

# A Comparative Analysis of Interview Discourse in Different Workplace Cultures in China under Face Negotiation Theory

## -- Take *The Exciting Offer* as an Example

Simeng Hou

School of Foreign Languages, Nanning Normal University, Nanning, China

### Abstract

The video text of the interview chapter in the four seasons of "The Exciting Offer" was extracted, and the critical discourse analysis method was used to cluster the three aspects of discourse text, social meaning and face needs to show the interview etiquette of the candidates in different fields of the job market. Based on the different face needs, we analyze how they present their sense of self-worth or self-image, in order to answer the following two questions: 1. How to realize their face needs in the interview? 2. What are the similarities and differences in realizing face needs for different occupational interviews? This study has a certain practical reference value, taking three professions of lawyers, doctors and architects as examples, to make a certain summary of interview etiquette and related workplace etiquette, so as to provide a certain reference for college students interviewing for jobs.

### Keywords

Face Negotiation Theory; Variety Show; Discourse Analysis; Workplace Etiquette.

## 1. Introduction

Face negotiation theory is developed by communication scholar Ting-Toomey based on the Face Theory of Mr. Hu Xianjin in China, which is different from other face theories, and it is a Face Theory studied from a cultural perspective. It focuses on self-face rather than other people's face in the process of face negotiation, and on actively expressing one's interests and aspirations[1]. *The Exciting Offer* is a workplace observation reality show launched by Tencent Video starting in 2019, with the first two seasons for lawyers, the third season for doctors, and the fourth season for construction. It focuses on the workplace life of interns in different fields and the workplace challenges they face. The workplace is a mandatory course for every college student, and for newcomers to society, everything in the workplace is unknown and challenging. Interview is the first lesson in the workplace culture. By comparing the interview discourses of lawyers, doctors and architects in three different workplace cultures, this selection shows the interview performance of candidates in different fields of work, and analyzes how they present their self-worth or self-image based on different face requirements.

## 2. Study Design

### 2.1. Research Questions

Using critical discourse analysis, this paper tries to analyze the discourse in the *Exciting Offer* from three aspects: discourse text, social meaning, and face needs, mainly exploring the following questions: (1) How to realize one's face needs in the interview? (2) What are the similarities and differences in realizing face needs for different occupational interviews?

## 2.2. Research Subjects

*The Exciting Offer* is a workplace observation reality show launched by Tencent Video from 2019, and this study is based on the author's analysis of the whole process from the interview chapter of the four seasons. It converts the video into text to collect information (the information is all based on the complete content of the video broadcast), with more representative research objects selected for the study.

## 3. Analysis of Results

First, the following statistics were conducted for 18 interns, using the first two seasons of the attorney chapter as an example.

**Table 1. Study Abroad Experience**

|           |       | Frequency | Percentage | Effective percentage | Cumulative percentage |
|-----------|-------|-----------|------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| Effective | No    | 12        | 66.7       | 66.7                 | 66.7                  |
|           | Yes   | 6         | 33.3       | 33.3                 | 100.0                 |
|           | Total | 18        | 100.0      | 100.0                |                       |

**Table 2. Five Schools and Four Departments**

|           |       | Frequency | Percentage | Effective percentage | Cumulative percentage |
|-----------|-------|-----------|------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| Effective | No    | 9         | 50.0       | 50.0                 | 50.0                  |
|           | Yes   | 9         | 50.0       | 50.0                 | 100.0                 |
|           | Total | 18        | 100.0      | 100.0                |                       |

**Table 3. Frequency of questions**

|           |               | Frequency | Percentage | Effective percentage | Cumulative percentage |
|-----------|---------------|-----------|------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| Effective | <3 Lower      | 5         | 27.8       | 27.8                 | 27.8                  |
|           | [3, 6) Medium | 5         | 27.8       | 27.8                 | 55.6                  |
|           | >=6 higher    | 8         | 44.4       | 44.4                 | 100.0                 |
|           | Total         | 18        | 100.0      | 100.0                |                       |

**Table 4. Statistics**

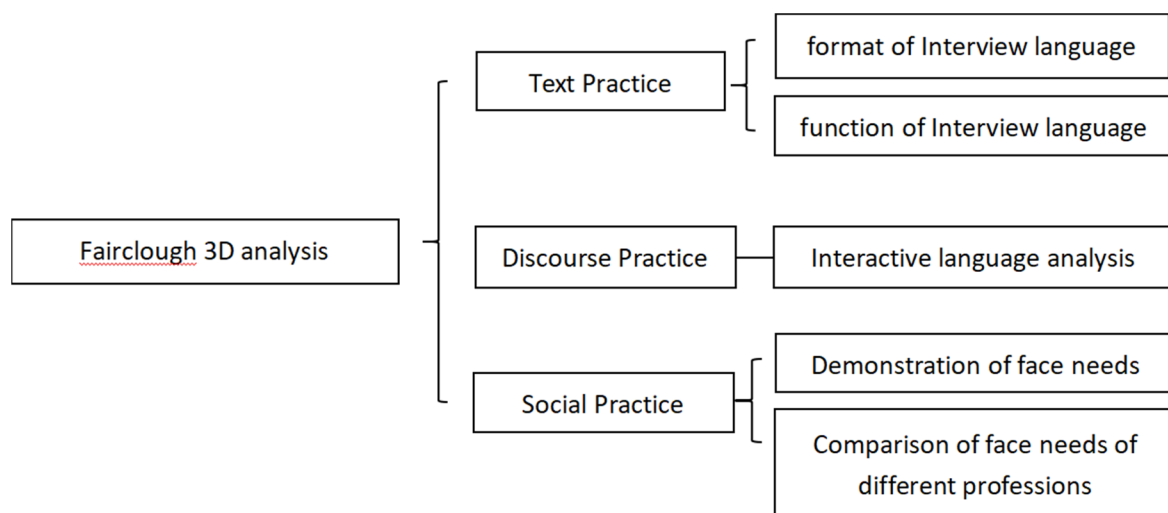
| Frequency of questions |           |        |
|------------------------|-----------|--------|
| Number of cases        | Effective | 18     |
|                        | Missing   | 0      |
| Median                 |           | 2.0000 |
| Crowd                  |           | 3.00   |

From the data in Tables 1 and 2, we can see that there are 18 interns in the Lawyer section, among which 6 interns have study abroad experience, accounting for 66.7%, and 12 interns have no overseas study experience, accounting for 33.3%. Meanwhile, half of the total number of interns came from the five schools and four departments. Combined with charts 3 and 4: from the overall perspective, most of the 18 interns were asked more than five questions.

Although not all of the interns had study abroad experience, and not all of them had strong academic backgrounds, they were all able to sit down together and compete fairly for an offer from a law firm.

So, from the example of that data, we can conclude that we don't deny that strong educational background is an open sesame to a well-paid job, but it is definitely not a portal to the other side of success. So, it emphasizes the importance of live performance of the interview. In a question-and-answer format, the examiner can make a preliminary assessment of the interviewee's overall quality, character and qualities through observation and conversation, so the conversation is crucial for the interviewee, and the way of speaking is the key to the interview [2].

In Fairclough's view, any discourse can be understood and analyzed from three dimensions: textual practice, discourse practice and social practice. Based on the theory, this paper describes the textual features of the interview dialogue from the textual practice level; analyzes and interprets the discourse structure from the discourse practice level; analyzes the discourse used and the interrelationship between the discourse interactions; reveals the meaning behind the interviewer's questions and the interviewee's answers in the offer program from the social practice level, and how the interviewees reinforce and highlight their need for face in the question-and-answer format. The specific analysis framework is shown in Figure 1:



**Figure 1.** Discourse analysis framework

**[Excerpt 1] Season 1 Li Haoyuan: A: interviewer, B: interviewee**

**A1:** I think this resume is quite special because we think there are some words that are still quite literary. You wrote that "Shanghai is a magic city full of talents, and your firm is the 'shelter and destination' of excellent lawyers. As a 'rookie', I hope I can get a valuable opportunity, and this can be the starting point for 'rookies' to soar. I also know the fact that If I were Kunpeng, I wouldn't go anywhere except the North Sea."

**B :** I like Shanghai very much, and I like your firm very much. Mirs day with the wind, the ninety thousand rise directly to a high position. I think I must be in a broader stage to make a difference.

**A1:** What do you think is the standard of a good lawyer?

**B :** Sixteen words: calm and steady, professional and proficient, trustworthy and punctual, funny and humorous.

**A2:** So, do you think that you can be a good lawyer?

**B :** I believe I can, but I'm not right now.

**A1:** Have you thought deeply about the combination of English major and law profession?

**B :** I think this is a process of one form and one system. I need a chance to test myself and try my hand. To get to a higher level, the reflection and learning after practice must be applied in the new practice, during which we must have the guidance and instruction of lawyers.

**A3:** What is the biggest strength of your own personality traits?

**B :** I am not afraid of difficulties, I can learn what I have to learn, I can take down the person I have to communicate with, I can take down the case I have to solve.

**A1:** What do you think is the relationship between talent and effort?

**B :** Talent is something like the zenith or the ceiling, which you cannot reach in the rest of your life if you don't work hard enough.

**[Excerpt 2] Season 2 Qu Zelin: A: interviewer, B: interviewee**

**A1:** Tell us about your career planning.

**B :** To be a lawyer.

**A1:** What kind of lawyer do you want to be?

**B :** In the first few years, of course, I should be an intern first, to lay the foundation, and then in the future I may ... just... wait for opportunities, because now there are always new blue ocean areas appearing, such as the disposal of invaluable asset.

**A2:** You seem to understand the current situation, for example, you just said the disposal of invaluable asset, which is very hot this year, how did you learn about it? I was a little surprised, a little beyond my expectations.

**B :** Nowadays, information is very developed, like Junhe's official accounts. Although I am not working now, but I still have information about it.

**A2:** So in the long run, do you want to be in a larger law firm like Junhe, or .....?

**B :** Because I know Junhe, which is an integrated office law firm.

**A1:** Do you know anyone in Junhe?

**B :** I don't know.

**A1:** You've done your homework very well, and you've really made a good point with the word 'integration'.

**A2:** This is our most prominent characteristic.

**A1:** It is better than many lawyers of Junhe who introduce themselves.

**[Excerpt 3] Season 3 Wang Rui: A: interviewer, B: interviewee**

**A1:** Why did you choose to study medicine?

**B :** Since I was a child, I felt that it was a great accomplishment to be a doctor and to be able to treat people, and I had this intention myself, and my parents also encouraged me.

**A1:** What poem about medicine can you think of to describe how studying medicine has affected you?

**B :** I'll say an idiom, that is 'sincere treatment with each other just like liver and gall'.

**A2:** You talk about the liver and gall. Please draw the liver and gall.

**A3:** So you have less clinical experience, which may be a disadvantage for you.

**B :** I think that's my disadvantage, but it can also be considered my advantage. Now you can think I were a stem cell, not very functional but having the potential to differentiate.

**A2:** You are the only one with a patent among the interviewees.

**B :** I used to get my teeth trimmed, and chose cheap brackets, which were steel, grinding my mouth. So I ask my friend whose major is engineering to design a model to generate a more

solid tooth protection cover, and then I acknowledged that there are no patents on this, so I applied for one by the way.

**A3:** I think you are quite brainy.

**[Excerpt 4] Season 4 Lin Jinyi: A: interviewer, B: interviewee**

**A1:** We saw your work this morning, and several instructors were quite interested in it and liked it. You are quite young, but the work is very classical. how long did it take?

**B :** This was my sophomore assignment.

**A2:** Undergraduate in the UK?

**B :** Yes.

**B :** Here are some renderings, and this one is the corner.

**A2:** Is this a rendering you made by yourself?

**B :** Yes.

**A2:** What software do you use?

**B :** Virtual engine. It is quite useful.

**A2:** Few people can do it as meticulously as you.

**A3:** Many of your scenes give me a sense of familiarity, you know, like this one for example, I think there must have been countless times in your mind or in your life experience that this light hit this stove.

**B :** I'm probably a more observant person. I actually have less architectural internship experience because I don't think I'm in a hurry to fill my summer with internships, because I think I can get a very good foundation for my architectural design by going to see some things and learn some things, including going to see the world.

### **3.1. Interpretation of Text Practice**

Bakhtin (1986) defines interview discourse as "a genre of job interview language", which means that interview discourse is a communicative event characterized by communicative intention [3]. Unlike daily conversation, this interview discourse is a linguistic interaction that takes place in a specific occupation, which is in line with the concept of "institutional interaction" proposed by Drew and Heritage in 1992.

In Excerpt 1, three interviewers asked questions about Li Haoyuan. From Li's answers, we can see that Li's writing skills are very strong, and after checking the relevant information, we found that Li Haoyuan was an outstanding contestant in Chinese Poetry Conference in 2016. He gave full play to his strengths in writing, which is why "I have enough accumulation, but always on the road, so there are infinite possibilities", "I also know the fact that If I were Kunpeng, I wouldn't go anywhere except the North Sea", "Talent is something like the zenith or the ceiling, which you cannot reach in the rest of your life if you don't work hard enough". Compared to excerpt 2, Qu Zelin's writing skills are relatively weak, and it is clear from his words that Qu seemed very rushed and nervous at the beginning of the interview, but he was also praised by the interviewer as having "well done" and "make a good point". When Qu was asked "what kind of lawyer do you want to be", he quickly mentioned "the disposal of invaluable asset". From excerpt 1, we can see that four questions were asked. The first question, "What are the criteria of a good lawyer", is a career-specific question, which changes according to the profession. (1) Please tell us the criteria for... (2) How do you think/how do you think you can become ....? (3) Why do you want to be .....? Answers to such questions should have the appropriate professional characteristics. In Excerpt 2, Qu Zelin was asked about his career plan, and in Excerpt 3, Wang Rui was asked "why did you choose to study medicine", which are actually career-specific

questions. This kind of career-oriented questions can be prepared well in advance, and it can be said that this is a mandatory question.

### 3.2. Interpretation of Discourse Practice

The analysis of discourse practice refers specifically to the analysis of intertextuality and discourse order. The concept of intertextuality was first introduced by Kristeva (1989), which argues that any text is constructed on the basis of an existing discourse and that any text is constituted by the absorption and transformation of other texts [4].

In Excerpt 1, Li Haoyuan was asked, "Have you thought deeply about the combination of English major and law profession?", followed by "What is the biggest strength of your own personality traits?" In this discourse practice, the interaction between the two sides is not reflected, and the interviewer is obviously in a dominant position, dictating the transmission of information. In excerpt 2, A1 asks "What kind of lawyer do you want to be?" Qu mentioned "the disposal of invaluable asset", and then A2 continued to ask questions about "the disposal of invaluable asset", and Qu mentioned "integration" in his further answer, which caused A1 to ask another question "Do you know anyone in Junhe?" Similarly, in Excerpt 3, A1 asks "What poem about medicine can you think of to describe how studying medicine has affected you?" In Excerpt 4, Li Jinyi handed some renderings to the interviewer, so A2 asked the following questions "Is this a rendering you made by yourself?" "What software did you use to do this?". The intertextuality is well demonstrated in one question and one answer.

### 3.3. Interpretation of Social Practice

First, from the perspective of the presentation of face needs: According to the definition of Ting-Toomey, face is "a good sense of self-worth or self-image felt by an individual in a particular relationship situation"[5]. The fulfillment of face needs is the realization of self-worth or the maintenance of self-image in a particular situation to achieve the desired purpose. In response to the last question in excerpt 1: "What do you think is the relationship between talent and effort?". The reason why the interviewer mentioned this question is that the interviewer had seen Li Haoyuan's amazing and outstanding linguistic talent. The question actually affirmed and praised his remarkable advantage. "Talent is something like the zenith or the ceiling, which you cannot reach in the rest of your life if you don't work hard enough." That is, he affirmed his talent, but also said that hard work is the ladder for talent to be shown, side-by-side expressing his firm attitude to work tirelessly despite his small talent. In response to excerpt 3, A3 mentioned, "So you have less clinical experience, which may be a disadvantage for you." Wang Rui's answer: "This is my disadvantage, but it can also be considered as my advantage." First of all, Wang Rui did not avoid the problem of her own shortcomings, which are both disadvantages and advantages. This clever answer not only did not deduct impression points because of the lack of clinical experience, but also gained high praise from the interviewer, thus maintaining a good self-image and thus gaining a sense of self-worth.

Second, let's come to the second question :what are the similarities and differences in realizing face needs for different occupational interviews?(1) Unlike lawyers, doctors and architects need some practical tests, so these two professions will encounter some practical tests or practical questions in the interview, such as the drawing test Wang Rui received in excerpt 3, and the interns in the architecture industry in the fourth quarter are required to present architectural works in the interview. (2) Different from lawyers and architects, the starting education of doctors is usually a doctoral degree, and a few are master's degree holders. Therefore, in the interview process, interviewees with master's degrees should learn to turn their academic disadvantages into practical advantages or learning advantages. A good example of this is the answer of prospective graduate student Feng Chen in the third quarter: "Simply speaking, I am definitely the youngest one, but I think the youngest one means that I am the youngest, and I am the most energetic, I am the one who has the most impetus to do something

that others dare not do. What I want to do I will make it and do my best to do it well, which I think is one of my greater strengths." (3) The main weapons of doctors and architects are both hands, which are more operational, but opposite to the two, the main weapon of lawyers is the mouth, which requires very strong verbal and logical thinking skills. Therefore, the lawyer profession needs to express their strong verbal and logical ability and advantages in the interview, just like Deng Bingying in the first season and Zhu Yixuan in the second season spend a lot to introduce their debating experience in their self-introduction to highlight their competitive advantages.

## **4. Research Insights and Recommendations**

The ultimate goal of attending an interview is to get the satisfaction of the interviewer so that you can get an offer and a good job, which requires the candidate to put his or her best foot forward. For college students who are about to enter the job market, how to function best in the interview? The author gives the following suggestions.

### **4.1. Reinforcing the Dominant Position**

The interviewee should hold the position of domination, not to be "led by the nose", so as to give play to their strengths whilst circumvent weaknesses. So, how to take the lead in the interview process? First of all, do not be too hasty to control the pace at the beginning. Many interviewees are arrogant and domineering at the beginning, eager to showcase themselves in all aspects, which is definitely not likely to have a good dominant effect. It is a good idea to start with a modest and steady attitude. Second, be sure to control the speed of speech. Everyone tends to speak faster when they are nervous, which can result in slurred speech and stuttering. Therefore, the candidates need to exercise their speech ability and speech ability so that in the face of the interviewer's questions and nervous atmosphere, the candidate can do eloquently, in a slow answer, gradually the overall direction to the place where they want to perform, so as to dominate.

### **4.2. Highlighting Career Strengths**

Interviews for different occupations have their own characteristics. It is an indispensable part of highlighting occupational strengths and showing occupational abilities to the interviewer. In this study, three professions were selected as examples: lawyers should try to pass the National Bar exam and know the basic knowledge of domestic and foreign laws; doctors should be familiar with the location of the basic organs; architects should have some basic skills of drawing and have some knowledge of the structure of houses. The best way to highlight your professional strengths is to show them in your self-introduction, either in the first half of your introduction or in the second half, where you can use a little more space to emphasize them and guide the interviewer's direction for the next questions. However, while selling yourself, you should also keep in mind the law of modesty and caution, as the saying goes, "The modest receive benefit, while the conceited reap failure".

Face perception has been a hot topic in recent years, but the study of face in specific cultural concepts and specific cultural practices is still lacking. At present, China has been emphasizing cultural confidence, and the research behind the Face Theory is actually concerned with the diversity and differences of human language and culture. The study of face and identity will show a broad prospect to explain the correlation between face and identity in a comprehensive manner through the analysis of multiple dimensions, including individual, collective, and social, through the unique socio-cultural attributes of Chinese identity. The paper is an in-depth analysis of the concept of Chinese face from the perspective of "face in specific cultural practices", aiming to provide a valuable reference for future domestic face research. This study

is of practical reference value for college students who are about to seek employment and for those who are not yet employed in society.

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