

A Study of Communication Strategy in Pilot's Interview for Abroad Training From the Perspective of SAT*

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The flight cadets interview for abroad flight training plays an important role in their whole flight career, thus it is essential for them to master necessary interview skills or understand relevant communication strategies so as to pass the interview smoothly. In this study, a dynamic analysis of communicative strategies used by pilots from the perspective of convergence, divergence, and language maintenance is proposed, which are the main strategies put forward by Speech Accommodation Theory. On the basis of this theory, some typical communicative strategies of two parties are comprehensively interpreted and the cadets' interview language strategy is effectively explored so as to improve students' real interviewing capability.

Keywords: speech accommodation theory, communication strategy, interview language, English for specialized purposes (ESP)

Introduction

In the civil aviation field, proficiency in English can promote the accurate execution of standard procedures and the adoption of decisive actions. However, communication failures caused by inappropriate English use are still a common cause of fatal accidents. Therefore, the proper use of aviation English is a prerequisite for them to participate in the civil aviation industry. Under the background of International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)'s high standards English requirement for flight cadets, civil aviation institutes have put forward higher requirements for aviation English level. Therefore, English interviews have gradually become an indispensable part for choosing the best cadets, which has raised the standard of interviewees' language application ability and the proficiency in communication skills. This study attempts to analyze the communicative strategies that should be properly used by both parties in the civil aviation flight cadets' interview and dynamically interpret the civil aviation pilot's communicative strategy in this process.

Speech Accommodation Theory

Speech Accommodation Theory was proposed by Giles et al. in the early 1970s as a theoretical model of social psychology (Giles & Smith, 1979, pp. 45-47). The theory aims to explain the language conversion in the process of language communication. It means that the speaker changes his or her speech style according to the identity of the listener, the topic of the conversation, the specific context, and his subjective judgment of the whole situation. It mainly covers two levels of theoretical basis: First, the use of social psychological

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mechanisms (such as similar attraction principles, social exchange principles, etc.) to govern the language conversion process; second, the two sides of the dialogue respond to each other's language conversion according to their own assessment and language analysis. Based on the above two levels of theoretical basis, the theory proposes three communicative strategies, namely, convergence, divergence, and language maintenance.

Speech convergence means that the speaker constantly adjusts his/her original speech style to adapt to the speech style of the listener. It can be expressed in terms of pronunciation, speech rate, pause, code, etc., thus gaining recognition and affirmation (Giles & Powesland, 1997, pp. 232-239). This communication strategy can be adopted in a variety of language forms, from multi-language conversion to more subtle detail adjustments, and the strategy is also applicable to those with lower status who are more convergent to those with higher status, or those with higher status converge with those with lower status, which in turn allows the speaker to get a good evaluation and resonance with the listener.

Speech divergence is a communication strategy that is contrary to convergence. It refers to the communicative process in which the speaker differentiates his or her conversation from the other's language style (Coupland & Giles, 1998, pp. 75-182). Although the divergent strategy has many functional uses in verbal communication, its most typical purpose is to enable the speaker to highlight his/her social identity and group characteristics in the process of verbal communication, especially from the cognitive and emotional levels, divergent from other members outside the group.

Language maintenance means that in interpersonal communication, the speaker does not change his or her own language style because of the characteristics of the other party, which means the speaker's speech style will be different from the listener. So, this communicative strategy can be described as not converging with others, and some people regard it as a kind of divergence, or a subclass of divergence (Liu, 2001, pp. 58-64).

The Basic Format of the Interviews for Flight Cadets

Currently, most flight cadets will finish their ground school courses in China and continue their flight training abroad. Before going abroad, foreign flight academies need to test their English language ability through interviews, and choose the best ones as their flight cadets. The interview mainly aims to test cadets' oral English capability through face-to-face interaction. The contents are designed from the perspectives of intonation, organization, fluency, and interactivity, as well as the use of English for specialized purposes (ESP) to check their real ability in understanding aviation English and dealing with aeronautical problems. Therefore, pilots must have excellent professional theoretical knowledge and English communication skills so as to pass the interviews and continue their further training.

Analysis of Communicative Strategies in Interviews From the Perspective of SAT

Convergence Strategy and Interview Language

Due to the difference in identity and status, the pilot will verbally converge with the decision-making interviewer in the interview, and the interviewer will seek the same strategy in order to adapt to the interviewer's language level. Although the directions are inconsistent, the ultimate goal is to ensure the smooth progress of the interview.

Language manifestation of interviewer's convergence strategy to interviewee.

(1) Frequent use of minimum response. During the interview process, the interviewer tries to ease the

interviewer's nervousness and indicates that he/she is concentrating on listening to the interviewer's answer. In the conversation, he/she often uses the most concise answer, such as the words "yeah", "well", "uh", "OK", "um", "uh-huh", etc. to indicate that they are listening very carefully about the other party's conversation, and definitely converge to the interviewer.

(2) Paraphrasing and rephrasing are widely used. Because the interviewees' English basic levels are quite different, and the difficulty of each question is also inconsistent, there are often cases where some problems are difficult to be understood by the interviewee. In this case, the communication between the two parties may be in a relatively embarrassing situation, because the interviewee cannot give the interviewer an expected response, then the two sides will fall into a state of silence. At this point, the interviewer will paraphrase or explain the question to help the student understand the exact meaning of it. For example, during the interview, the interviewer may ask the pilot: "What damages CBs bring to your aircraft?", the interviewee have no idea about the meaning of the professional word "CB", after the interviewer realized it, he/she will paraphrase the question as: "CBs refer to cumulonimbus, so what kind of bad influences will be brought by this bad weather?" In this situation, the interviewer converges to the interviewee's language level, allowing the interviewee to understand the meaning of the question better and then answer it correctly.

(3) The problem continues to be extended. During the interview process, there will often be some questions or opinions that can be extended during the conversation between the two parties in the process of asking and answering. To some extent, this is one of the embodiments of the interviewer's convergence with the interviewee. For example, "What will you do after realizing the problem?", "As you know the importance of it, why?" These are the extensions of the previous interview questions. On the one hand, the interviewer can effectively push the interview going on smoothly. On the other hand, the interviewer can test the pilot's comprehensive English language ability more effectively.

(4) The topic continues to be pushed forward. In order to promote the dialogue to go on smoothly, the interview process will use some sentence patterns, such as "Is that right?", "That is interesting", "Do you agree with my statement?", or a special tone to show their interest in the interviewee's answer, which is also the typical embodiment of the interviewer's convergence strategy.

Interviewee's convergence strategy.

(1) Formal language and courtesy addressing forms. In order to highlight the distinguished status of the interviewer during the interview process, the interviewee often uses many formal terms and courtesy addressing forms, such as "Yes sir, thank you", "Would you please...", "I would really appreciate it if...", "Excuse me please, Sir", etc., to converge with the interviewer, and want to leave a good impression to the interviewer, which makes himself more possible to pass the interview.

(2) The use of emphasis. The interviewee often uses some emphasis when answering interview questions and discussing with the interviewer, such as "He really did so", "That was the most interesting experience I have ever had", "This is exactly what I mean", "I certainly do insist that", etc., to emphasize one's point of view or to agree with the interviewer's thoughts and understanding, which is also the embodiment of convergence with the interviewer's discourse.

Divergence Strategy in Interview Language

The entire interview process requires two parties to have a smooth and complete dialogue as much as possible in order to fully demonstrate the language ability of the interviewee, and help the interviewer to make

a correct judgment. Therefore, in order to make communication go on smoothly, both parties will subconsciously avoid using the divergence strategy, but there will always be an exception, where divergency is used by accident.

Divergence from interviewer's part.

(1) The passive structure replaces the active structure. During the interview, if the interviewee's answer is difficult to satisfy the interviewer, or the performance is poor, the interviewer will use some passive structures, such as "Many cadets were dismissed due to this", "Part of understanding with different perspectives may appear", and "Different ideas may be easily proposed". These responses will diverge from the interviewee's response to express an unsatisfactory attitude towards the interviewee.

(2) Clarifying requirements further. When the interviewee does not grasp the requirements and meaning of the interviewer's question, the content of the answer will be irrelevant to the question. The interviewer will re-state the meaning of the question at this time, for example, "I need you to talk about piston engine not jet engine, clear?", the use of divergence from the interviewee's answer can make the interviewee make adjustments and return to the key point of the question.

Divergence from the interviewer's part.

(1) No commitment or disclaimer. When the interviewee faces some difficult questions, he will adopt a divergent strategy, using no promise or disclaimer, and leave some room for possible mistakes. For example, "I am not an expert, but...", "Please correct me if I am wrong", "I would like to get involved... but...", "Please allow me to explain just according to my incomplete understanding", and so on to express they are not quite sure about the question's answer, but at same time, they do not want to leave a bad impression on the interviewer, so choose this kind of divergent strategy will be adopted.

(2) Personalized cognitive modality. For questions in the interview that are concerned with personal opinions, the interviewee will use sentences that highlight personal opinions, such as "It seems to me that...", "It looks like...", "Probably I will interpret in the following way", etc. The sentence pattern tends to emphasize interviewee's own cognitive understanding of the question, and does not converge with the opinions of others; therefore it is a typical expression of divergence.

Language Maintenance in Interview

Language maintenance strategy refers to the fact that neither party has explicitly given consent or negation. In the interview, it is mainly used to determine the purpose or implied meaning of the two parties' communication, leaving time for interviewee to think about how to answer the question.

The interviewer's maintenance strategy. The interviewer's maintenance strategy is mainly reflected in the use of tag questions. The main purpose of using antisense question during interview is to confirm the interviewee's exact views or opinions to the specific question being asked just now, or to put forward further questions. For example, "Isn't it?", "Won't you?", "Can't you?", "Ok?", "Right?", "Don't you think?", and "Wouldn't you agree?" This strategy can help the interviewer to clarify the interviewer's point of view so as to continue his or her further questioning, and the communication between two parties do not have a clear convergence, so it is seen as a maintenance strategy.

Interviewee's language maintenance strategy.

(1) Avoid answering questions directly. When an interviewee has no clear answer to some questions, he or she often chooses to avoid answering them directly to prevent any possible mistakes. For example, "kind of",

“to some extent”, “it could be that”, “presumably”, “a little bit”, “perhaps”, etc. These words are relatively ambiguous in semantics. Thus, the interviewee selects such kind of language as the language maintenance strategy in order to avoid making false answers.

(2) The use of mark language like hesitation. When answering some interview questions, the interviewee often needs a certain amount of time to think about how to organize their answer and at the same time does not want to make the interviewer feel he is not familiar with relevant knowledge, so he chooses kind of hesitant language, such as “I, um, don't know”, “Ah, let me think”, “Well, um, uhhh”, etc., to try to gain more time for thinking until getting the clear answer.

Conclusion

Based on the discourse analysis of the above English interviews, it is not difficult to conclude that the communicative parties show the dynamic features in discourse and communicative strategy selection at various stages in the whole interview process, and to some extent reflect a certain kind of language pattern. For the interviewer, the convergence and language maintenance strategy is an important guarantee for the smooth progress of the interview, and the divergence strategy is a necessary means to state the requirement clearly and clarify misunderstanding; from the perspective of the interviewee, the former is a flexible skill to fully demonstrate their own language capability, while the latter is an effective strategy to highlight their unique insights and avoid defects exposure. Therefore, the profound analysis of the social psychological mechanism of the interviewing parties and the proficiency in adopting appropriate communication strategies are indispensable for the flight cadets who will have to go through interviews before going abroad for their flight training.

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