

Violation of Grice's Maxims and its Effect on the Conversational Structure and Plot Development of Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*¹

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Abstract

The goal of this article is to analyze Kazuo Ishiguro's novel Never Let Me Go (2005) from the perspective of a combined linguistic analysis made up of stylistics, narration and pragmatics. Herbert Paul Grice's cooperative principle is used in order to illustrate the crucial features of the narrative style of the novel and account for its conversational structure and plot development. After a literature review, the basic notions of Jenny Thomas's "meaning in interaction" concept and Grice's cooperative principle are applied on the selected extracts from the novel. Several reviewers' analyses are given for a comprehension of the effects of the violation of Grice's maxims. The narrative style of the novel, violation of Grice's maxims and its effect on the novel's dramatic structure are shown how the novel is introduced, constructed with complications, and then revealed. The lack of maxims manipulates readers' expectations through presentation, especially by spinning a net of loss of interaction and withholding certain information. Using Grice's principle on the conversations that make up the complications in the story, the study illustrates that the foreshadowing strategy of Ishiguro is made possible through the violation of Grice's conversational maxims. As a conclusion, eliminating context from the conversations in the plot structure is found to be an indispensable and complementary tool for Ishiguro's narrative elegance.

Keywords: Cooperative principle, Grice, Narration, Ishiguro, Novel

1. Introduction

In this study, Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *Never Let Me Go* (2005) is analyzed in the light of Grice's cooperative principle in order to shed light on the crucial features of the narrative style of the novel and account for its plot development and resolution. Conversational structure and the narrative style of the author are scrutinized to see how complications are built up and fitted into the introduction, development and resolution levels of the novel.

¹This article is produced from the master's dissertation of the author.

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Grice's cooperative principle and its violation is searched in the selected texts that leads to the prominent complication of the novel and account for its conversational development. Further, the role of context in the conversations, its comprehension and its effect on the narrative strategy of the author is questioned. Regarding the structure of the study, in literature review, brief, adequate notions and definitions of the theories and principles used in the analysis are given. Then, to validate the research questions, various reviewers' quotes about the narrative style of the book are given in accordance with the aims of the research. In discussions, Grice's principle is applied on the conversations in the main complications to shed light on its construction. Then conclusions are drawn from the study and suggestions are made for further research.

It is contended that when there is a flawless communication between the factual world and the characters' private worlds in a fictional narrative, the cosmos inside the text is in a state of equilibrium. In such a universe, there is no need for action or change, so there is no chance for a plot to go underway (Semino, 2005). Therefore, there has to be some kind of conflict among the characters' or author's worlds in a narrative for the story to begin. In his book, Robert Wilensky (1983) juxtaposes the ways to create conflicts inside a story. Inspired by him, Marie-Laure Ryan says that for a story to be tellable, it must have a point (1991: 150). Ryan mixes her ideas with Wilensky's and outlines the concept of tellability (1991). She uses the following definition from Wilensky to explain and elaborate on what "point" means:

Points are structures that define those things that a story can be about. They characterize those contents that constitute reasonable stories and account for the existence of that story as an item to be communicated. By this I mean that a person tells or listens to a story because the story has a content that is some of intrinsic interest. The content that bears this interest value is what I term the point. (1983: 583)

In the analysis of the conversations these points are an indispensable tool for understanding whether there is a hidden message beyond the utterances or if there is something hidden and misleading. These points have a prominent strategic value in the formation of the plot structure in Ishiguro's novel. He hides the information and context in the speeches of the characters using the violation of Grice's maxims therefore the suspense in the novel is maintained and kept until the end of the novel. The reviewers' analysis part in the paper is used as a platform to prove that they have recognized the effect of suspense in the novel.

The aim of an author in writing a novel and the meanings and inferences that readers and reviewers draw from it may be different. For this reason, the reviews and commentaries of professionals and academics are important when considering the artistic value of a novel. Their analyses of matters such as plot technique, entities and concepts of the novel reveal its artistic value. Considering the debate above, in this book, the most important artistic element is the existence of a cloned race and their regular creation for their organs. However, this plotting device alone does not lead to the diversity of the novel's reviews. Ishiguro uses Hailsham school, the aims of the clones, caring and completing, and the institution of guardianship to build up a complete realization of the cloned characters for the reader. Therefore, these are the three most important entities in this novel. Analyzing these will lead us to a better understanding and appreciation of the novel and the author's artistry.

The reason why the study chose these three elements and concepts is that the author uses deviant and foregrounding language while introducing, developing and resolving these

three plot frames. They are based on linguistic structures that are available for linguistic, and thus stylistic, analysis. Understanding the linguistic structure of these elements will enable us to understand the importance of them; and this understanding will enable us to see their place within the novel's artistic value. In the development of these three elements, the author uses language that enables these three concepts to contribute to the differentiation of the clones from the real human beings in the novel. Hailsham is a school for the clones, designed for them. Caring, completing and donating are the missions of the clones. The use of the institute of guardianship and the conversations between the guardians and the clones also make the lives of the clones unique and different.

2. Literature Review

Jenny Thomas' *Meaning in Interaction: An introduction to Pragmatics* (1995) puts forward that in a conversation the speaker always indicates to another meaning other than what they say or perceive on the surface level. She defines pragmatics as the meaning in usage or the meaning in context and classifies the works on pragmatics into two categories: one dealing with speaker meaning and other with utterance interpretation. She claims that we can understand the difference by examining the levels of meaning, which are abstract meaning and contextual (utterance) meaning. A third level of meaning is reached when the speaker's intention is understood, "known as the force of an utterance" (1995: 1-2).

The first level of meaning is abstract meaning, this is what a particular sentence could mean in theory. According to Thomas, force is the second level of speaker meaning and it refers to the speaker's communicative intention. The problems of misunderstanding are classified by Thomas as: "understanding utterance meaning but not force; understanding force but not utterance meaning; and understanding neither utterance meaning nor force" (1995: 16-17). She emphasizes the importance of context for clear communication and understanding what the speaker tries to express (1995: 2-8). This, she claims is enabled through "assigning reference" in context (1995: 9). Reference is conveyed through deictic expressions. Indeed, Thomas quotes Stephen Pit Corder to show the importance of context: "Well-formed sentences produced by native speakers are mostly ambiguous when taken out of context" (1981: 39). Here, Thomas confirms conversely that a few ambiguous sentences are genuinely misleading when taken in context.

The cooperative principle coined by Grice tries to explain how the implied meaning in a conversation is transformed from the level of expressed meaning based on the individual level (Grice, 1975). The cooperative principle is defined as such: "Make your contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged" (1975: 45). Grice's theory lists four conversational maxims that should be followed in the conversations and speeches for the message to be conveyed and comprehended at the highest level possible by the speaker and targets. These are listed as quantity, which is contributing to the meaning in conversation with as much information as needed; quality, is not to utter something you are believe is not true or do not have enough knowledge on; relation principle is speaking relevantly; and manner is to be clear, orderly and not causing any vague meanings in a speech (1975: 47).

Non-observance of the maxims in a speech leads to misunderstandings or other problems. In such a situation the message of the speaker and author or narrator in a text is not conveyed therefore the reader cannot comprehend the message behind. The first of these violations of Grice's maxims is "flouting" a maxim. In this case the speaker ignores the meaning deliberately failing to receive what is spoken, so there is a clear intention of

producing an implicature. Flouting a maxim takes place in two forms: first there would be a conflict between the maxims. A sample of this case would be giving additional or fewer information than needed in the situation at the result of which the speaker is confronted with a clash of maxims. The second is flouts that exploit a maxim. At the end, violating a maxim is the unostentatious non-observance of a maxim. In the first level of flouting a maxim there are four main levels regarding the quality, quantity, relation and manner of the conversation. In each feature the flout takes a different shape. For example, in flouts regarding quality, words that are obviously untrue are uttered by the speaker or the speaker do not have required knowledge of the situation; in quantity a speaker gives extra or inadequate information than desired; in violations regarding relation, the flout is made through making a reply or remark that is unrelated to the subject matter, so the aim of the question is not accomplished. On flouts of manner there is a clash in the goals of the speakers. The second type of violation maxims is called infringing a maxim. In this violation the intention is not deliberate but because of a failure the speaker infringes a maxim and the comprehension is not achieved. Third variation of the violation is opting out of a maxim where a speaker is not involving in the cooperation enough willingly therefore the meaning is lost or lacking. Fourth and last, suspending a maxim is another violation when there is no need to opt out of observing the maxim because there are certain events in which “there is no expectation on the part of any participant that they will be fulfilled, hence the non- fulfilment does not generate any implicatures” (Grice, 1975: 49-50).

In this part unique to this research, evidence from professional reviewers’ analyses and their comments about the novel is provided and summarized, so the complications analysed prove to be important and salient for the unfolding and revelation of the novel and its complications. These are important to notice that the reviewers spotted that the Ishiguro’s narrative style is unique and conversational structures are important in this respect as well. There are a number of commentators who points to the conversational effects of themes of the novel such as “guardians”, “carer”, “donations”, “collection”, “deferral”, “completion” and many more (Dyer, 2005; Hensher, 2005; O’Neil, 2005). However, the clearest comment that underlines and highlights the conversational structure’s effect on the general quality of the text is Menand’s words (2005: 1):

It is always a puzzle to know where Ishiguro’s true subject lies. The emotional situation in his novels is spelled out in meticulous, sometimes comically tedious detail, and the focus is entirely on the narrator’s struggles to achieve clarity and contentment in an uncooperative world. Ishiguro is expert at getting readers choked up over these struggles.

The reviewers of the novel seem to fall into two groups. The first group, which outnumbers the second, is positive regarding both the narration and themes of the book. The second group is not so positive about the themes of the book, though they still respect Ishiguro’s ability to construct the plot, especially its complications through conversational and narrative strategic applications. The following reviewers and their comments praise the complication-focused narration of Ishiguro. Kakutani (2005) thinks that Ishiguro assembled a “jigsaw puzzle” with a unique fictional realm “with its own rules and dynamics”. The Economist’s analysis (2005) claims that the normal is turned upside down in the text and the references to certain concepts in the conversations intensifies the curiosity of the readers. Barrow (2005) emphasizes that the novel is the product of a “narrative brilliance” than depends on the “provocative idioms” inside the conversations and the flash-forwards that “make the reader ache with curiosity”. Yardley’s words (2005: 1) reinforces the importance of the conversational structure in the novel:

[Ishiguro] timed very carefully and deliberately everything they told us, so that we were always just too young to understand properly the latest piece of information, by the same token Ishiguro carefully and deliberately unfolds Hailsham's secrets one by one, piece by piece, as if he were slowly peeling an artichoke.

Deb (2005) also praised the quality of Ishiguro's slow-paced resolution and uncertain speeches and events in which the meaning is resolved gradually. Harrison (2005) points to the lack of communication inside the speeches of the characters and states that the readers are lost in the same lack of meaning in the story and have to guess what comes next. In the same direction, Kemp (2005: 1) states that Ishiguro's ability in creating such a narration depends on the fact that he created a "world where it was often also hard for the reader to make out what was going on, seemed somewhat fruitless experiments in low-visibility fiction".

3. Discussion

In *Never Let Me Go*, the removal of context enables the author to foreshadow and withdraw information from the reader and the clones. This is enabled thorough taking out the context from the conversations so that the reader (and sometimes the clones) are left with ambiguous meanings. How is the context removed from the reader? First and foremost, removal of context is the reality that the students of Hailsham, Kathy, Ruth and the others, are copied human clones. This information is hidden from the reader until the end (exceptionally, Kathy herself learnt this at Madame's house, but as she is remembering things from past in the narration, she knows it before the reader). The context removers for the clones is the guardians. The removal of context for the reader is done through Kathy (thus the author). Secondly, without telling the clones that Hailsham was a laboratory-like school for them, concerns and presuppositions about the clones' discussions of the complications (these discussions among the clones make up a huge part of the novel) become inconclusive and blurry. The strategic struggle between Miss Lucy and the other guardians about telling the clones that they are cloned and destined to donate, and die is a matter of withdrawing or giving the context to the clones. If the clones are given every bit of information, then so are the readers. Then, there would be no departure point for the complications of the story. This is clearly stated by Miss Emily in the novel as such:

Lucy Wainright was idealistic, nothing wrong with that. But she had no grasp of practicalities. You see, we were able to give you something, something which even now no one will ever take from you, and we were able to do that principally by sheltering you. Hailsham would not have been Hailsham if we hadn't. Very well, sometimes that meant we kept things from you, lied to you. Yes, in many ways we fooled you. I suppose you could even call it that. But we sheltered you during those years, and we gave you your childhoods. (*Never*: 262-263)

In Miss Lucy's talk, Kathy now can understand both the force and meaning of the utterances, though what the reader cannot understand are the aim and intention of the speaker. Kathy's own words reveal that when they were little they could not comprehend it: "I can see we were just at that age when we knew a few things about ourselves - about who we were, how we were different from our guardians, from the people outside - but hadn't yet understood what any of it meant" (*Never*: 36). Therefore, Kathy is now 30 years old and remembering things from the past and knows everything, what she did not know was the force of Miss Lucy's utterances. The reader, when reading the story for the first time and

listening to Kathy's reminiscences, cannot understand the force of Miss Lucy's utterances either. In this speech, which is one of the most important among the resolution extracts, Miss Emily explains that they fooled the clones with lies. On the other hand, she adds in a positive way that their efforts were not in vain: they had given the clones their childhoods, their own memories and possessions. This final extract brings us to the next section of the paper, which is a conversational analysis of these lies of the guardians in terms of Grice's conversational maxims.

The final extract was the first-hand confession of the deliberate violation of Grice's maxims in the conversations between the guardians and the clones. In this part, the non-observance of Grice's maxims in the speeches of Miss Lucy, whose information blackout strategy leads to the most important complication of the novel is scrutinized, which is: Kathy and her friends are clones, their lives are predetermined though they are not being told everything. In discussions section, the extracts below that chosen from the novel are the most important for its exposition. They do not comply with Grice's principles. On the level of the reader's comprehension of the novel, the narrator does not make enough contribution to construct the broader picture; the narrator determines the stage of the narration on purpose. While talking with the clones, the guardians flout (sometimes opt out or suspend) the maxims so as not to give away the facts about their creation, aim and lives. In parallel with this, the narrator, Kathy, violates the maxims to have the same effect on the reader: To create conflicts, to withdraw information and to raise doubts in the minds of the readers.

In the following conversation, Miss Lucy blatantly flouts a maxim. In this extract the flout is necessitated by a clash between the maxims:

—Miss, why does Madame take our things anyway?

—All I can tell you today is that it's for a good reason. A very important reason. But if I tried to explain it to you now, I don't think you'd understand. One day, I hope, it'll be explained to you. (*Never*: 40)

According to the maxim of quantity, in a conversation a speaker should contribute as informatively as is required for a complete comprehension and meaning transfer. However, Miss Lucy flouts the maxim by not answering the question. The answer should be because the things are used to prove that you are creative, therefore you have souls. An additional flout is in the maxim of manner. Miss Lucy causes obscurity in her words that makes the clones' minds become blurred about this issue. On the other hand, Grice's maxims seem to overlap here because Miss Lucy opts out of the maxim of quantity at the same time. Opting out of a maxim ensues when a speaker indicates "unwillingness to cooperate in the way the maxim requires" (Thomas, 1995: 74). Miss Lucy wants to say more though she is not allowed to (Miss Emily states that Miss Lucy is dismissed because she taught too much). In this extract, the maxims are flouted and opted out of, both on the level of the clones' comprehension and of the readers. In terms of the context of the extract, the reader is not given the information that the things are taken away to prove that the clones have souls.

In the next extract, there is a situation in which the reason why the clones are not allowed to smoke needs to be explained. Miss Lucy speaks:

—It's not good that I smoked. It wasn't good for me so I stopped it. But what you must understand is that for you, all of you, it's much, much worse to smoke than it ever was for me. [...]

—You've been told about it. You're students. You're ... special. So keeping yourselves well, keeping yourselves very healthy inside, that's much more important for each of you than it is for me. She stopped again and looked at us in a strange way. Afterwards, when we discussed it, some of us were sure she was dying for someone to ask:

—Why? Why is it so much worse for us? But no one did. (*Never*: 68)

In these extracts, the maxims are not flouted or opted but suspended. Thomas explains suspending a maxim as such: “there are occasions when there is no need to opt out of observing the maxims because there are certain events in which there is no expectation on the part of any participant that they will be fulfilled” (1995: 76). Therefore, on the level of the clones' comprehension, the maxim of quantity is suspended because they do not have any expectation to hear the complete answer. However, on the level of the reader's comprehension, the question of why remains unanswered. In that sense, the maxim of quantity is flouted because there is not enough information for the reader. In terms of the context of the conversation, the information that the clones must be healthy because their organs have to be healthy is not given.

In these next extracts, Miss Lucy reveals that she lied before, thus flouting a maxim of quality. She tries to make up for it, though she raises new complications and flouts another maxim:

Tommy, I made a mistake, when I said what I did to you. And I should have put you right about it long before now.' Then she's saying I should forget everything she told me before. That she'd done me a big disservice telling me not to worry about being creative. That the other guardians had been right all along, and there was no excuse for my art being so rubbish ... [...] Listen, Tommy, your art, it is important. And not just because it's evidence. But for your own sake. You'll get a lot from it, just for yourself.

—Hold on. What did she mean, evidence? (*Never*: 105-106)

In the extract, Miss Lucy continues flouting the maxim of quantity because the clear answer to the question “What is wrong with not being creative?” is not explained properly. This time, Miss Lucy brings in an evidence discussion. She does not explain what kind of evidence that is or what it is for. Here, on both the level of the clones and of the reader's comprehension the maxim of quantity is flouted. The lack of context, which is that creativity is important because they are tested to see if they had souls' results in the reader's lack of comprehension.

4. Conclusions

The aim of this study has been to account for the stylistics and narrative peculiarities of the novel *Never Let Me Go* by Kazuo Ishiguro, as well as for the novel's conversational development and some important aspects of its authorial narrative techniques. The analyses were made in terms of Grice's cooperative principle. Primarily, the research leads to a better understanding of the novel's artistic value and the author's narrative achievements in writing it. On the other hand, it attempts to test the applicability of the theories above to explore their

strengths and weaknesses. Moreover, it was also pointed out that it is these communicative complications which make up the strategic points of the novel, i.e. the presentation of the novel with conversational structure leading to the manipulation of the reader's expectations. Finally, the verbal construction of the main complication of the novel in terms of Grice's cooperative principle were accounted for in the discussion.

How was the conflicts of the story and the data withheld by the author chosen? How can it be claimed that these points are left undetected and hidden until the revelation part of the novel? The first validation comes from the comments of the reviewers. The reviewers point to some important points in the novel, which surprised them or made them praise the author's success in this matter. The points almost all coincide with the conflict elements of the plot structure that were outlined. On the other hand, it can be said that the reviewers wrote their pieces after reading the novel, therefore knowing the resolution of the conflicts and having a through comprehension of the novel's narration, motives and arguments. In contrast, what makes the commentaries valid is that reality. Having a profound comprehension of the novel's themes and arguments, they can pick up the main points in the novel. Moreover, the reviewers are professionals.

A novel (especially the one analyzed in this study) includes a series of blocks of conversations or at least reports of them from the first person or third person narrator. Therefore, Grice's principle is a feasible device for that particular novel. In fact, Kathy is telling us her story, which is also in the form of exposition, complications, climax and resolution for herself, like a novel. Therefore, these processes occur twice in the novel, first for Kathy then for the reader. Then, why would Kathy hide the fact that they are clones. This has a simple answer. Keeping the reader awake. Therefore, Ishiguro's style in the conversations aims at this effect. Thomas (1995: 87) states that some problems occur when using Grice's maxims. In the analysis, as a matter of fact, sometimes the maxims overlap reach other and they are problematic to differentiate from one another because of the impossibility of knowing author's intentions and contexts. Although there were problems with Grice's principle when applying it to the conversational process in the novel, his principle works in general terms. The author and his characters did not contribute until the end of the novel. Grice's maxims could contribute greatly to the conversational technique of a writer. Understanding how the non-observance of the maxims work in prose can enable a writer to produce varieties of conversations between the characters in a story, which appeals to the cognitive process of foreshadowing and withholding information strategies on the reader's side.

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