Factors of Characterisation and Urban Content

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Abstract
A character is regarded as an essential element for storytelling, revealing the concept of a content piece. The character is freely created through an author's imagination, but methodology is required to make it a concrete figure. Thus, this paper will explore the elements that make characterisation possible and find ways to represent characters. It will further investigate whether the methodology can be applied to digital content, which occupies an important position in the urban computing arena. The ‘DuGong’ character in the 2012 Expo in YeoSu, Korea, serves as a good example.

Keywords: character, characterisation, storytelling, digital content, urban content

1. Introduction
A character is regarded as an essential story element. Its role is important not only to the story’s progression, but also in advertisements, cultural products, emblems and so on. A character signifies the concept of content in the same way as plot and setting. Characters are built depending on the creator's intention without limit. However, character traits must be expressed consistently and in detail throughout the content. Thus, our research examines how characterisation is accomplished.

To represent characters effectively, we can refer to the concept of ‘indices’ (indicator) proposed by Barthes. He divided a story's structural unit into 'functions', a collective subject matter, and ‘indices’, a systematic subject matter. In other words, 'functions' is to 'doing' as indices are to 'being'. A character's characteristic indices, its information on its social position, and something of atmosphere belong to the unit. He gave an example to show this notion. In the novel Goldfinger, Bond is given a master-key by his associate: the notation is a pure function. In the film Goldfinger, Bond laughingly takes a set of keys from a willing chamber-maid: the notation is indicial, referring to Bond's character (his easy charm and success with women).

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1 Greimas explains that, through the meaning-creation model, the base meaning of a profound structure get expressed through a plot, a character and a setting in both a surface structure and a conversation structure, and this is called ‘conversion’.
Characters can be seen as the total collection of multiple character traits. This is made possible through ‘assembling various character-indicators distributed along the text-continuum’. When several indicators are gathered together and generalised as one type of character feature, a characteristic is built. When the features are combined, a character is created. Rimmon-Kenan called it ‘a tree-like hierarchical structure in which elements are assembled in categories of increasing integrative power’.

Figure 1. Characterisation

Rimmon-Kenan provided more detailed classification methods in terms of indicators, and thus established a theory of characterisation. Direct definition refers to a being’s characteristic features—that is, the features that are made clear by an authorised voice. It is accomplished by a narrator in visual content. But Not all content has a narrator. Thus, its utilisation is very limited.

Marvin Macy was not a person to be envied, for he was an evil character. (⋯)
And love changed Marvin Macy. Before the time when he loved Miss Amelia it could be questioned if such a person had within him a heart and soul. Yet there is Some explanation for the ugliness of his character, for Marvin Macy had had a hard beginning in this world.

- The Ballad of the Sad Cafe

On the other hand, indirect presentation reveals indices by showing them with examples. Action, speech, external appearance and environment all make up the subcategory of indirect presentation. The method of ‘analogy’ can be used to reinforce the components of a being, comprising analogous names, analogous landscape, and analogies between characters.

Based on these theories, we’ve categorised the elements of characterisation and studied each method. Thereby, we’ve attempted to provide a methodology for creating a character for the digital content that plays such a vital role in the urban computing arena.

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4 Ibid., p. 37.
5 Ibid., pp. 60-70.
2. Factors of Characterisation

2.1. External Appearance

Lavater's theory of physiognomy has acquired a pseudo-scientific status. The impact of his theory on Balzac and other nineteenth-century authors was great indeed. Efforts to prove the inevitable and direct relationship between appearance and personal traits came to an end in the twentieth century but the metonymical relationship between appearance and personal traits still impacts a lot of authors. External appearance includes height, colour of eyes, length of nose, hair-style and clothes.

Scarlet and Melanie in the movie, Gone with the wind, show typical types of women with different characteristics. Scarlet who is faithful on her desire and Melanie who is devoted to others build their characters with their hairs of wave and straight. Scarlet's curly wave hair is imprinted to people strongly. Melanie's pure image is connected to the images of heroines such as Juliet of Romeo and Juliet, Jenny of Love Story, etc.

In the case of animation, appearance is more important element showing characters. It is because of the necessity of creating new characters perfectly. Main characters' fat and ugly appearances in the movie Shrek visualize new characters, not fantastic hero and heroines in the ordinary fairy tales.

2.2. Speech

A character's speech is clearly distinguished from a narrator's. Through speech, a character naturally reveals its social characteristics, such as its origin, education, social class, and occupation, as well as its personal traits. A character's speech can be indicative of some traits both through its form and through its content. Speech may include vulgar words, a dialect, impolite expressions or a foreign language. The content of speech directly implies a character's personality.

Seeing the Korean movie No. 3, there is gang boss's speech. Through the speech, we can notice his ignorance but also through swearing, dialect, stammering, etc, his hot temper and illogical personality can be caught. Particular speech is important factor to leave deep impression to the public. Sometimes characters are remembered for their unique speech.

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7 Ibid., p. 65.
2.3. Actions

Indirect presentation through action is divided into habitual actions and one-time actions. Habitual actions evoke a character's static personality, frequently revealing comedy or irony, whereas one-time actions usually evoke a character's dynamic personality and play vital roles in the narrative text—such as comprising a story’s turning point.\(^9\)

Melvin Udall in the movie *As good as it gets* is a cynical romance novel writer. He does habitual actions compulsively. He tries not to step on to the gaps of paving blocks in the street and bump people. He sits on the same table in a restaurant and has a meal with his own plastic knife and fork he brought. His nervous character is expressed through the actions. Korean TV drama *New heart* shows characters' personalities through one-time action.\(^10\) For an example, decisive heroin breaks the other heal once a heal is broken in the street. Emotional hero chats all the time through treatment at the emergency room. Action is the element to visualize characters effectively in a short time.

![Figure 3. Melvin Udall's habitual actions in the As good as it gets](image)

2.4. Environment

A character's physical surrounding (room, house, street, town) as well as his human environment (family, social class) are also often used as trait-connoting metonymies.\(^11\) The adjoining relation can be seen as the result of cause and effect.

That is, the people with lazy and apathetic personality would neglect their home or office. On the other hand, those who have strong vanity would spend too much time on decorating the environment they are in. Hero of the French movie *The Taste of Others* depreciates the house that his wife interiors in her hand to house of doll full of flower and bird patterns. The fact that Shrek showers with mud living at swamp, not a palace in a fairy tale is the element showing his character.

\(^9\) Ibid., pp. 61-62.
\(^11\) Ibid., p. 66.
In addition, one of the analogy is 'analogous' landscape. This method is different, but similar from 'environment'. Landscape is independent of man, and hence does not normally entertain a relation of story causality with the characters. The analogy established by the text between a certain landscape and a character-trait may be either 'straight(based on similarity)' or 'inverse(emphasizing contrast)'.\textsuperscript{12} For example, Amelia in The Ballad of the Sad Cafe is similar to the loneliness and sadness in the town where she lives.

"The town itself is dreary. (…) Otherwise the town is lonesome, sad, and like a place that ia far off and estranged from all other places in the world."

\textit{- The Ballad of the Sad Cafe}\textsuperscript{13}

On the other hand, in korean movie \textit{Welcome to Dongmakgol}(2005), the tragedy of a war is emphasized by the sharp contrast between the soldiers and the peaceful mountain village "Dongmakgol".

\begin{figure}[h]
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\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{Figure4.jpg}
\caption{The house in the The Taste of Others}
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\begin{figure}[h]
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\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{Figure5.jpg}
\caption{The background of Welcome to Dongmakgol}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 69.

\textsuperscript{13} Carson McCullers, \textit{op.cit.}, p.7.
2.5. Application to Digital Content

Urban computing has become a tool to deliver various information in cities. If a storytelling technique with characters, as opposed to simple information, is used, such information can be delivered in a more symbolic and effective way, and it will remain longer in the receiver’s memory.

We will apply the elements of characterisation to digital content. Appearance is created through visual image, and speech is created through audio sounds. In the process, a character's personality can be built. Also, action is created through motion, and environment through a character's background.

![Characterisation in digital content](image)

**Figure 6.** Characterisation in digital content

We will consider the Korea’s first 3D animation *Jumbagi: Korea’s Dinosaur* as an example. The producer tried to adopt historical restoration through developed CG skills. The original source of this content was a documentary film concerning dinosaurs in the Korean peninsula. So to speak, this was a faction documentary. This is developed from a scientific content to an interesting and touching movie. In this process, a story were drawn naturally. The hero and his family’s moving to the earthly paradise against the apocalypse was enough to inspire audiences. Especially the importance of characters was emphasized. It characterized storytelling using the name of the main character ‘Jumbagi’ as the title. This is why the personality of a character is important.

First of all, appearance of hero contributes to express its character as recreating through visual image. The film was illustrated by live actions with 80s of 17 species, CG and animatrix technique. It might be similar appearance among the dinosaurs but the speckles on the face can distinguish hero from others. In this way, it is named here ‘speckles’ as giving individuality. The name, Jumbagi, could be loutish yet friendly. It is getting more awareness internationally, representing Korea’s characters. The character of wife, the hero loves, stands for purity and beauty through feature of ‘blue eyes’. On the other hand, in terms of looks, Tyrannosaur who is the antagonist of the film has one-eyed. This character is a symbol of someone who is villain. And also, the sharp claw on hind leg of Velociraptor trait to express its felinity.
Behavior is mostly expressed by materialized motion through using of CG techniques. We look seeing that the difference of behavior can express the one’s character. It has combined with another way to illustrate delicately dinosaur’s behavior in this content. The digitalized actions of the characters were also made by acting of actual actors imitating dinosaurs. By using this, the motion of a cute little dinosaur or a violent antagonist shows it’s realistic. Speech is alike. The dinosaurs could not speak themselves, but it has to articulate exquisite difference of each character through audio images. So when it comes to voices, voice actors acted out the voices of the dinosaurs for each age group and the voices were digitalized.

The background is not only a space for story but also the element to connect with characters. The background of this content is that the Korean peninsula was a paradise for dinosaurs 80 million years ago, during the Cretaceous period. It was expressed by shooting filming in New Zealand and using of CG techniques. The ‘Speckles’ used to frisk in the forest where is the condition to allow him to be naïve and good character. And also, it is imprinted on his mind to go back desperately to the forest against disaster as the eruption of a volcano.

3. Case Study: ‘DuGong’ Character in the Expo 2012, YeoSu, Korea

3.1. Feature of the Expo 2012 Yeosu

The Expo 2012 Yeosu had its theme of sea and coast which was the origin of life and repository of food as well as account for 70% of surface of the earth. It exhibited the world latest ocean related technologies and equipments and was established to see history of human's challenging toward ocean and experience cities in the sea after a century. The Expo 2012 Yeosu featured green environment at the first. The expo was not just exhibit of simply technology but suggested solutions on climate change. For the frist time in the history of the world Expo, it established the environment guideline and built the exhibition as the model of low carbon and green growth. And especially what is important is that the Expo 2012 Yeosu is ubiquitous Expo along with the participation of the audience. Through facilities including excellent IT technology, audience could access real-time information on the exhibit at any time and at any place. To apply the characterisation theory to the storytelling of the urban media in this context, this case was selected.

3.2. Storytelling of Theme Pavilion

The Theme Pavilion at the 2012 International Exposition of Yeosu, Korea, is the core space for displaying the Expo’s theme.\textsuperscript{13} It is aimed at raising awareness of the value and importance of the sea. The organiser of the Expo intended for the Theme Pavilion to lay the foundation for viewers changing their attitude towards the sea, thus realising the constant coexistence of the sea and humanity. To do so, simply delivering a message or information was not enough; drawing viewers’ empathy through storytelling could be far more effective. Also, when viewers’ participation and experiences are induced, messages are more actively accepted.

\begin{figure}[h]
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\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{Fig8.jpg}
\caption{DuGong Character in the Theme Pavilion}
\end{figure}

‘DuGong’ is a character that plays a critical role in displaying the contents of the Theme Pavilion.\textsuperscript{16} To express the concept of humanity’s and the sea’s coexistence, the main show utilises storytelling. The Second Exhibit Pavilion, which is encountered before one enters into the main show, provides information on the threatened sea. DuGong appears in both displays. Digital content in the Second Exhibit Pavilion makes DuGong approach viewers and begin talking.\textsuperscript{17} This real-time, real talk with viewers provides them with interest and experience. That is, it helps actively deliver messages to viewers. The main show tells a travel story about a boy and DuGong, using both virtual and real spaces for the performance. A real boy and DuGong figure are experienced by viewers in three dimensions, and the storytelling effect is maximised.

3.3. Characterisation of DuGong

DuGong’s characterisation can be analysed more specifically. For its visual image, digital creature technology is used to express the sea creature’s skin and look. The character’s small body reveals that it is young, and the turned-up corners of its mouth show that it is friendly. Since talking with viewers is an important element, building DuGong’s personality through

\textsuperscript{13} For more information on pavilions, refer to the Expo 2012’s official website http://www.expo2012.kr/is/ps/pavil/pavilTemplat.html?pavild=PAV0000006 <Accessed 2010.5.10>.

\textsuperscript{16} DuGong is a type of endangered whale with a live population of only one hundred. The organiser found that the whales’ intelligence is similar to human beings’, and so chose it as the character of DuGong, which embodies the coexistence of nature and humanity.

\textsuperscript{17} There are two people behind a screen. One is a voice actor, and the other a sculptor making DuGong move. The voice actor speaks properly, looking at viewers, and the sculptor pushes the buttons already prepared to make DuGong move, surprising viewers.
speech is a focal point. DuGong's speech emphasises its youth, using low forms of speech because it hasn’t yet learned polite expression. It talks as a child, inducing viewers to laugh. Since many families visit the Expo, the character is meant to be attractive to children. Its childlike character further evokes a sense of friendliness.

DuGong informs viewers of the threatened sea and the sea's pain, requesting that they preserve nature. The character swishes its tail and turns circles, an action that contributes to the character’s attractiveness. The environment portrayed is a mangrove forest, a nest of marine creatures living between the land and the ocean. Showing the environment facing the threat of destruction helps deliver the message that the character confronts danger.

4. Conclusion

The case study above shows how a single character can help deliver a message through digital media. The character DuGong was created to drive home the concept of the sea and humanity’s coexistence. DuGong directly realises the concept through speech, which is utilised to invoke viewers' participation. Through its speech, appearance and actions, the character imparts a sense of friendliness and smoothly communicates with viewers. The environment is also used to awaken awareness of the sea’s crisis, thereby inducing viewers to easily understand the message. Feeling empathy for DuGong's pain through a story rather than a slogan, viewers actively accept the message. And, we have found that various aspects of characterisation can be effectively created through digital technology.

References

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