

Analysis of Blackmail From the Perspective of Cooperative Principle

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Abstract

The classic excerpt "Blackmail" from the novel "Grand Hotel" is about a game of "blackmail and counter-blackmail". The author, Arthur Hiley, uses cooperative principle to create brilliant dialogues and characters in this selection. This successfully portrays Ogilvie as an arrogant, greedy, and cunning blackmailer and the Dukes as cold, hypocritical, and shameless superiors. This paper analyzes the characters and psychology of the characters in the novel Blackmail from the perspective of Grice's cooperative principle.

Keywords

Cooperative Principle, Violation, Blackmail.

1. Introduction

The dialogues are an important part of novels, which directly or indirectly reflects the psychological characteristics of the character and the main idea of the whole text. Therefore, we must have an in-depth understanding of the conversation in order to truly decipher the profound meaning of the novel. By using the cooperative principle to analyze the dialogues in the novel Blackmail, the author aims to illustrate the value of using Grice's cooperative principle in the discourse teaching. At the same time, it is hoped that it will help to improve students' ability to analyze and appreciate discourses.

2. Theoretical Basis

Grice, an American scholar, believes that there is a tacit agreement between speaker and listener in all linguistic communication activities in order to achieve a specific purpose. This is a principle that both parties should follow, and he calls this principle the Cooperative Principle. The Cooperative Principle can be expressed in four guidelines:

1. Maxim of Quantity

- (1) Make what you say to the required level of detail
- (2) Do not make what you say more detailed than required.

2. Maxim of Quality:

- (1) Do not say what you think is untrue;
- (2) Do not say what you lack sufficient evidence.

3. Maxim of Relation:

Be relevant.

4. Maxim of Manner:

- (1) Avoiding obscure words;
- (2) Avoid ambiguity;
- (3) speak briefly;
- (4) Speak in an organized manner.

In conversations, most people expect the other person to follow the rules. These four cooperative principles are the rules that people mostly follow when talking to others. If everyone follows these four rules in conversations, then they can have the most efficient and reasonable communication. However, people often do not fully comply with these principles because of special needs such as avoiding questions, refusing politely, and so on. Thus these statutes are often violated, and it is the violation of these norms that gives rise to conversational meaning.

3. Analysis of the Text

The story takes place in a large hotel in the United States. One of the characters Ogilvie is the head of security of a hotel. His social status is low. The other main characters are a duke and his wife. A duke is the highest ranking nobleman after a prince or king. The duchess is also a relative of the royal family. Their social status is extremely prominent. The social roles between Ogilvie and the Duke and Duchess are absolutely different. But the Duchesses killed a little girl when they drove drunk. As a result of the hit-and-run accident, they incur blackmail from the minor character Ogilvie. The Duchess and the blackmailer thus engage in a tit-for-tat psychological battle through dialogues. The author's description of this dialogue is brilliant, especially the part of the dialogue that intentionally violates the cooperative principle.

4. Violation of Cooperative Principle

4.1. Violating the Maxim of Quantity

Example 1:

"I imagine you did not come here to discuss décor".

"No, ma'am, can't say I did. I like nice things, though. Like that car of yours. The one you keep here in the hotel. Jaguar, ain't it?"

He also told her bluntly that the purpose of the visit was not to talk about the decoration of their room. But the real power of speech was in Ogilvie's hands at the moment. He needed a suitable opportunity to introduce the topic of the accident, so he violated the maxim of quantity of cooperative principle. Instead of exactly providing the duchess with a sufficient amount of information, he mentioned that he liked pretty things, such as their car. From this the conversation naturally transitions to the car that was involved in the accident. As you can see, the discourse at this point is almost entirely in his hands. Based on the evidence he had and his reasoning, he concluded that the car accident was caused by both the Duke and his wife.

Example 2:

"I'll tell you, Duke – I've been in this town and this hotel a long time. I got friends all over. I oblige them; they do the same for me, like letting me know what gives, an' where. There ain't much, out of the way, which people who stay in this hotel do, I don't get to hear about. Most of 'em never know I know, or know me. They think they got their little secret tucked away, and so they have – except like now."

At this point, Ogilvie explained in excessive detail. He brags about his wide range of contacts and the number of friends he has. They could help him with a lot of information. But generally those who do illegal things do not know that he knows everything about what they do. What he said exceeded the Duke's expectations, which in turn convinced them that he was prepared.

4.2. Violating the Maxim of Quality

The violation of the maxim of quality in the text focuses on the denial of the escape by the Dukes.

Example 1:

"Late last night the word was out about the hit-'n-run. On a hunch I went over the garage and took a quiet look-see at your car. You maybe don't know – it's away in a corner, behind a pillar where the jockeys don't see it when they're comin' by."

"I suppose that doesn't matter now, what can I possibly say? You know what happened."

"You'd better call the police and get it over."

In fact, the Duke is quite nervous, he certainly do not want the police to deal with the matter. These unspoken words fully demonstrate the Duke's helplessness after the incident was revealed. This reflects his weak character and his tendency to give in to blackmailer.

Example 2:

"Whatever names you call things, ma'am, don't matter to me. All I come for was to help you people out of trouble. But I got to live too."

After making his blackmail intentions clear, Ogilvie was not half as timid about the Duchess's aggressiveness. On the contrary, he also gently said that this is to help the duchess. This is dumbfounding, this obvious falsehood to the blackmailer's stinky face revealed.

4.3. Violating the Maxim of Relation

There are two conversations about extinguishing cigarettes in the work.

Example 1:

"My husband and I find strong smoke offensive. Would you kindly put that out."

"Pretty neat set-up you folks got."

One requested the other to put out the smoke, while the other boasted about the room's layout. This shows that at this time the detective was very confident because he had evidence of the other side's crime in his hands. He thought that the other party would soon meekly submit, and did not even put the Duke and his wife in the eye.

Example 2:

"In return for that, you will drive our car north."

"Twenty-five thousand dollars. Ten thousand now. Fifteen thousand more when you meet us in Chicago. "

"This cigar bother in' you, Duchess?"

The change from passive to active extinguishing of cigarettes aptly reflects the blackmailer's change in attitude toward the duchess. This reflects the subtle change in the role of the blackmailer from being proactive and openly defiant to being at the mercy of others.

4.4. Violating the Maxim of Manner

Violations of the modality guidelines appear primarily in the extortionist's responses to questions.

Example 1:

"You listen to me, your high-an'-mightiness. This city's burnin' mad – cops, mayor, everybody else. When they find who done that last night, who killed that kid an' its mother, then high-tailed it, they'll throw the book, and never mind who it hits, or whether they got fancy titles neither. Now I know what I know, and if I do what by rights I should, there'll be a squad of cops in here so fast you'll hardly see 'em. But I come to you first, in fairness, so's you could tell your side of it to me."

In fact, the Duke and his wife were well aware of the hit-and-run charge, which is common knowledge in society. The blackmailer also elaborates on it in order to cause panic in the other party. He gets the other party to submit and willingly put himself at his mercy.

Example 2:

"What do you propose to do?"

"Like I said, I come to hear you, side of it."

"You'd accept money to keep silent about what you know?"

"I reckon I might."

"How much do you want?"

"Well ... I figure you people are pretty well fixed."

Throughout the blackmail process, Ogilvie did not actively say straightforwardly the intention of the blackmail and the amount of money. He left these to the other side to speculate, wanting to put psychological pressure on the other side. Ogilvie appears to be crowned on the surface, but in fact is sophisticated.

5. Conclusion

In the novel "Blackmail", the dialogues play the role of expressing the character, portraying the psychology of the characters and advancing the plot of the novel. The author intentionally violates the cooperative principle when creating the dialogue, and which brings uses of dialogue to the extreme. It portrays the characters' character and inner world in the novel to the letter. Thus, the Duchess, the detective, the Duke, their hypocrisy and cowardice, shamelessness and deceitfulness is vividly presented to the readers.

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