there are some scholars focusing on the conversational complicate under the violation of the cooperative principle. They use cooperative principle to do some researches, but they have done not much research under specific maxim of the Cooperative principle. Therefore this study will focus on specific maxim to explore stylistic features in *the Reference*.

3. Analysis

After knowing that this story named as *the Reference*, readers may wander that what is the reference. Is it a piece of letter? Or is it a person? Who will be the reference if it refers to a real person? After reading the whole text, people will infer that the reference is a person who is one of the interlocutors in this story. This story is told by pure direct speech and no other describing words in this story. Therefore readers do not guess out the two different interlocutors easily, if only they depend on some stylistic features. The most obvious writing feature in this story is the violation of the cooperative principle. Plenty of violation of the cooperative principle in this long conversation show different stylistic features and it may express some potential meanings. This chapter will explore its stylistic features by analyzing the violation of cooperative principles. As mentioned

above, cooperative principles own four maxims, the maxim of quality, the maxim of quantity, the maxim of relation and the maxim of manner. Donald Barthelme uses lots uncooperative depiction in his works deliberately to reveal two speaker's status, inconsistency and other characters of figures.

3.1 The Violation of Maxim of Quality

As it is mentioned in the theoretical framework, the maxim of quality is about truth. If people tell a lie or say something incredible, they may violate the maxim of quality in cooperative principle. We can analyze this part from two aspects that one is from micro-aspect and another is from macro-aspect. Micro-aspect focuses on analyzing the specific sentences in the story, while the macro-aspect pays more attention to the whole text. It is few violations of maxim of quality from micro-aspect. Because the answer person who is from Arkansas State believes that what he wants to say. It can be inferred from his own words. He said that he knows Mr. McPartland well because they are "intimate" "for more than twenty years". In the following conversation, the one who is from Arkansas State use lots of detailed things let readers believe that they are intimate and they are friends for more than twenty years. But in lots of time, the friend of Mr. McPartland uses some paradoxical words to describe his intimate friend. He said that Mr. McPartland knows wide-ranging knowledge of so many things. This positive comment will make the investigator believe that he is a good friend of Mr. McPartland, and he will do some positive comments on Mr. McPartland. But things go different. The friend of Mr. McPartland uses some negative comments such as "heresies", "scams of all kinds", "is sublime with the mundanities", "plotting graphs", "figuring use-densities", "diddling flow charts", "inflating statistics", "issuing modestly deceptive reports" and so on. These verbs are with negative color; when they are be used in the talking, people will not believe that he is a good friend to Mr. McPartland. This contradiction from words violates the maxim of quality so that the investigator and the readers would not like to believe his comments. However, it violates the maxim of quality a lot from the macro-aspect. There are seventy-seven paragraphs in total text. The friend of Mr. McPartland emphasizes that he is a good friend to Mr. McPartland and they are intimate in paragraph five and he also emphasizes that he knows Mr. McPartland well by using lots of words to describe Mr. McPartland, for example, *wide-ranging knowledge*, *dodges*, *new and old innovations*, and so on. These sorts of words will reveal two features. One is to make readers realize that this speaker is a real good friend of Mr. McPartland and they actually are intimate. No wonder that Mr. McPartland will regard this person as a reference. In audience's opinion, a reference as well as a good friend will say something which is benefit for Mr. McPartland. But actually there are lots of negative comments on Mr. McPartland in most of paragraphs, such as paragraph 13, paragraph 17, paragraph 22 and paragraph 25 and so on. The one who wants to know about Mr. McPartland may be an investigator. He mentioned twice that the friend of Mr. McPartland twigs to the fact in paragraph 26 and paragraph 62. After reading that audience will know that the friend of Mr. McPartland use negative words to depict Mr. McPartland. It is not what the reference should do. There is contradiction between the identity of this reference and the negative comments that this friend makes on Mr. McPartland. This is a violation of the maxim of quality because it cannot make not only other interlocutors but also readers believe what the friend said.

3.2 The Violation of Maxim of Quantity

This maxim argues that only people tell the informative thing in a conversation, their talking can go on. Too much information as well as too few information is not good for conversation. It is a certain kind of uncooperative phenomenon. Violating the maxim of quantity deliberately also bring conversational implicature. Donald Barthelme writes this short story with violation of maxim of quantity through the whole passage. The friend of Mr. McPartland always tells the information

more than the investigator needs.

For instance, from paragraph 2 to paragraph 6

“In the character?”

“He warp ever which way.”

“You don’t think we should consider him then.”

“My friend Shel McPartland whom I known deeply...He’ll choose marginalia.”

“I sir am not familiar sir with that particular bloom sir”

In that conversation the investigator just asked *“in the character?”*, it means another speaker can tell him whether it is he (Mr. McPartland) warp in the character. However, the friend of Mr. McPartland gives an affirmative answer that Mr. McPartland is warp in every way. But at the same time, this man tells too much information about Mr. McPartland. He wants to tell the investigator that he is a faithful man by telling his relationship between Mr. McPartland and more detail about Mr. McPartland, such as Mr. McPartland’s position, his favor and what he will do in some situations. The following information about Mr. McPartland is superfluous. Violating the maxim of quantity by the friend of Mr. McPartland will reveal that this man is urgent to tell the investigator the relationship between him and Mr. McPartland so that the investigator would like to believe what he will say in the following conversation.

There is plenty of other violation of the maxim of quantity. From paragraph 7 to paragraph 9, the investigator just asks *“Didn’t think you would be...You are from Arkansas State Planning Commission, are you not?”*, if the answer one obeys the maxim of quantity, it is enough to reply “Yes” or “No”. “Yes” and “No” are the answer what the investigator wants exactly rather than mentioning the how wide-ranging knowledge that Mr. McPartland knows about.

And also, between paragraph 24 and paragraph 25, the friend of Mr. McPartland violates the maxim of quantity. The investigator only wants to know that whether it is true that Mr. McPartland is sublime with the mundanities, while Mr. McPartland’s friend depicts how Mr. McPartland tie his shoes with other more information. Too much information reveals that the friend of Mr. McPartland is urgent to show off that how familiar with Mr. McPartland. Those violations of maxim of quantity express the friend’s avidness. He wants to tell the investigator that he really knows Mr. McPartland well. If the investigator believes that he knows Mr. McPartland well, although he uses negative comments on Mr. McPartland, the investigator will believe what he said about Mr. McPartland.

3.3 The Violation of Maxim of Relation

The third maxim in cooperative principle is about relation. It argues that people should tell something relevant in a conversation rather than talking about some irrelevant things. But in this story which is written by Donald Barthelme, the friend of Mr. McPartland violates the maxim of relation too many times. He always says something irrelevant with the questions. There are so many examples that can evident its irrelevant speech.

When the investigator asks that whether the friend of Mr. McPartland is from Arkansas State Planning Commission, the man just answers something about Mr. McPartland’s warp. It is actually irrelevant with the question. And there is another irrelevant situation. The investigator said *“Leaving aside the question of warp for a minute.....call a hard worker?”* in paragraph 12, while the friend of Mr. McPartland replies *“Hard, but warp. He sort of goes off in his own direction”*. The investigator hopes to skip the topic about warp but the friend of Mr. McPartland replies something about Mr. McPartland’s warp again. This kind of information is irrelevant with the question and is not what the investigator wants. Not only once the friend of Mr. McPartland does like that. He does violate the maxim of relation to emphasize the warp of Mr. McPartland. This action makes the investigator wander that whether he can trust him and whether on earth Mr. McPartland is warp.

Warp is a word with some negative meaning, but sometimes the friend with Mr. McPartland use other else words with positive meaning to describe Mr. McPartland, such as “*Harder*”, it means that Mr. McPartland is a hard worker; and “*Very much a team player*”, it means that Mr. McPartland is a good team worker with strong team spirit; and the investigator asks “*Does he fiddle with women?*”, the answer is “*He has so much love and respect for women...nothing to do with them*”, it means that Mr. McPartland did not fiddle with women. This irrelevant information makes the listener consider more deeply. They guess that why the friend of Mr. McPartland says so. Is it true for Mr. McPartland? What kind of person is Mr. McPartland? Violating the maxim of relation make more space to imagine the character of Mr. McPartland, and also it makes the investigator impeach the authenticity of the speech from the man.

3.4 The Violation of Maxim of Manner

The maxim of manner in cooperative principle asks speakers that do not say something out of order. If people do a conversation, they should avoid ambiguity and organize the conversation in order. The story is not well-arranged in order. Their dialogue goes on with some random topic. Therefore, it makes the readers confused about the plot of the story. But after intensive reading, people can know that this is a conversation about talking a person who is named as Shel McPartland. The friend of Shel McPartland is a reference who will put up some information to support that Shel McPartland is a good man. But actually, the friend of Shel McPartland gives lots of ambiguous information so that the investigator suspects whether Shel McPartland is a good man. And the reader will speculate the character of Shel McPartland only from the comments from the friend of Shel McPartland.

For example,

“*I am one of it. Mr. McPartland gave you as a reference.*”

“*Well sir let me tell you sir that my friend Shel McPartland who has incautiously put me down as a reference has a wide-ranging knowledge of modern techniques, theories, dodges, orthodoxies, heresies, new and old innovation.....and scam of all kinds....*”.

In those paragraphs, there are some words with positive meaning, such as “*wide-ranging knowledge of modern techniques*”, “*orthodoxies*”, “*new and old innovation*”, while there are some words with negative meaning to depict Shel McPartland, such as “*heresies*”, “*scam of all kinds*”. Those words with different meanings create the ambiguity with self-contradiction. The situation of paradox makes the investigator believe that this is an illiterate man. The investigator puts up a question in the start of this conversation after talking a while with the friend of Shel McPartland. He said “*Didn’t think you would be, you bein’ from Arkansa and therefore likely less than literate...*”. At that time, the investigator starts to speculate that the reference is an illiterate man. After the following talking, there are more and more paradox comments about Shel McPartland making the investigator and the readers believe firmly that the man who is the friend of Shel McPartland is an illiterate person.

After that, this illiterate man uses lots of disordered sentence to make comments. The man uses the word “sir” to solute the investigator up to twenty-one times. These kinds of disordered sentences make the investigator make sure that he is an illiterate man.

For example,

(1) “*I [sir] am not familiar [sir] with that particular bloom [sir].*”

(2) “*Well [sir] let me tell you [sir] that my friend Shel McPartland who has incautiously ...he warp.*”

(3) “*But it doesn’t sound very likely if I may say so Mr. Cockburn [sir] that Mr. McPartland would neatly infit with our outfit. Which must of necessity as I’m sure you’re hip to [sir] concern itself*

mostly with the mundanities.”

Other similar example will not be shown in this part. Look at the word “sir”; it appears almost in every sentence that the friend of Shel McPartland makes. To use too many times “sir” has two sides potential meaning. One is to reveal the speaker’s inner thinking. Only a person with low status will use honorifics frequently. Frequent honorifics emphasize the low status the man belongs to. And as well as it will reveal that the friend of Shel McPartland is an illiterate man not only because of his low status but also of his incomplete ability of making sentence. It makes sentences in disorder thus people will understand it difficultly. Violating the manner of expression in this story mainly emphasizes the man’s illiterate and his low social status.

4. Conclusion

After that, in the story *the Reference*, Donald Barthelme uses plenty of violation of cooperative principle to reveal different phenomenon and figures’ personality. Violating different maxim of cooperative principle will bring about different stylistic features. The author wants to shape the image of the friend of Shel McPartland that he is an unreliable person although he is the intimate friend of Shel McPartland through violation of the maxim of quality and the maxim of quantity. With the other two maxims, the maxim of relation and the maxim of manner, the author mainly gives an image that the friend of Shel McPartland is illiterate with low social status through violating the maxim of relation and manner. The author characterizes those figures indirectly by conversational complicature. People will realize that those depictions of personality of figures through violating cooperative principle are to create uncooperative complicature in a conversation.

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