

## The Pragmatic Study of Evasion in Political Interview Based on Adaptation

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**Abstract:** the Adaptation from Vershueren Provides a Full Theoretical Frame of Description for the Study of Language Application Rule. to Analysis the Evasion in Political Interview, in View of Adaptation, Can Make It Clear That How the Social and Cultural Elements Work on the Language Selection and What Kind of the Pragmatic Effect Will Be Produced. Evasion is the Result of Adapting by Interviewee to interviewer's Mental World, Physical World and Social World. in Political Interview, Such Language Usage Produces Positive Pragmatic Effect to Create Successful Communication, Such as Keeping Information, Avoiding Conflict and Building the Harmonious Communication Environment. in Political Interview, There Are Two Important Ways of Communication--Intercommunication and Question-Answer Communication. Compared with Former One, Question-Answer Communication Plays an Essential Role in Rhetoric Function in Political Language. in Interview, Politicians Often Answer Questions in Evasive Way That Means They don't Present Information Directly, But Fuzzily. Journalists Are Skilled in Well-Organized Questions, While Politicians Are Good At Answering Such Questions with Evasion. as a Language Phenomenon in Language Communication, Evasion Has Caught Attention of Linguisticians and Has Been Studied from Different Aspects. Evasion Has Been Defined by Some Linguisticians, Such as Orr, Burkins, Dillon, Harris and Chinese Linguisticians Pang Jianrong, Zhou Liuxi, Etc. over the Years, Two Typical Approaches Have Been Proposed to Explain Evasive Answers, and They Are the Semantic Approach from Dariusz Galasinski and the Functional Approach from Bull and Mayer, Which Differ from Each Other by Their Different Emphasis. in China, Evasion in Political Interview Has Been Studied from Cognitive Pragmatics to Explain Its Generative Mechanism. Adaptation Theory Also Could Be Applied to Analyze the Specific Contextual Elements Which Influence Such Speech Act, to Figure out Its Application Rules and Explain Its Pragmatic Effect. Language is Used to Produce Meaning, and the Process of Conveying Meaning is Dynamic Way That Makes Choices Adaptively and Consciously. the Pragmatic Study of Evasion Based on Adaptation Theory Could Present the Effect of Language Choice in Social and Cultural Environment.

### 1. Introduction

Evasion is a Pragmatic Strategy in Political Interview, Which Means the Interviewee Purposely don't Provide Enough Information That Interviewer Expects. as a Pragmatic Strategy, There Are Different Explanations of It. Orr & Burkins Suggested That Evasion Had to Do with Equivocation and Ambiguity [1]. Dillon Viewed Evasion as "Non-Answer Responses, Those That Related Coherently to the Act of Questioning Not to the Question-Sentence" [2]. According to Dillon, the Evasion Was Just a Kind of Behavior Interaction Rather Than Question Answering. Harris Held a View That a Response Was Evasive If It Did Not Answer the Question in Direct Way or the Question Has Been Queried.[3]

Ng & Bardac argued that evasive answers were deliberately irrelevant to the question [4]. Besides, there are some studies about evasion in China. Pang Jianrong and Zhou Liuxi put forward that the evasion answer meant respondents do not provide all information that questioners expect in their answer [5].

Dariusz Galasinski employed a semantic approach to the study of deception in The Language of

Deception. The book focused on the deceptive messages themselves: how language was used to deceive others and what kinds of linguistic devices were used. Galasinski developed a theory of deception based on his extensive study of debates and interviews of American and British politicians.

In his study on deception, evasion was taken as a means to it. He first examined the characteristic of evasive act through lots of examples, and then demonstrated three strategies to generate the implicit evasive answer by considering the questioning structure and semantics: ① Changing the Textual Context of the Question; ② Changing the Focus of the Question; ③ Changing the Focus and the Textual Context of the Question [6].

But Bull and Mayer developed the category of evasion from functional aspect which would be: ① Ignores the question; ② Acknowledges the question without answering it; ③ Questions the question; ④ Attacks the question; ⑤ Attacks the interviewer; ⑥ Declines to answer; ⑦ Makes political point; ⑧ Gives incomplete answer; ⑨ Repeats answer to previous question; ⑩ States that the question has already been answered; ⑪Apologizes.[7]

## 2. The Theory of Adaptation

Language communication is a kind of social behavior. which had a close relationship with cognition, society and culture in people's lives.

According to Verschueren, there were three important related notions for people to understand the process of choice-making: variability, negotiability and adaptability. Defined as a quality of language, variability signified the range of possibility from which choices could be made. Negotiability was defined as “the property of language responsible for the fact that choices were not made mechanically, but rather on the basis of highly flexible principles and strategies [8].”

Adaptability enabled human beings to make negotiable choices from all possibilities to satisfy what the communication needs. Verschueren claimed that adaptability was a cognitive process and a mechanism of language use, whereas variability and negotiability were the contents of adaptation. According to him, some tasks or angles of investigation to pragmatic descriptions and explanations were allowed to be assigned within the notion of adaptability.

The first notion is the contextual correlates of adaptability. It includes any ingredient of the communicative context with which linguistic choices could be inter-adaptable. The following figure could show us Verschueren's understanding of context:

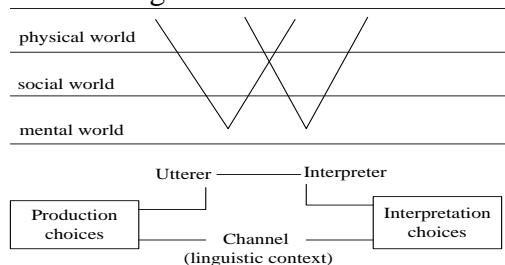


Fig.1 Contextual Correlates of Adaptation (Verschueren, 2000: 76)

The elements of the communicative context involve the physical surroundings, social relationship between addressors and addressees and the communicators' state of mind. The utterer and the interpreter in this figure are presented as focal points because the contextual aspects of the physical, social and mental worlds do not usually play a role in language use until they have somehow been activated by the language user's cognitive processes.

The second notion is structural object of adaptability, including structures at any level of organization as well as principles of structuring. Communicative choices take place at all possible levels of linguistic structure and pragmatic phenomena can be related to any level of structure, from sound feature and phoneme to discourse and beyond, or to any type of inter-level relationship.

The third notion is the dynamic adaptability, the unfolding of adaptive processes in interaction.

Any pragmatic description must account for the ways in which principles and strategies are used in the making and negotiating of choices of production and interpretation.

Thus, language use is the process that communicators choose adaptation to some certain elements in different situation with consciousness.

The thesis will focus on the first one, contextual correlates of adaptability. According to Verschueren, the contextual ingredients include physical world (time, space), social world (power, social status, social position, etc.), and mental world (emotion, intention, target, etc.) [8].

### **3. Adaptation of Evasion in Political Interview**

The thesis will analyze the evasion in political interview through contextual correlates of adaptability. According to Verschueren, the contextual ingredients include physical world (time, space), social world (power, social status, social position, etc.), and mental world (emotion, intention, target, etc.) [8]

#### **3.1 Adaptation to Interviewee's Physical World**

In physical world, time and space sometimes have great impact on the answerer's speech. They decide what interviewee should say or shouldn't say in a certain situation or in a certain time.

Example:

Question: Can the withdrawal schedule still be changed?

Answer: ...President Karzai has now announced the next regions in which responsibility for security is to be handed over to Afghanistan. By the end of this month, the Afghan authorities will have assumed responsibility for around one half of Afghanistan's territory. That's a genuine step forward.

([http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/EN/Infoservice/Presse/Interview/2011/111202-BM\\_Rheinische\\_Post.html](http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/EN/Infoservice/Presse/Interview/2011/111202-BM_Rheinische_Post.html))

Here the withdrawal schedule indicated the timetable that Germany withdrawal their troops from Afghanistan. About the war, sometime it was subject to the actual development of a given situation. As a politician in government, the interviewee wasn't provide the specific time about withdrawal, but put the responsibility on the Afghanistan's President Karzai by adapting the time factor in physical world that the day Afghanistan could assume responsibility for around one half of Afghanistan's territory was the day German go further to withdrawal troops. For this question, if the officer didn't evade it through the optimal relevance-time and adapt time manifestation. It creates an interesting subtle effect in communication.

#### **3.2 Adaptation to Interviewee's Social World**

The contextual ingredients for social world are more complex and in a great number. Most of them are concerned with social factors, situations and institutions, like the interview's social status, social power, working environment, etc. In some occasions, the language is decided by the relationship between power, equality, and attachment relationship.

Example:

Journalist: Free trade is something President Obama is also pushing for, so you're talking about something similar to that?

Kevin Rudd: Well not wishing to represent, or misrepresent, the US President, we in Australia have been free traders for a long time.

([http://www.foreignminister.gov.au/transcripts/2012/kr\\_tr\\_120123\\_cnbct.html](http://www.foreignminister.gov.au/transcripts/2012/kr_tr_120123_cnbct.html))

This is also from CNBC interview to Prime Minister of Australia. One topic in the whole interview included Australian economy. In this conversation, the financial policy correlated the question and answer tightly. President Obama is a leader who always stressed on free trade in the whole world, because only to open domestic market and pursue free trade could be benefitted to most of countries, including America. As a developed country, Australia must be free trader in economy as America. Regarding the question, Kevin said a truth "we in Australia have been free traders for a long time" without any further comment. Whether he represented or misrepresented the

free trade pushed by President Obama, it would be impressed by this American journalist that Kevin was not quick-witted, which was not good for him as a prime minister of a country.

### **3.3 Adaptation to Interviewee's Mental World**

Mental world is also known as psychological world, in which both speaker and hearer should do adapt to each other. In common interaction, language is tool used for information transmitting from one brain to another. As a significant part of context, mental world concerns psychological states of communicators, including emotions, view, belief, wishes, motivation, purpose, which are emphasized by Relevance Theory, too.

Example:

TBS, Tokyo Broadcasting System, Japanese TV: ...The DPRK declares that it has nuclear weapons. What do you think of the information? Does the DPRK have uranium enrichment program or not?

Li Zhaoxing: ...With regard to whether the DPRK has already possessed nuclear weapons or whether it has uranium enrichment program, I believe maybe you know more than I do. Let me tell you that after receiving the relevant verbal message from President Hu Jintao, the DPRK supreme leader indicated that the DPRK still pursues the objective of a nuclear-weapon-free Korean Peninsula and remains ready and willing to continue to participate in the six-party talks and that the DPRK hopes to see more sincerity to be displayed by the relevant parties.

(<http://www.51test.net/show.asp?id=18044&Page=4>)

Japanese journalist hoped foreign minister Li Zhaoxin to express own point of view on DPRK nuclear weapons and asked if DPRK have uranium enrichment program by a Yes-No question. DPRK refers to North Korea. Regard of the two questions, as a foreign minister of a country, he couldn't answer them directly. DPRK declared that it had nuclear weapons. As a neighboring country, of course China hope there is no nuclear weapons. If he criticized it, the relationship between China and Korea would be influenced. After all, North Korea borders with China, therefore it is very worthwhile to keep friendly Diplomatic relations for bilateral stability. In order to replay, he cited official statements from DPRK, avoiding adding subjective view and providing a context for the journalist to infer the answer. The Yes-No question is more difficult to be handled. Does the DPRK have uranium enrichment program or not? It was domestic affair of DPRK. The answer any country got is a kind of speculation, and no one can promise his/her conclusion is exactly right. This question for foreign minister put him into a dilemma. No matter he said Yes or No, he would fall into a passive situation and throw shortness in Japan. To keep such answer and save himself from this embarrassed situation, he adapted to his communicative purpose and said "I believe maybe you know more than I do". The question raised by Japanese journalist showed his sufficient preparation for such issue. Japan is contracting state in six-party talks. It is obvious that the information about nuclear weapons in DPRK held by Japanese government and their journalists is no less than that of China.

## **4. Pragmatic Effects of Evasion**

Language is a crucial way for human beings to communicate with each other. As one nature of human which is characterized by social attribution, the interaction among people also can be viewed as social interaction to produce meaning. Evasive answer utilized by politicians in interview is a strategy to create a harmonious and successful communication

### **4.1 Keeping Information**

The basic function of questioning behavior is to seek information. In political interview, keeping information is more common. This function can be analyzed from two perspectives: one is that if the question, asked by interviewer, concerned the confidential of the country, politician usually avoid answering the questions. Therefore, the function of evasive answers is to keep the secret; the other one is to keep privacy. Sometimes politicians avoided showing personal affaire in public. For example, the following is a transcript of Hillary Clinton, the Secretary of United States, from 60

Minutes of CBS news program:

Question: What does Mr. Clinton think through the mouth of Mrs. Clinton?

Answer: You want me to tell you what my husband thinks? My husband is not the secretary of the state. I am. You ask my opinion. I will tell you my opinion. I'm not going to be channeling my husband'

(<http://www.cbsnews.com/sections/60minutes/main3415.shtml>)

In this interview, the interviewer asked Hillary how Mr. Clinton thought about American affairs. Hillary Clinton as current secretary of the state and Bill Clinton as former president are two outstanding politicians in the United States. What's more, their relationship is couple. Confronting with such question, Mr. Clinton didn't divulge any word from her husband by saying "I will tell you my opinion, not my husband's". As to special status of Mr. Clinton, previous president, Hillary's words about her husband's opinion would bring influence on both of them. Mr. Clinton has not been the president of US, and he is only her husband, the conversation between them was private so that it was unnecessary for her to show it in the public. So she wouldn't wish to make her husband a public role again. From social functions, evasion helped interviewees to keep the information they were not willing to talk about and to protect their privacy.

## 4.2 Avoid Conflicts

The second social function is to avoiding the conflict. As we all know, the interviewer and the politician represent the two opposite groups. The aim of interviewing is to ask some hot questions and look for the real answers representing the public, and sometimes their questions are involved in other politicians even other countries, so under such circumstances, politicians usually avoid answering such questions to keep offending other politicians or causing conflicts between countries.

## 5. Conclusion

In real language communication, it's not only one element limiting language usage, but various ones which play different roles in different time and different situation. The process of language communication is developing, so is the pragmatic strategy that promote social relationship. In political interview, considering own social status, interviewee sometimes can't answer questions directly, while there must be a response, then evasion is the best choice which help the social activity goes smoothly. From the theory of adaptation, for interviewer and interviewee, such language phenomenon adapts to both physical world (time, space), social world (power, social status, social position, etc.), and mental world (emotion, intention, target, etc.) . The interviewee is free to make language strategy in optional context to meet the need of social communication.

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