

# Analysis of Cooperation Principle and Politeness Principle – Taking *Love is a Fallacy* as an Example -

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## Abstract:

This article mainly talks about the cooperation principle and the politeness principle in the narration “love is a fallacy” which was written by Max Shulman who introduces some classic logic fallacies in a humorous tone. In the narration, the characters break the cooperation principle and the politeness principle for many times. The article is trying to analyze the conversation in the love is a fallacy and the aims of the author, based on the cooperation and politeness principle. This article finds that the break of the principles help the author to describe the personalities of the characters, to connect the passage and to create the comedic effect and so on.

**Keywords:** Love is a Fallacy, Cooperation Principle, Politeness Principle

## Introduction

Max Shulman is an American writer who is good at humor and satire. His writings range from novels to television scripts. Shulman’s collegiate character, Dobie Gillis, was the subject of a series of short stories named *The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis*, which was air on the CBS as a sitcom from 1959 to 1963. *Love is a fallacy* is taken from Shulman’s *The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis*.

This story tells Dobie’s failure to win the heart of a young woman with the force of logic, which proves to him that “love is a fallacy”.

In the narration, Polly was featured as a silly and naive girl. However, the author didn’t take so much ink to describe her naive, he just use the speech to show her character of naive. How could he make it? Obviously, it’s the matter of pragmatics. We will analyze how the cooperative principle and the politeness principle work in the speech between Dobie and Polly.

There are many analyses of love is a fallacy from linguistic perspective, Song Yi (2013) made a research of the stylistic features of love is a fallacy. He found that run-on sentences, fragments, elliptical sentences help describe heroes’ characteristic and their psychology and the writer’s attitude to them.[6]Wang Jinling(2014) made a suvery of antithesis in *love is a fallacy*. She argues that the writer fully employs the rhetoric device of antithesis in his work, making the language colorful and powerful. [7]Liu Yan(2018) made an anlysis of the character from the perspective of speech act theory and cooperative principle,she analyze the distinguished characters in the *love is fallacy* with the help of these two theories.[4] Lin Li (2022) explored the rhetoric devices in love is a fallacy, she believes that has fashioned the hero’s character image of unreliable narrator, so as to fulfill

the intention of exposing and satirizing the widespread social fallacies in America of that era. [5]

## Theory basis

### *Cooperative Principle*

The Cooperative Principle is proposed by H.P. Grice in 1975. In his work *Logic and Conversation*, Grice distinguished four categories of maxims which will yield results in accordance with the Cooperative Principle.[2]

The first is the category of quantity. It requires the quantity of information.

a. Make your contribution as informative as is required for the current purpose of the exchange.

b. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

Under the category of quality, Grice place that “try to make your contribution one that is true”.

a. Do not say what you believe to be false.

b. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

The third is the maxim of Relation, which means be relevant.

The last is the maxim of Manner. Grice refers it as “be perspicuous”.

a. Avoid obscurity.

b. Avoid ambiguity.

c. Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).

d. Be orderly.

### *Politeness Principle*

The politeness Principle is proposed by G.N. Leech in 1983. Based on Grice’s theory, the Politeness Principle made up for deficiencies of the cooperation principle. In the *Principles of Pragmatics*, he defined politeness as forms of behavior which are aimed at the establishment and maintenance of comity. Like Grice, Leech distinguished six maxims of politeness.[3]

(1) Tacit Maxim

a. Minimize cost to other

b. Maximize benefit to other

(2) Generosity Maxim

a. Minimize benefit to self

b. Maximize cost to self

(3) Approbation Maxim

a. Minimize dispraise of other

b. Maximize praise of other

(4) Maxim of Modest

a. Minimize praise of self

b. Maximize dispraise of self

(5) Agreement Maxim

a. Minimize disagreement between self and other

b. Maximize agreement between self and other

(6) Sympathy Maxim

a. Minimize antipathy between self and other

b. Maximize sympathy between self and other

We can see that the Tacit maxim and the Generosity maxim are two sides of the coin. The former requires how to treat other, and the latter suggests us how to treat ourselves. In the same way, the Approbation Maxim tells us how to judge other, and the Maxim of modest implies us how to judge ourselves. They are different perspectives of the same question—how to act politely when we communicate with others.

## The pragmatic analysis of speech in *Love is a Fallacy*

Usually, the speech of characters in the novels will obey the cooperation principle and the politeness principle, in that way the readers could understand the passage in terms of words, syntax and their living experience. However, the writer may break the principles intentionally to improve the literal effect. That is to say, we can make an analysis about the writer's intention with pragmatics. In the narration, the writer breaks the principles for many times, which makes the passage interesting and hilarious. We will make a pragmatic analysis in the context *love is a fallacy*.

### *Cooperation principle of the text*

In the text of "*love is a fallacy*", Petey was described as a beautiful and not so smart girl. Dobie wants to make her clever, so he taught logic lessons for her. During the lessons, there are many conversations which obey or break the maxim of the cooperation principle.[1]

#### (1) To emphasize the rightness of Dobie's logic

The maxim of quantity requires that we should not offer too much or too little information in our conversation. In other words, it is proper to offer enough information in our conversation. When the information more or less than required, the speaker will break the maxim of quantity.

Here is an example of breaking the maxim of quantity.

Dobie found his roommate, Petey, lying on the bed, he thought Petey was ill, so he managed to call the doctor. But Petey said something confusing.

*"Raccoon," he mumbled thickly.*

*"Raccoon?" I said, pausing in my flight.*

*"I want a raccoon coat," he wailed.*

*"I should have known it", he cried, ponding his temples. "I should have known they'd come back when the Charleston came back. Like a fool I spent all my money for textbooks, and now I can't get a raccoon coat."*

*"Can you mean." I said incredulously, "that people are actually wearing raccoon coats again?"*

*"All the Big Men on Campus are wearing them. Where've you been?"[8]*

In this conversation, Petey broke the maxim of quantity twice. Petey wants a raccoon coat, but he just said "raccoon" at first. Apparently, Petey offered too little information. Dobie cannot understand what Petey's word mean. In this way, the writer emphasizes Dobie's logic thinking in comparison with Petey's, which makes the logic thinking begin.

#### (2) Describe the enchantment of the raccoon coat

The maxim of quality requires the honesty of the speaker. One should believe his word is true and do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence. Or, it will break the maxim of quality.

Here is the example of breaking the maxim of quality.

Dobie brought Petey the raccoon coat. Dobie who loved Petey's girlfriend, Polly, wanted to make a deal with Petey. He inveigled Petey with the raccoon coat.

*"Would you like it?" I asked.*

*"Oh yes!" he cried, clutching the greasy pelt to him. Then a canny look came into his eyes. "What do you want for it?"*

*"Your girl," I said, mincing no words.*

*"Polly?" he said in a horrified whisper. "You want Polly?"*

*"That's right."*

*He flung the coat from him. "Never," he said stoutly.*

*I shrugged. "Okay. If you don't want to be in the swim, I guess it's your business"*

*...*

*"It isn't as though I was in love with Polly," he said thickly. "Or going steady or anything like that."*

*“That’s right,” I murmured.*

*“What’s Polly to me, or me to Polly?”*

*“Not a thing,” said I.*

*“It’s just been a casual kick – just a few laughs, that’s all.”[8]*

Petey firmly refused Dobie at first, he would never betray his girlfriend, but he cannot refuse the lure of the racoon coat. He began to convince himself that he didn’t love Polly (actually, he loved her). Petey’s words are quite contradictory which showed his hesitation between Polly and the racoon coat. In this conversation, the racoon coat was repeated as equity with Petey’s girlfriend Polly, which implies the racoon coat’s enchantment for the people and paves the way for following passage.

### (3) Characterizing character personalities

The maxim of relation means that one’s word should be relevant with his topic. In other words, we should make our speech relevant with the topic of the conversation.

Here is the example of breaking the maxim of relation.

Dobie wanted to teach logic for Polly, because he wanted Polly to be more intelligent. He’s talking about Hypothesis Contrary to Fact.

*“Listen: If Madame Curie had not happened to leave a photographic plate in a drawer with a chunk of pitchblende, the world today would not know about radium.”*

*“True, true,” said Polly, nodding her head. “Did you see the movie? Oh, it just knocked me out. That Walter Pidgeon is so dreamy. I mean he fractures me.”[8]*

Dobie talked about the logic fallacies, but Polly replied him with the film. Polly broke the maxim of relation. Apparently, Polly didn’t like what Dobie said, she managed to change the topic. The conversation also describe a lovely and naive girl, Polly, who has no interest in the logic thinking.

### (4) Create comedic effects

The maxim of manner suggest that our speech should be perspicuous. Or our speech will be rambling, ambiguous and confusing.

Here is the example of breaking the maxim of manner.

Dobie expressed his love to Polly, but she refused him and said she loved Petey. Dobie was so shocked and asked why she loved Petey.

*With an immense effort of will, I modulated my voice. “All right,” I said. “You’re a logician. Let’s look at this thing logically. How could you choose Petey Burch over me? Look at me—a brilliant student, a tremendous intellectual, a man with an assured future. Look at Petey—a knot head, a jitterbug, a guy who’ll never know where his next meal is coming from. Can you give me one logical reason why you should go stead with Petey Burch?”*

*“I certainly can,” declared Polly. “He’s got a racoon coat.”[8]*

Dobie who compared his advantages with Petey was eager to know why Polly loved Petey. Polly’s answer was brief and odd. She said only one simple reason instead of analyzing their advantage in a logical way. It broke the maxim of manner and created an ambiguous ending.

There are different ways to understand Polly’s word. The first explanation, Polly loved those who is in the mode. From Petey’s word *“All the Big Men on Campus are wearing them (racoon coat)”*, we can know that people were keen on the racoon coat. Polly also loved the racoon coat, so she loved Petey. The second explanation, Petey told Polly what Dobie had done before. They made fun of Dobie. What’s more, they got a racoon coat from Dobie! The last explanation, Polly learnt the logic well from Dobie. She chose this irrefragable reason to refuse Dobie’s love. The writer cleverly broke the maxim of manner, which brings more possibility and humor.

### *Politeness principle in the text*

#### **(1) A Comparison of different characters**

The tacit maxim requires that we should avoid costing others and reduce such expression.

Here is the example of the tacit maxim.

Petey wanted the racoon coat so much. He wanted to change his attitude towards Dobie's deal – Polly. But he was shame to say it directly, and Dobie helped him.

*“It isn't as though I was in love with Polly,” he said thickly. “Or going steady or anything like that.”*

*“That's right,” I murmured.*

*“What's Polly to me, or me to Polly?”*

*“Not a thing,” said I.*

*“It's just been a casual kick – just a few laughs, that's all.”*

*“Try on the coat,” said I.*

*He complied. The coat bunched high over his ears and dropped all the way down to his shoe tops. He looked like a mound of dead racoons. “Fits fine,” he said happily.[8]*

From the conversation, we can see that Petey convinced himself continually and implied his love towards the racoon coat. Dobie knew that, so he said “Try on the coat” instead of asking his decision. What Dobie said kept Petey away from embarrassment, in other words, minimized cost to Polly. In the end, Petey answered Polly happily which showed Dobie's word had saved Petey's face. The writer made a comparison with Petey and Dobie in terms of logic thinking, which makes Dobie more clever seemingly.

#### **(2) Characterizing character personalities**

The Generosity maxim says that we should minimize benefit to ourself.

Here is the example of obeying the Generosity maxim.

Dobie brought Petey the racoon coat. Dobie who loved Petey's girlfriend, Polly, wanted to make a deal with Petey. He inveigled Petey with the racoon coat.

*“Would you like it?” I asked.*

*“Oh yes!” he cried, clutching the greasy pelt to him. Then a canny look came into his eyes. “What do you want for it?”*

*“Your girl,” I said, mincing no words.*

*“Polly?” he said in a horrified whisper. “You want Polly?”*

*“That's right.”*

*He flung the coat from him. “Never,” he said stoutly.*

*I shrugged. “Okay. If you don't want to be in the swim, I guess it's your business.”[8]*

From the conversation, we can conclude that Petey quite like Dobie's racoon coat, but he hesitated Dobie's deal – his girlfriend, Polly. Finally, he refused Dobie. Dobie did not persuade Petey, he just said *“If you don't want to be in the swim, I guess it's your business”*. It is like that he helped Petey get the racoon coat, but Petey refused. Dobie's words maximized cost to himself without naming his deal—Polly. The writer utilize the conversation to make a cunning figure of Dobie, so that he could threaten “silly” Petey to get Polly with his racoon coat.

#### **(3) Create a dramatic effect of fallacy**

The approbation maxim suggests that we should use more appreciation rather than criticizing others.

Here is the example of breaking the Approbation maxim.

Dobie told his love to Polly. However, Polly had promised Petey Burch that she would go steady with him. Heard of that, Dobie was so angry and he said:

*I reeled back, overcome with the infamy of it. After he promised, after he made a deal, after he shook my hand! “The rat!” I shrieked, kicking up great chunks of turf. “You can't go with him, Polly. He's a liar. He's a cheat. He's a rat.”*

*“Poisoning the well,” said Polly, “and stop shouting. I think shouting must be a fallacy too.”[8]*

It is so obvious that Dobie broke the Approbation maxim. He began to minimize dispraise of Petey, describing Petey as *“a liar, a cheat and a rat”*. Dobie's words broke the Approbation maxim. It is quite impolite. His shouting also annoyed Polly. There is a

punchline of the passage, at first, Dobie was described as a clever and logic person. He was so proud of his logic thinking that he taught logic lessons to his imagined girlfriend, Polly, whom he thought quite silly before. However, Polly use the logic thinking to defeat Dobie, which make Dobie nothing to reply.

#### (4) Dobie lost his logic because of love

This maxim means that one should maximize dispraise of himself and reduce the appreciation.

Here is the example of breaking the Maxim of modest.

Dobie knew that Polly would go steady with Petey. He was so angry and he wanted to know why she chose Petey rather him.

*With an immense effort of will, I modulated my voice. "All right," I said. "You're a logician. Let's look at this thing logically. How could you choose Petey Burch over me? Look at me—a brilliant student, a tremendous intellectual, a man with an assured future. Look at Petey—a knot head, a jitterbug, a guy who'll never know where his next meal is coming from. Can you give me one logical reason why you should go stead with Petey Burch?"*

*"I certainly can," declared Polly. "He's got a racoon coat."*[8]

It is so obvious that Dobie broke the Maxim of modest. He compared himself with Petey. He dispraised Petey, saying that Petey was *"a knot head, a jitterbug, a guy who'll never know where his next meal is coming from"*. As for himself, he said that he was *"a brilliant student, a tremendous intellectual, a man with an assured future"*. Clearly, Dobie was impolite and his words showed that he was mad at Polly's action (go steady with Petey). It is a clear comparison of Dobie's logic before and after he met Polly. He was insane, to some extent, after he heard the reason why Polly loves Petey, he thought he was soaked by them.

#### (5) To show Dobie's logic

The Agreement maxim tells us to keep pace with others' opinion. In other words, we should try our best to reduce the disagreement.

Here is the example of obeying the Agreement maxim.

Dobie and Polly were arguing about a logic fallacy, but they can't convince each other.

*"I still think it's a good idea," said Polly.*

*"Nuts." I muttered. Doggedly I pressed on. "Next we'll try Hypothesis Contrary to Fact."*

*"Sounds yummy," was Polly's reaction.*[8]

Dobie knew that it is no good to argue with Polly. He changed the topic and talked about another logic fallacy. Polly was very polite. She agreed with Dobie's suggestion—Let's talk about another logic fallacy. In this way, she minimized disagreement between Dobie and herself. In other words, the writer wants to show that Polly is too naive to understand the logic thinking.

Here is another example of obeying the Agreement maxim.

Dobie was confused about Petey's passion about the racoon coat. Petey explained that it was popular to get a racoon coat.

*"Can you mean." I said incredulously, "that people are actually wearing racoon coats again?"*

*"All the Big Men on Campus are wearing them. Where've you been?"*

*"In the library," I said, naming a place not frequented by Big Men on campus.*[8]

From the conversation, we can see that Dobie cannot believe Petey's words. But he still followed what Petey had said. He said he went to the library where people rarely wear the racoon coat in Petey's logic. Dobie obeyed the Agreement maxim. He maximized agreement between Petey and himself. Here forms a connecting link between the preceding and the following, which means the tendency of the racoon coat is the thread of the whole passage. The story is all about racoon coat, Dobie gets a chance to date Petey's girlfriend, Polly, in the same time, Dobie was soaked by Polly and Polly because of the racoon coat.

#### (6) Emphasize Dobie's love for Polly

The sympathy maxim implies that minimize antipathy between self and other and understand other in their sides.

Here is the example of obeying the sympathy maxim.

Dobie taught Polly logic, however, he got impatient soon, because Polly learnt too slowly.

*“Polly,” I said sharply, “it’s a fallacy. Eula Becker doesn’t cause the rain. She has no connection with the rain. You are guilty of Post Hoc if you blame Eula Becker.”*

*“I’ll never do that again,” she promised contritely. “are you mad at me?”*

*I signed deeply. “No, Polly, I’m not mad.”*

*“Then tell me some more fallacies.”*

*“All right. Let’s try Contradictory premises.”[8]*

Polly realized that Dobie was impatient with her. She asked Dobie whether he was angry with her and promised she would never do that again. In this way, Polly obeyed the sympathy maxim. She maximized sympathy between Dobie and herself. It is clear that Dobie is a logic and clever guy. He cannot stand naive Polly, however, he was into her. In this way, Polly ask for sympathy and Dobie came back to be patient for his love--Polly.

## Conclusion

The analysis of the cooperation principle and politeness principle in the context of love is a fallacy reveals interesting insights into the author’s intention and the characters’ personalities. Fristly, the author successfully achieved the writing purpose by observing and violating these principles, e.g. successfully describe the personalities of Polly and Dobie. Secondly,by usage of these principles, the author also create the dramatic effect which makes the whole story more interesting. Furthermore,the analysis of the speech in the story also highlights the importance of the the Principles in the communication.

Overall, the analysis of the Cooperative Principle and Politeness Principle in "Love is a Fallacy" provides valuable insights into the author’s intention and the characters’ personalities for us.

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