# 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.[1] 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)[2] proposed by Barthes. Characters can be seen as the total collection of multiple character traits. This is made possible through 'assembling various character-

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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'.

[2] Barthes 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. Barthes, Roland, *Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives, Image-Music-Text*, selected and trans. by Stephen Heath, Fontana/Collins: London, 1977, pp. 79-124.

indicators distributed along the text-continuum'.[3] 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'.[4]
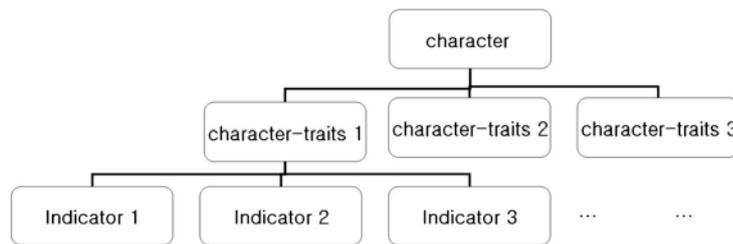


**Fig. 1. Characterisation**

Rimmon-Kenan provided more detailed classification methods in terms of indicators, and thus established a theory of characterisation.[5] *Direct definition* refers to a being's characteristic features—that is, the features that are made clear by an authorised voice.[6] 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.

## 2 Factors of Characterisation

### 2.1 External Appearance

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[3] Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*, Methuen: London, 1983, p. 59.

[4] Ibid., p. 37.

[5] Ibid., pp. 60-70.

[6] Not all content has a narrator. Thus, its utilisation is very limited.

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.[7] 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.

## 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. Speech may include vulgar words, a dialect, impolite expressions or a foreign language. The content of speech directly implies a character's personality.

## 2.3 Action

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.[8]

## 2.4 Environment

A character's physical surroundings (room, house, street, town) as well as his human environment (family, social class) are also used as trait-connoting metonymies.[9] The adjoining relation can be seen as the result of cause and effect.

## 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. Therefore, let us 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.

[7] Ibid., p. 65.
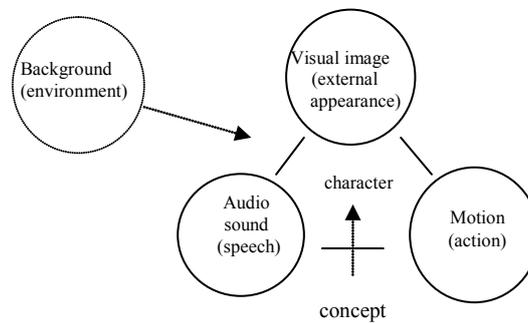[8] Ibid., pp. 61-62.
[9] Ibid., p. 66.

**Fig.2.** Characterisation in digital content

## 3  Case Study: 'DuGong' Character in Expo 2012, YeoSu, Korea

The Theme Pavilion at the 2012 International Exposition of YeoSu, Korea, is the core space for displaying the Expo's theme.[10] 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.

'DuGong' is a character that plays a critical role in displaying the contents of the Theme Pavilion.[11] 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.[12] 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.

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

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[10] For more information on pavilions, refer to the Expo 2012's official website http://www.expo2012. kr/is/ps/pavil/pavilTmplatP. html? pavilId =PAV0000006 <Accessed 2010.5.10>.

[11] 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.

[12] 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.

show that it is friendly. Since talking with viewers is an important element, building DuGong's personality through 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.

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