

# TV Hosts' Language Artistry: a Relevance Theory Perspective

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## ABSTRACT

Cultural programs that promote traditional Chinese culture have become popular among viewers in recent years, with *The Reader* and *The Chinese Poetry Conference* hosted by the famous Chinese host Dong Qing as typical examples. The opening speeches of *The Reader* and *The Chinese Poetry Conference* are extremely poetic and artistic. By exploring the language artistry of the hosts from the perspective of relevance theory, it can be found that the language artistry is generated from the audience's reasoning about the implicit meaning in the language, and the smaller the contextual effect in the language expression, the greater the artistic effect produced.

**Keywords:** Relevance theory, Language art, Host, Cultural programs.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, cultural programs with the theme of promoting Chinese traditional culture have been widely sought after by TV viewers, which is the mainstream media's compliance with the national requirement of promoting and carrying forward the heritage and development of China's excellent traditional culture, and also reflects the people's growing pursuit of spiritual and cultural life. *The Chinese Poetry Conference* and *The Reader*, two cultural programs that focus on traditional Chinese culture and combine competition and emotion, stand out among many other programs and have instantly become popular topics in the lives of TV viewers and are frequently praised on microblogs, WeChat and other online social platforms, inspiring the people's enthusiasm for Chinese culture and classical poetry. It also arouses people's thinking about cultural philosophy, life philosophy and emotion.

Relevance theory is based on Grice's conversational cooperation principle, which is a further development of pragmatics. Relevance theory analyzes the underlying rules in language use from the cognitive perspective from the beginning to the end, and puts forward pragmatic analysis principles including communicative relevance principle and cognitive relevance principle. Relevance theory holds that any

discourse is related. From the speaker's utterance to the listener's understanding of discourse is a process of seeking relevance. The artistry of discourse is directly related to the effort of the listener in understanding discourse. Dong Qing's hosting language of cultural programs is vivid and artistic, which is a model of hosting cultural programs. Analyzing the artistry of Dong Qing's language in cultural programs from the perspective of relevance theory will provide a unique analysis and explanation for the artistry of language in cultural program hosting and gain insights from it.

## 2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### 2.1 The Core Content of Relevance Theory

Sperber and Wilson (1986) put forward relevance theory on the basis of Grice's Conversational Cooperative Principle, the core concept of which is relevancy. They define relevance as: if a proposition has the greatest contextual effect in the context hypothesis, then the proposition has relevance in the context. If a proposition needs less effort to deal with in the context hypothesis, then the proposition has relevance in the context. According to relevance theory, communication is a process from the speaker's ostensive to the listener's inferential, and the degree of understanding effect is the degree of relevance. In other words, the purpose of language

communication is not to let the listener copy the speaker's thoughts, but to change the listener's cognitive environment. The process of communication is to constantly improve the cognitive environment shared by both the speaker and the listener. The success or failure of communication or the effect of communication depends on the advantages and disadvantages of the common cognitive environment. Therefore, in relevance theory, the key to discourse understanding lies in the speaker's ostensive process and the listener's inferential process. Language is not only a tool of human communication, but also a tool of thinking. In the application of language, language in context is a dynamic process from interpretation to understanding. Among them, the choice of context, the ostension of language and the listener's reasoning all affect the contextual effect.

Relevance has two levels of meaning, namely relevance degree and relevancy. When communicative discourse produces contextual effect in context, discourse has relevance in this context. In relevance theory, contextual effect refers to the effect of a new utterance uttered by the speaker on the existing cognition of the listener. New discourse is the thought that the speaker wants to express as a fact subjectively. For the listener, it can be regarded as a fact recognized by himself or not. According to relevance theory, contextual effect can be divided into positive contextual effect and negative contextual effect. The acquisition of contextual effect requires brain power to infer sentence meaning, which is the process of mental effort. Relevance theory defines the degree of relevance by the change of context effect and mental effort. The greater the context effect is, the greater the degree of relevance is; under the same conditions, the greater the effort, the smaller the correlation.

## ***2.2 Relevance Theory and Language Art***

The relevance theory holds that people's cognition tends to be consistent with the maximum relevance. However, in the process of language communication and information transmission, speakers can only pursue the best relevance as possible due to the limitation of communication time and space and communication objects. The best relevance is to achieve the best contextual effect in communication, that is, the obvious meaning of communication discourse. Listeners can understand the inner connection of discourse

clearly, and listeners can understand the expression intention without consuming too much reasoning and mental power. Clear and straightforward explicit language is conducive to understand the discourse clearly, but for art language, often lack of artistic conception and charm. It can be inferred that the artistic effect of language expression comes from the inference of implicit meaning in communication. The implicit meaning in language expression produces artistic effect, which makes listeners spend more effort to promote artistic discourse with artistic conception and charm. In this process, in order to obtain more artistic effects and let the audience spend some energy to understand the discourse, the speaker must sacrifice some contextual effects to a certain extent. Because, in language expression, the stronger the artistic effect, the smaller the contextual effect.

The process of people's understanding of language is carried out in the dynamic context of cognitive context. For artistic language, if speakers want to make the language expression more poetic, they should get rid of the interference of time and space as far as possible, and make as many symbols in the language as possible become the carrier of emotion. This is what so-called beyond context. That is to say, artistic discourse should obtain more artistic conception and charm, and obtain more artistic effects in the super context on the basis of ensuring the best relevance as far as possible.

## **3. A CASE STUDY OF THE ARTISTIC LANGUAGE HOSTED BY DONG QING'S CULTURAL PROGRAMS**

For the host, the choice of style is the key to the host style. In order to improve the language artistry of cultural programs, it is necessary to make the language reach relevance purposefully. The host should have a certain understanding of the audience's cognitive ability and the construction of context resources, and then express it through the interaction of explicit meaning and implicit meaning.

Dong Qing's *The Reader* and *The Chinese Poetry Conference* have been highly praised by the audience. The audience's deep impression on the host comes from the host's generous and gentle image temperament, and also from the host's eloquent and graceful words. Dong Qing's success is closely related to the host's relevance to the program positioning and style selection. The two cultural programs hosted by Dong Qing have a

well-designed opening speech with clear theme, beautiful language and full of meaning, which improves the overall cultural quality of the program and quickly brings the audience into the main atmosphere of the program.

The following is a case study of how to grasp the relationship between context and cognition in a few opening speeches, choose the right language style, achieve communicative effects, and demonstrate the art of language, using the opening speeches of two programs hosted by Dong Qing.

### 3.1 Case 1

"*The Chinese Poetry Conference* is an annual meeting with you. This year is the fourth year. People have walked hand in hand through spring, summer, autumn and winter. Let's watch 'peach blossom on human face' together, listen to 'the fragrance of rice flowers tells us about a good harvest', sigh 'frost leaves are red in February flowers' together, and hope 'wind and rain send spring home, and snow welcome spring'. There are four seasons in the seasons, and there are also four seasons in poetry. It has been handed down from generation to generation, and it's endless. Let's feel the resplendence of Chinese civilization, taste the poetic life, and see the scenery of the four seasons once again on the stage of *The Chinese Poetry Conference*."

Above is Dong Qing's opening speech in the fourth season of *The Chinese Poetry Conference*. The opening host said that the program has entered its fourth year and has gone through spring, summer, autumn and winter one after another. Then he used four poems. The first two sentences are not directly related from the obvious meaning. At this time, the audience is forced to further explore the encyclopedic knowledge of poetry in their memory. It can be understood that these four poems respectively describe the four seasons of spring, summer, autumn and winter.

Through two kinds of expression of the four seasons, one is obvious and the other is hidden, the audience is urged to pay extra effort to understand the relevance of the two sentences before the opening of the host. Then the host expresses that "seasons have four seasons, poetry also have four seasons", confirming the audience's relevance reasoning. Finally, the audience is pulled back to the stage from reasoning and reverie, and feels the four seasons through poetry on the stage of *The Chinese Poetry Conference*, which not only makes

the audience stay in the endless reverie of the four seasons, but also makes the audience have expectations for the next program. The audience infers with the information given by the host and their own encyclopedia knowledge in the whole prologue, and finds the best relevance of the discourse in the inference. The extra effort produces the poetic contextual effect and achieves the information intention that the host wants.

### 3.2 Case 2

"The theme of our show is gifts. Gift, what a beautiful word. Looking up at the starry sky, the earth is a gift from the universe; looking down, a flower and a leaf, is the gift of nature to the world; children are gifts to parents; friends are gifts for company; memory is the gift of time. In today's program time, let's open all kinds of gifts with different colors but also full of emotion."

Above is the opening speech of the program *The Reader*. The first sentence directly indicates that the theme of the program is 'gift'. Through four parallelisms, the host constantly changes time and space, and explains the gift of the universe, the gift of nature, the gift of parents, the gift of companionship, and the gift of time. The four sentences go beyond time and space and the context of reality, and urge the audience to start their own imagination, there is a vast universe, associated with the plants around us, with friends and relatives, and with company and memories.

These expressions related to emotion and mood form a series of implicit meanings. In the associative reasoning of audience mobilizing encyclopedia knowledge, most of their own connections are achieved, which makes audience and host reach resonance in the interaction of ostensive and inferential. It makes the audience go beyond the standard context and premise, and promotes the poetic effect of language.

## 4. DISCUSSION

Cultural TV programs carry the attribute of promoting traditional Chinese culture, and have higher requirements for the hosts, who must be able to control the program, guide the program and organize the whole scene smoothly and freely, and have a higher level of culture and deeper artistry of language expression. The hosts of the two TV programs, *The Reader* and *The Chinese Poetry Conference*, are both Dong Qing, whose atmospheric and gentle temperament and profound

language skills based on classical literature have been recognized by the audience, and people are impressed by the host of these two programs, Dong Qing, while praising the programs. Dong Qing's hosting style is calm and atmospheric, and she blends her personal temperament with the style of the program, and her language expression is profound, with thoughtfulness and artistry, flowing and clear, bringing the audience quickly into the very poetic and sentimental theme of the program.

Poetry is always in silence. The ostensive inferential communication mode advocated by relevance theory includes three steps: attracting the listener's attention, directing the listener's attention to the speaker's intention, and showing the speaker's intention. Compared with the direct and clear expression of the host's expression intention, Dong Qing completes the implication of the discourse intention by means of metaphor and implication, so that the audience can mobilize their own encyclopedia knowledge to infer and cognize according to the host's word information, and pay extra efforts to find the relevance between the discourse and context, resulting in the charm and poetic flavor of language expression. That is to say, the poetic flavor of language art originates from the listener's pursuit of relevance and understanding. What the poetic flavor brings is not the common knowledge or information of the listener and the speaker, but the common impression and emotional expression. This kind of emotional expression needs to be widely mobilized by the host through reducing the relevance and contextual effect of the language, making the audience pay attention to understanding the reasoning, so as to understand the host's expression intention, and finally let the host and the audience get emotional and impression resonance.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Cultural programs with the theme of carrying forward Chinese traditional culture are widely concerned, which also puts forward higher requirements for the host's language expression art. The two programs *The Rader* and *The Chinese Poetry Conference* hosted by Dong Qing show Dong Qing's qualities of eloquence, gentleness and poetry, which provide people with a good reference. Relevance theory is a new perspective to analyze communicative discourse from the perspective of cognition. It holds that the expression of language intention is accomplished through the "ostensive

inferential" interaction between the speaker and the listener.

Through the above analysis, it is obtained that language produces artistic effects from slightly hiding the relevance of words in the process of the host's expression of words, reducing the contextual effect, prompting the audience to put their minds to think and reason according to the host's language expression, thus achieving emotional resonance with the host. When hosting cultural programs, the host can use various means of expression to reduce the contextual effect and enhance the artistic effect of language by correctly predicting the audience's knowledge level and contextual structure under the premise of ensuring the standardization of language expression, and using various means of expression to appropriately use the hidden meaning of language to reduce the contextual effect and strive to achieve the best relevance.

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