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A STUDY OF GRICEAN THEORY OF IMPLICATURE
AND NONVERBAL IMPLICATURE IN
SOMERSET MAUGHAM'S *MR. KNOW ALL*

Abstract

Somerset Maugham's writings in general and short stories in particular did not receive the critical attention they deserve. His critics found him cynical in his attitude to life. Therefore, the technical virtuosity of his narration and linguistic skill in writing remain unexplored. An enquiry into Maugham's language through an application of Grice's Maxims and the implicature that

emanate from the violation of the Maxims, will help a reader to understand that his language use is only apparently simple.

H.P. Grice's discussions on Maxims of Conversation and Conversational Implicatures paved way to disseminate communication through language, where a speaker or a writer assumes that the recipient of the message already is aware of it. Implicature refers to what is suggested in an utterance, even though neither expressed nor strictly implied. It helps "to clarify the intuitive difference between what is expressed literally in a sentence and what is merely suggested by an utterance of the same string of words." This study attempts to use Grice's Cooperative Principle and the four Maxims of Conversation, together with Nonverbal Communication, to understand the linguistic meaning of words in Maugham's short story *Mr. Know All*, when implications are intended.

Keywords: implicature, cooperative principle, nonverbal communication

Introduction

Somerset Maugham was a deft painter of characters where they become symbolic to Maugham's intention of delineating a peculiar character trait. *Mr. Know-All* is an interesting short story of Somerset Maugham, similar to Alexander Baron's story *The Man Who Knew Too Much*. In both, the hero who steals the show in every discussion becomes the target of others for contempt born out of insane jealousy. When others feel that they have trapped Mr. Know All in an incident, he really triumphs with his greater human understanding.

When read with a linguistic intent, this story exposes the greatness of Maugham's use of his apparently simple prose style. Gricean theory of conversational implicature, rightly considered the foundation of modern theories of meaning and implicitness, is used to analyse this short story. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy clarifies that "Implicature serves a variety of goals beyond communication: maintaining good social relations, misleading without lying, style, and verbal efficiency." The Cooperative Principle and associated maxims (Quality, Quantity, Relevance and Manner) play a central role in implying something in saying one thing. Implicatures also use figures of speech like irony and metaphor to enable the audience to recognize that something has been implicated.

Grice asserted that the following rules are followed by people for effective communication:

Cooperative Principle. Contribute what is required by the accepted purpose of the conversation.

Maxim of Quality. Make your contribution true; so do not convey what you believe false or unjustified.

Maxim of Quantity. Be as informative as required.

Maxim of Relation. Be relevant.

Maxim of Manner. Be perspicuous; so avoid obscurity and ambiguity, and strive for brevity and order.

It is proved that communication is done not only by words emanating from the mouth. It is widely accepted that a lot more is inferred from what is not said; i.e. what is conveyed through non-verbal cues. In both formal and informal communication, the wordless meaning is more important, as what is said can be misconstrued or can mislead, but non-verbal communication definitely does not. Various surveys have shown that 7% of communication is through words, 38% is vocal (pause, intonation and pitch) and 55% of communication is through body language. To be successful in both personal and professional relationship, it is necessary that there should be the ability to understand how non-verbal communication can act as a powerful tool to convey meaning. Ray Birdwhistell in his book *Kinesics and Context* (1952) popularized the term ‘body language’. E.T. Hall, another anthropologist, coined the term Proxemics to denote “The study of how human beings communicate through their use of space.” It involves the study of an individual’s use of physical space while interacting with others. George L. Trager invented the study of Paralinguistics in the 1950’s and his research showed that the tone of voice conveys a whole gamut of information and conveys the state of the mind of a person.

Paul Grice had also given sufficient thought to Non-Verbal Communication. He considered such items under ‘stress’. Stress, according to Grice, on many occasions make a difference to the speaker’s meaning; indeed, it is one of the elements, which help to generate implicature. The Maxim of Relevance applies “not only to what is said but also to features of the means used for saying what is said” (p. 51). Thus, so long as non-verbal communication satisfies the Maxim of Relevance, it has its place in communication and implicature.

In the present study, an attempt has been made to explore the nuances of Maugham’s implicature to bring out his artistry, by analyzing the conversations in the story through an application of H.P. Grice’s Cooperative Principle and Nonverbal cues.

1. Maxim of Quality

Mr. Ramsay was ever irritated with Kelada for stealing the show in every discussion in the cruiser. When he boasted of his knowledge of pearls, Mr. Ramsay proposed to expose him. Mr. Kelada referred to Mrs. Ramsay's necklace as precious. Mr. Ramsay had the word from his wife that the pearls in the string were cultured, costing some 18 dollars. He chose to bet on its being cultured and Kelada accepted the challenge.

Mrs. Ramsay demurred what her husband claimed and said that they had to accept her words.

'But how can it be proved?' she continued. 'It's only my
word against Mr. Kelada's.' (390)

Mr. Kelada immediately intervened and asked to see her string of pearls. When Mr. Ramsay asked his wife to give it to Mr. Kelada, she hesitatingly put her hand to her neck

'I can't undo it,' she said. 'Mr Kelada will just have to take my word for it.' (390)

These two responses from Mrs. Ramsey violate the sub maxim "do not convey what you believe to be false or unverified." She had intentionally lied to hide the truth from her husband.

To prove Mr. Kelada wrong, Mr. Ramsay moved to his wife's side and undid the necklace himself. When he handed it over to Mr. Kelada, he took a magnifying glass from his coat and meticulously examined it. His face became suffused with a triumphant smile and after handing over the chain, he opened his mouth to speak. But suddenly, he glimpsed Mrs. Ramsay's pale face and wide eyes filled with consternation. Her look held frantic appeal, and the narrator wondered how her husband could be oblivious to it. Mr. Kelada, with a deep flush on his face, visibly controlled his open mouth and said,

'I was mistaken,' he said. 'It's a very good imitation, but of course
as soon as I looked through my glass I saw that it wasn't real. I think
eighteen dollars is just about as much as the damned thing's worth.' (390)

The talkative man who never bothered to know if others liked his intervention suddenly reacted to the unspoken appeal in the woman's eyes and responded by flouting the sub maxim "do not convey what you believe to be false or unverified", to save her not only before her husband but before the entire crew. The appeal that Mrs. Ramsay made through her body language, particularly her eyes is discussed in the section on non-verbal communication. Body language is more reliable as it is unconscious.

2. Maxim of Quantity

The narrator was flummoxed to hear Mr. Kelada call himself an Englishman, as Mr. Kelada was short and sturdily built with long, black hair. His accent was different and the narrator suspected that his passport would reveal that he was not a native British. So,

“I blinked. ‘Are you English?’ I asked, perhaps tactlessly.

‘Rather. You don’t think I look an American, do you?

British to the backbone, that’s what I am.’ (385)

Here we can take the conversation of both the narrator and Mr. Kelada as an example of conversational implicature. The narrator was not able to contain his surprise and let his words slip out involuntarily. This shows that he was not very good at masking his emotions and that he had floundered in maintaining decorum with a stranger. On the other hand, Kelada’s use of ‘rather’ proves that he was evasive in answering whether he was British or not. He did not give a direct ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer, but instead hedged. Hedgings are also important words, which aid conversational implicatures and this response flouts the sub maxim “Be as informative as required,” as we are left to wonder if Mr. Kelada belonged to some other nationality.

3. Maxim of Relevance

When Mr. Kelada received a cover, he was perplexed as to the sender and exclaimed, “Who is it from?” When he drew out a hundred-dollar from it, he shredded the envelope into bits and asked the narrator,

‘Do you mind just throwing them out of the port-hole?’ (391)

Here, Mr. Kelada violates the sub maxim “Be relevant” and “Add new information,” as he did not explain to the narrator from whom he had received that envelope. It implies that he did not want anyone to know that Mrs. Ramsay had conceded to Mr. Kelada’s surmise that her pearls were truly real. It also implies that Mr. Kelada wanted to save the woman a second time, by not exposing to anyone that she had returned the hundred-dollar note he lost in the bet.

Mr. Kelada deduced that the narrator was aware who the sender was, though he did not mention Mrs. Ramsay’s name. He was happy that at least one person, the narrator, had become aware of his having accepted defeat in the bet, though he could have easily won.

‘No one likes being made to look a perfect damned fool,’ he said. (391)

This particularized implicature flouts the sub maxim “Add new information.” It implies that Mr. Kelada had voluntarily shouldered the jibes of others to help the unknown woman.

4. Maxim of Manner

Mr. Kelada introduced himself and asked the narrator,

‘What will you have?’ (385)

This perplexed the narrator as alcohol was prohibited in the liner. Thus, Mr. Kelada’s flouts the sub maxim “be perspicuous,” as it makes the author wonder how this man could have access to liquor on board the ship.

Towards the end of the story, the narrator asked Kelada if the pearls were real. To that Mr. Kelada answered:

‘If I had a pretty little wife I shouldn’t let her spend a year in New York while I stayed at Kobe,’ said he. (391)

Here Mr. Kelada flouts the sub maxim “avoid obscurity and ambiguity” as his words do not directly answer whether the pearls were real or not, but implies that Mrs. Ramsey, who had been left alone in New York while her husband had been at Japan, had been flirting with another man. Instead of passing moral judgment, he proved himself to be more tolerant of human frailty.

5. Non-Verbal Implicature

5.1. Proxemics

The narrator was travelling from San Francisco to Yokohama, and since the war had just ended, passengers thronged the ocean cruisers and had to accept the accommodation provided by the agents.

“It suggested closed port-holes and the night air rigidly excluded. It was bad enough to share a cabin for fourteen days with anyone I should have looked upon it with less dismay if my fellow-passenger’s name had been Smith or Brown.” (384)

The narrator’s attitude of hatred is a psychological implication of class-consciousness. He reveals it again, when he went into the cabin he shared with Kelada and observed that Kelada was a rich man as he used costly things. They were all displayed on the tables and this is a non-verbal implicature that Kelada was pompous and flaunted all his costly possessions. We can also find from the reaction of the narrator the universal truth that people do not take kindly to the

people, who are ahead of them in the social ladder. These two instances and the repetition of the opinion he had of Kelada,

I did not like Mr. Kelada. (385 & 386)

show that the people's attitude is also an indicator of non-verbal implication, as it would definitely mar their social relationships too.

The second instance of Proxemics can be seen, where irritated with Kelada's familiar attitude in the smoking room, the narrator abruptly got up saying that he wanted to book his seat in the dining room. But Mr. Kelada assured him saying that he had already booked a table for both of them. The narrator could not shake him off and laments,

I not only shared a cabin with him and ate three meals a day at the
Same table, but I could not walk round the deck without his joining me." (387)

and again,

"It was at meal times that he was most intolerable. For the better part
of an hour then he had us at his mercy. He was hearty, jovial, loquacious
and argumentative." (387)

These two instances show fixed-feature elements, where the narrator felt claustrophobic with Kelada's domineering attitude everywhere on board the ship.

5.2. Kinesics – Appearance

The narrator thought that his cabin-mate was not an Englishman and so was surprised, when Mr. Kelada introduced himself as English. The narrator undiplomatically enquired if the other man was English. The man jokingly asked if he looked like an American and confirmed that he was British by waving his passport as evidence. But his appearance did not measure that up to that of an Englishman.

"Mr Kelada was short and of a sturdy build, clean-shaven and
dark-skinned, with a fleshy, hooked nose and very large, lustrous
and liquid eyes. His long black hair was sleek and curly. He spoke
with a fluency in which there was nothing English and his gestures
were exuberant."

Mr. Kelada was the most detested man on the cruiser, but he always accepted it as a taunts as a commendation. At mealtimes, he was insufferable, as he was voluble and knowledgeable on all

topics. He became distressed if anyone disagreed with him and challenged the person interminably until the other conceded defeat. Mr. Ramsay was at Kobe in the American Consular Service.

He was a great heavy fellow from the Middle West, with loose fat under a tight skin, and he bulged out of his ready-made clothes. (388)

The appearance of Mrs. Ramsay was particularly noted by the narrator,

“Mrs Ramsay was a very pretty little thing, with pleasant manners and a sense of humour. The Consular Service is ill paid, and she was dressed always very simply; but she knew how to wear her clothes. She achieved an effect of quiet distinction..... You could not look at her without being struck by her modesty. It shone in her like a flower on a coat. (385)

Appearances are deceptive. Initially, Kelada was portrayed as a man who was overbearing, audacious and meddling. He was insensitive to other people’s hatred, turned their censure and insults into compliments, and basked in them. Nevertheless, this man suddenly came out of his shell and correctly read the predicament of Mrs. Ramsay and saved her face in public. On the other hand, Mrs. Ramsay, who was shown as a modest woman, who knew how to dress and behave, had betrayed her husband’s trust and been unfaithful to him.

5.3. Kinesics – Gestures

Mr. Kelada was very jovial and often smiled happily, while talking with the narrator. In the first instance, when they met for the first time,

‘I am Mr Kelada,’ he added, with a smile that showed a row of flashing teeth, and sat down. (385)

and again when he offered a drink to the narrator, when no liquor was served on deck.

“But Mr. Kelada flashed an oriental smile at me.”

This generous smiling makes the narrator suspect that Kelada was not a Britisher, as Englishmen are always reticent and do not take to strangers easily.

When the narrator thoughtlessly enquired if Kelada was English, Mr. Kelada insisted that he was British.

“To prove it, Mr Kelada took out of his pocket a passport and

airily waved it under my nose.” (385)

Here Mr. Kelada’s action implies that he was an Englishman. However, as his accent was different, the narrator suspected that his passport would reveal that he was not a native British. The narrator was offended, when Mr. Kelada called his first name to put the narrator at ease. The narrator once again confirmed of his opinion that he did not like Mr. Kelada. The narrator ignored Mr. Kelada and continued with his card game, but when Mr. Kelada interfered even in that, the narrator was extremely exasperated. With hatred churning inside him, the narrator ended his game. Then Mr. Kelada seized the pack and started showing the narrator some card games. The narrator abhorred it and abruptly got up saying that he wanted to book his seat in the dining-room. But Mr. Kelada assured him saying that he had already booked a table for both of them. This infuriated the narrator even more and the thought became fixed in his mind that he hated Mr. Kelada.

“He was hearty, jovial, loquacious and argumentative. He knew everything better than anybody else, and it was an affront to his overweening vanity that you should disagree with him. He would not drop a subject, however unimportant, till he had brought you round to his way of thinking. The possibility that he could be mistaken never occurred to him.” (387)

This attitude assumes significance, as towards the end the man proved that he was much more perceptive than he was given credit for.

Once, the people at the narrator’s table had a fervent discussion about the artificial pearls made by the Japanese. . As usual, Mr. Kelada plunged into discussion and told them everything that he knew about pearls. Mr. Ramsay could not accept Mr. Kelada’s snobbishness and had an intense argument with him. Mr. Kelada was stumped by something Mr. Ramsay said and shouted that since he was in pearl trade, he knew everything about it. He revealed that he was going to Japan on that business and flung a challenge that no man could know better than him. Everyone was flabbergasted, as Mr. Kelada had never before divulged his true business.

“He looked round the table triumphantly.” (389)

Mr. Kelada’s superior look is an implication that he was an expert, who could very easily tell a real pearl from cultured pearls.

Kelada said that the moment he had seen the string of pearls around Mrs. Ramsey's neck, he knew them to be real. To this,

“Mrs Ramsay in her modest way flushed a little and slipped the chain
inside her dress.” (389)

This gesture shows the nature of Mrs. Ramsey, who wanted to instinctively hide the real pearls, which would bring her shame and retribution. She wanted to hide them from prying eyes and bring the discussion quickly to an end.

When Mr. Ramsay asked Mr. Kelada to value it and he replied that it would fetch even thirty thousand.

“Ramsay smiled grimly.” (389)

as he had information from Mrs. Ramsay of it being imitation jewellery. This reveals how he now relished an opportunity to prove Kelada wrong.

Mr. Ramsay said that his wife had bought them at a department store at New York for eighteen dollars.

“Mr. Kelada flushed.” (389)

This angry flush warming Mr. Kelada's face implicates that Mr. Ramsay repudiated his being a connoisseur of pearls.

“She had a little smile on her lips and her tone was gently deprecating.” (390)

Her reaction indicates that she wanted to gently extricate herself from the situation, which was getting out of her control.

Mr. Ramsay buoyed by the bet Kelada threw his way, urged Mrs. Ramsay to give the chain to Kelada. But,

“Mrs Ramsay hesitated a moment. She put her hands to the clasp.” (390)

Her hesitancy implies that she was not willing to hand over the string of pearls to a man who knew about real pearls. It is also apparent that she was not willing to hand over the chain of pearls to Kelada.

Mrs. Ramsay said that she couldn't undo the chain around her neck and again insisted that Mr. Kelada would just have to accept what she said. At that,

“Ramsay jumped up.” (390)

This gesture implies that Ramsey was wound tight with tension and was not ready to drop the argument as he had been bent on proving Kelada wrong.

Ramsay handed over the pearls to Kelada, whose face became wreathed with an exultant smile, when he tested it with his magnifying glass. He handed back the chain and when he was about to speak,

“Suddenly he caught sight of Mrs Ramsay’s face. It was so white that she looked as though she were about to faint. She was staring at him with wide and terrified eyes. They held a desperate appeal.” (390)

Through this non-verbal cue, the desperate woman, on the verge of being caught out in a lie, frantically tried to send across an appeal to a relatively strange man. She used her eyes to signal to him not to reveal her treachery and tried to reach the sensitivity of Mr. Kelada. Her pale face and her expressive eyes were conveying a plea to Kelada not to reveal her treachery.

When it was apparent from the satisfied look on Kelada’s face that the pearls were real, Mrs. Ramsey’s pale face and wide eyes filled with consternation. Her look held frantic appeal, and the narrator wondered how her husband could be oblivious to it.

“ it was so clear that I wondered why her husband did not see it.” (390)

This shows that Ramsey was an inconsiderate husband, who was insensitive to every change of expression on his wife’s face. It could also be assumed that this inconsiderate attitude of her husband had driven Mrs. Ramsey to find consolation in another person’s kindness.

On reading Mrs. Ramsey’s face, Kelada became undecided and

“Mr Kelada stopped with his mouth open. He flushed deeply.

You could almost see the effort he was making over himself.” (390)

This gesture shows how difficult it was for the boastful man to refrain himself from exposing the actual truth. These imply the inner struggle he was suffering, where he wanted to brag about his correct prediction, but at the same time was unnerved as to whether to heed the woman’s appeal. He accepted that he was mistaken after close examination and passed up saying that the pearl was worth only eighteen dollars. And then,

“He took out his pocket–book and from it a hundred–dollar note.

He handed it to Ramsay without a word.” (390)

This silent gesture indicates that Kelada had sympathy to human frailty and accepted his defeat for a purpose.

When Kelada silently drew out his pocket-book and gave a hundred-dollar note to Mr. Ramsay, Ramsay gleefully accepted the note and asked Mr. Kelada that this would be a lesson for him not to be very conceited. But,

“I (the narrator) noticed that Mr Kelada’s hands were trembling.” (391)

This again proves that Kelada was exercising a super human control over himself in not proving his prediction to be right.

Everyone on the ship was happy to share the juicy gossip, and Kelada had to face their repartee, where for once he had been beaten hands down.

“But Mrs. Ramsay retired to her state-room with a headache.” (391)

This indicates that Mrs. Ramsay’s nerves had received a shocking battering and that she could not bear to see the man derided, who had saved her from public humiliation.

The next morning, when Mr. Kelada received an envelope with a hundred-dollar note,

“He looked at me and again he reddened. He tore the envelope into little bits and gave them to me.” (391)

The eye contact between the narrator and Kelada is indicative of their secret understanding. He intentionally tore the envelope so that it would not reach another person’s hands, which would expose Mrs. Ramsey’s deceitfulness.

6. Irony

Here the title given to Mr. Kelada “Mr. Know-All” is an example of irony as the people on board the ship used it to make a joke of the man, who infuriated them with his pompousness and meddling attitude.

He was everywhere and always. He was certainly the best-hated man in the ship. We called him Mr Know-All, even to his face. He took it as a compliment.

This is an apt example of situational irony, as the man who assumed to know ‘everything’ was not intelligent enough to understand that it was a derogatory term rather than a compliment. As explained by Pexman and Glenwright (2007), this ironic criticism though is a semantically positive utterance, has been used with a negative intent. McDonald (1999) said that verbal irony

can be used to diffuse criticism to make it less offensive. Mr. Kelada might have taken the cue if the others on board had not backed out of the comment by creating humour and making a joke of Mr. Kelada.

7. Repetition

In the beginning of the story, we find the narrator repeated thinking

“I did not like Mr. Kelada.”

The reaction of the narrator hints at the universal truth that people do not take kindly to the people, who are ahead of them in the social ladder. It also implies that when we are confronted with people who are superior to us in intelligence and performance, we naturally demean them and make them an object of mockery.

But at the end we find a reversal of his opinion, as he had opportunities to study Kelada's great understanding.

“At that moment I did not entirely dislike Mr Kelada.” (391)

This change of opinion implies that the narrator now acknowledged Kelada's quality.

Conclusion

Thus, this story revolving around Mr. Kelada proves that people exasperated with chattiness and superiority of dogmatic people would go to any extent to make them cringe with obeisance. Mr. Kelada made the meal times a horrendous affair for the people and his inconsiderateness was ruthlessly crushed at the very table. The various verbal and non-verbal implicatures prove that this central character was also successful in exposing the prejudices of the society and highlight the significance of the saying “Don't judge a book by its cover.” The present study of Somerset Maugham's short stories in the light of Grice's theory of implicature emphasizes that his simple style and limited vocabulary have rich resources for generating verbal implicatures. This linguistic approach enables the readers to improve their cognitive interpretation by understanding Maugham's use of obscure and ambiguous utterances.

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