



An Affect-Theory-Based Discourse Analysis of Interview Talk: A Case Study of *An Exciting Offer 7*

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Abstract. This study examines how interview discourse operates as an affective communication practice in the mediated context of reality television. Taking two interview tasks in *An Exciting Offer 7* as cases, namely the interview tasks involving Zhelai Nv and Fly, the paper draws on affect theory and the concept of emotionality to analyze how discursive practices shape interaction, mobilize emotions, and construct relationships between interviewer and interviewee. The analysis focuses on three dimensions, including the establishment of mutual trust, the narration of personal experience, and the expression of emotion. The findings show that interview talk in reality-show settings does not merely transmit information; rather, it initiates affective alignment through emotional self-disclosure, reconstructs interpersonal relations through identity positioning and caring expressions, activates memories through detailed questioning, and amplifies resonance through empathetic and emotion-oriented prompts. The study argues that affect is not a secondary element of interview tasks in the program but a central mechanism through which communicative quality and audience engagement are produced. By applying affect theory to a program-within-the-program interview task, this paper offers a useful perspective for understanding how discourse functions in controlled media environments and how interview strategies contribute to affective meaning-making and communication effects.

Keywords: Affect Theory, Emotionality, Interview Discourse, Mediated Interaction, Reality Television, Communication Studies.

1 Introduction

In the contemporary media environment, variety programs have gradually become an important site of discursive production. This is especially true of programs that combine interview formats with reality-show elements, where discursive practices often display strong emotional and interactive features [1]. *An Exciting Offer* is a workplace observation reality show, and its seventh season focuses on the media industry [2]. The program designs practical tasks such as news broadcasting, high-pressure interviews, and large-scale event hosting, thereby closely simulating the real working environment of media practitioners. Among these tasks, the interview segments appear, at first glance,

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to aim at information gathering, but in essence they are closer to carefully designed processes of emotional interaction. Interviewers deploy linguistic strategies to mobilize interviewees' emotional states in order to obtain more affectively compelling expressions, while also taking into account programmatic narrative needs and audience resonance.

Existing interview studies have in fact paid insufficient attention to the mechanisms by which discourse produces emotion. Traditional research often regards discourse primarily as a tool for information transmission, emphasizing its organizational structures and communicative rules [3]; even within reality-show research, discussions of interview strategies frequently remain at the level of phenomenological description and have yet to yield a systematic theoretical analytic framework. Affect theory offers an important perspective for understanding emotion generation in interaction [4], but extant affective studies have largely concentrated in philosophy, political science, and literary criticism; their application to media discourse analysis, especially to concrete interactive contexts such as reality-show interviews, remains limited. This paper seeks to intervene at the intersection of this theoretical gap and practical demand by using affective theory as an analytical tool to examine the mechanisms through which discourse constructs emotion in reality-show interviews.

Accordingly, this study takes two interview segments from *An Exciting Offer 7*, involving Zhelai Nv and Fly as its analytical corpus and conducts discourse analysis along three dimensions, including the establishment of mutual trust, the narration of personal experience, and the expression of emotion. It focuses on two central questions: (1) How do interview discourses initiate and transmit emotion during interaction? (2) How are emotions constructed and amplified within the interviewer-interviewee relationship? By introducing affect theory into the analysis of reality-show interview discourse and shifting the perspective from "discourse as information transmission" to "discourse as emotion production," this paper aims to illuminate the mechanisms of linguistic influence in interaction and to offer a new theoretical pathway for interview studies and research on reality-show communication.

2 Theoretical Framework

Affect theory emphasizes that affect is not a stable internal state of the individual, but a dynamic process that is continuously generated and circulated through interaction [4]. From Deleuze and Guattari's perspective, language should not be understood as a passive tool of expression, but as an active force that can participate in the production of reality, experience, and social relations [5]. The human body is always affected by and responsive to external bodies, whether these bodies are other people or objects. In this sense, the body is not an independent and autonomous entity; it is always situated within relations. Spinoza understood affect as this kind of bodily affection, and argued it was precisely through such bodily affection that emotion was generated [6]. Hardt also noted that the challenge of an affective perspective first lay in its demand for synthesis, since affects involve both body and mind, and also because they concern both

reason and passion [7]. From this perspective, language is no longer merely a tool for expressing emotion, but a key mechanism participating in the generation of emotion.

Affect is often understood as pre-discursive and transindividual. It is not fully dependent on language, nor is it simply contained within a single subject. Rather, it emphasizes the relations of influence between bodies. Ahmed's concept of "affective economies" is useful here because it shows that emotions do not simply reside within individuals, but circulate between bodies and signs and shape social relations in the process of circulation [8]. As Thompson suggested, affect appeared to be less directly embedded in discourse, whereas emotion was more clearly articulated through language and social meaning [9]. Massumi argued that affect was not an emotional experience contained within the individual, but an intensity circulating between individuals [10]. Emotion, by contrast, depends more on the formation of the subject. It is the socially and linguistically qualified form of affect, usually understood as the content of subjectivity and as a personal experience that can be named, expressed, and recognized through discourse. In this sense, emotion is a qualified intensity.

This paper argues that although affect and emotion differ in theoretical origin and conceptual emphasis, both concepts show that discourse does not merely transmit information. Instead, discourse has the capacity to stimulate, circulate, and generate feelings and emotions. Therefore, in the concrete textual analysis, this paper does not make a strict distinction between affect and emotion. Instead, it treats both as manifestations of the affective function of discourse, with a particular focus on how interview talk communicates emotions, mobilizes affect, and influences subject relations in interaction.

3 Literature Review

Existing studies mostly analyze interview-program discourse from linguistic or communicative perspectives. Some studies (e.g., [3]) draw on transactional analysis theory and focus on role relations and modes of interaction in interviews, while others (e.g., [11]) examine linguistic structure and conversational rules through turn-taking, the co-operative principle, and cohesion theory. These studies mainly explain how interviews proceed smoothly and how language is organized in communication. By contrast, this paper adopts affect theory and therefore has a different focus. Rather than mainly analyzing linguistic structure or communicative rules, it is more concerned with how language influences the emotions and states of participants during the interview process, and how an affective atmosphere is formed between interviewer and interviewee. Thus, this paper places more emphasis on the impact of language in concrete interaction than on its forms and rules.

In contemporary media environments, interview tasks in variety programs differ in important ways from traditional interview formats. Traditional interview programs are mainly oriented toward information transmission and opinion expression [3]. Interviewers typically adopt a relatively objective and neutral stance, their questioning patterns remain stable, and interview strategies are not highly conspicuous, the principal aim being to elicit guest expression. In variety programs, by contrast, interviews are

often designed as tasks with situational and performative dimensions. Such interviews attend not only to content but also to the entertainment value and effect of the interaction. Under these conditions interviewers more actively employ diverse strategies such as follow-up questions, guidance, and even emotional framing in order to increase program appeal [12]. Therefore, compared with traditional interviews, interviewer strategies in these formats are more pronounced and observable. Interviewers frequently foreground their questioning techniques so that audiences clearly perceive their role in shaping the dialogue. This provides an ideal site for applying affect theory. The paper treats interviewer questioning as affective practice and examines how discourse initiates emotion, circulates intensity, and shapes relations in interaction, thereby offering a theoretically penetrating analytical path for research on reality-show interviews.

4 Establishing Mutual Trust: The Initiation of Affect and the Reconstruction of Relations

The opening of an interview task often determines the direction of the subsequent interaction. In the two interview tasks with Zhelai Nv and Fly, the opening stage clearly emphasizes relationship building rather than directly entering the topic. Through emotional self-disclosure, self-positioning, and caring expressions, the interviewer quickly shifts the conversation from an exchange between strangers to a relatively familiar interaction. The key point at this stage is the initiation of affect. By making emotions visible, both sides are brought into the same affective field, thereby reducing psychological distance.

First, in the interview task with Zhelai Nv, the expression *“Hello, Teacher Zhelai, oh my god, I’m so excited”* has overt affective features. As an English greeting, “Hello” often carries a relaxed and even slightly performative meaning in a Chinese context. To a certain extent, it reduces the formality of the interview task. This informal greeting transforms what might have been a serious interview setting into an interactional field closer to everyday conversation. The following phrase, “oh my god, I’m so excited,” directly externalizes emotion, making emotion part of the interaction rather than something hidden behind language. It can stimulate the interviewee’s emotions and also make her more likely to enter a relaxed state.

Furthermore, the expression *“a real Zhe’ergen (Zhelai Nv’s fan name) finally meets Teacher Zhelai”* redefines the relationship between the two sides by explicitly positioning the interviewer as a fan. The original “interviewer-interviewee” structure is transformed into a “fan-admired public figure” relationship. This relationship naturally carries an emotional basis. By lowering the interviewer’s own position, the utterance reduces power asymmetry and provides the interviewee with an affective environment in which she feels liked and appreciated, thereby encouraging more open expression.

Second, in Fly’s interview task, the expressions *“I specially bought grapes for you”* and *“Don’t worry, eat them; no one is going to prank you”* reflect another strategy. Here, it is not language alone that functions, but the combination of action and language. The act of buying food itself carries emotional meaning. Care is materialized into a perceptible action. Through visible action, the interviewer strengthens emotional

expression and makes the interaction appear more authentic. Meanwhile, “Don’t worry, eat them; no one is going to prank you” refers to an inside joke related to Fly. This playful expression with subcultural meaning indicates that the interviewer pays attention to and understands the interviewee. It allows the interviewee to feel recognized and creates an affective environment of being noticed. Through shared context, group identity is built and psychological distance is further shortened.

Another example is the statement, “*I feel like I just graduated, but you have already achieved so much.*” Through self-deprecation and praise of the other, the interviewer actively lowers her own position and pushes the interviewee into the role of a successful person, thereby activating his motivation to express his experience. This strategy reduces potential comparison and judgment. At the affective level, it produces a feeling of being recognized, which makes the interviewee more relaxed and facilitates subsequent expression.

Overall, during the stage of establishing mutual trust, the core function of discourse is not information transmission but relational adjustment. Through emotional self-disclosure, identity reconstruction, and caring expressions, the interview task enters from the very beginning into an interactional state based on affect.

5 Personal Experience: The Development and Deepening of Affective Narrative

After the initial relationship has been established, the interview task gradually enters the stage of storytelling. However, the focus of this stage is not simply the experience itself, but how to make the experience feel affectively meaningful. Through detailed questioning and chronological organization, the interviewer guides the interviewee back into emotional memory, enabling the interviewee to tell a more engaging and infectious story.

In Zhelai Nv’s interview task, the interviewer says, “*I remember you once mentioned that you sang in a sheepfold.*” From the perspective of affect theory, the phrase “I remember” or “I heard that” places the information in an indirect position, thereby weakening the directness and pressure of the question and making it less sharp. “I heard that” does not require the interviewee to give an immediate factual response; instead, it provides a relatively open space for response. This vague formulation makes the question closer to a curiosity-driven and interest-based prompt, which reduces the interviewee’s defensiveness and facilitates the natural flow of emotion. In addition, the question implies a presupposition about the interviewee’s growth environment. Compared with directly asking “What was your living environment like?” or “I heard your childhood environment was difficult,” the phrase “singing in a sheepfold” has a stronger sense of scene and is more tactful. This form of questioning is neither overly serious nor fully entertaining; it therefore creates a balance between emotional expression and information gathering.

In Fly’s interview task, the interviewer asks a sequence of increasingly detailed questions: “*So how much money did you bring with you at that time? Who gave it to you? So did your grandmother control you very strictly?*” First, “how much money” and

“who gave it to you” are highly specific detail-oriented questions. From the perspective of affect theory, this kind of concrete information is more likely to awaken the interviewee’s memories and emotions from that time, because it transforms an abstract past into an experience that can be felt again. In other words, emotion is not elicited through direct questioning; rather, it is activated through the process of recalling details. Money here is not merely information, but also a carrier of emotion, often connected with pressure, anxiety, or persistence. Second, the shift from “money” to “who gave it to you” moves the topic from objective circumstances to interpersonal relationships. From the perspective of emotionality, this shift is significant because emotions are often produced around relationships. The interviewer is in fact preparing the ground for later emotional expression. Finally, the sentence “So did your grandmother control you very strictly?” has a clear emotional orientation. The phrase “very strictly” contains a presupposition: it provides a possible emotional interpretation and guides the interviewee to respond to or revise it. From the perspective of emotionality, this is a typical form of emotional framing, in which the interviewer first offers an emotional direction and then allows the interviewee to express feelings within that frame.

In addition, the interviewer says, “*But now I feel you are not an Introversion (I)-type person at all... I knew this person was definitely not an I-type.*” This judgment is not made out of nowhere, but is based on the fact that the interviewee has already shared many personal experiences. Therefore, this utterance can be understood as feedback based on listening. By summarizing the interviewee’s expression, the interviewer gives a conclusion with a subjective tone. At the same time, “I-type,” a concept from Myers-Briggs Type Indicator test, is a popular but also subjective personality label. Its use in the interview task makes the expression sound more relaxed and closer to everyday communication, while also reducing the seriousness of evaluation. From the perspective of affect, the key function of this statement lies in response and recognition. By clearly expressing her judgment, the interviewer lets the interviewee feel, “I have been listening carefully to what you said, and I have formed an understanding of you.” The feeling of being understood itself produces emotional circulation, making the interviewee more willing to continue speaking and pushing the interview task forward.

Questions in the interview are often based on semi-known information. The interviewer has prepared background knowledge in advance and provides cues in the questions, guiding the interviewee to supplement and expand the story. This strategy both ensures the direction of the narrative and reduces the difficulty of expression, allowing affect to circulate more smoothly. In the section on personal experience, the function of discourse is to transform facts into lived experiences. Through detail-triggering and emotional guidance, the interview task allows the interviewee not only to recount experiences, but also to re-experience them. In this way, experience is turned into an affectively thick narrative, and the infectious power of the story is strengthened.

6 Expressing Feelings: The Intensification of Emotion and the Generation of Resonance

In the later stage of the interview task, the questions gradually shift from “what

happened” to “how do you feel.” This shift marks the entry of the interview task into the stage of emotional expression. At this stage, emotion is no longer implied content, but becomes the core topic of discussion.

In Zhelai Nv’s interview task, the question *“This year, as people follow the program Singer, they will definitely notice you. Are you afraid that this traffic may disappear?”* is not simply an ordinary question. Rather, it intentionally shifts the topic from an event to emotion. The first sentence affirms the fact that she is being noticed, placing the conversation in a relatively relaxed and recognized atmosphere. Then the question turns to her inner feelings. From the perspective of affect theory, the phrase “traffic may disappear” itself carries a sense of instability and anxiety. The question guides the interviewee to face and express possible inner uneasiness, rather than remaining at the surface-level fact that she is currently popular. In other words, the interviewer is not pursuing experience itself, but pushing emotional expression, giving the interviewee an opportunity to express more real and personal feelings. This way of moving from external circumstances to inner emotion also makes the interview task more resonant and gives the conversation greater depth.

Moreover, the question *“So do you think the stage name Zhelai Nv is your true self?”* is not merely asking about the meaning of a stage name. It is more concerned with Zhelai Nv’s own feelings. On the one hand, it guides the interviewee to think about the relationship between the stage name and the self, which involves her understanding of identity. On the other hand, it also implies concern for her current state: whether she identifies with who she is now and with this form of identity expression. From the perspectives of affect and emotionality, such a question can encourage the interviewee to conduct a certain degree of self-analysis. It moves expression from surface information to inner feeling and is more likely to trigger emotional circulation, allowing the interview task to move toward a deeper level of communication.

In Fly’s interview task, the interviewer says: *“Many people think that esports is an industry with more regret than completion. There are many esports players who may never get to touch the final trophy as you did. Some players may sit on the bench from beginning to end and never have the chance to play. Others may keep transferring teams for one chance to play, but in the end still fail to get the result they want. How do you understand this phenomenon?”* This long description of esports as an industry marked by more regret than fulfillment has already created an emotional atmosphere of regret and uncertainty. By giving examples such as substitutes and players who keep transferring without achieving results, the interviewer emphasizes the fact that most people may not succeed, thereby guiding the interviewee to respond to this emotion rather than merely analyze an industry phenomenon. From the perspective of affect and emotionality, this question more easily invites the interviewee to express his feelings and attitudes, such as how he understands winning and losing, opportunity, and the meaning of long-term effort. The key function of this question is that it constructs an industry image filled with emotional tension. As a result, the interviewee is not only responding to “how he views esports,” but also expressing “how he faces uncertainty and failure.” It is precisely in this process that the interviewee’s values and emotional attitudes are further presented, and the interview task moves from external analysis of a phenomenon toward a deeper understanding of life. Overall, in the stage of emotional

expression, the interview task intensifies affect through emotional vocabulary and empathetic questioning. Emotion is not only expressed here, but also continuously amplified and shared, thereby generating resonance.

7 Conclusion & Discussion

Using affect theory as an analytical tool, this paper conducts discourse analysis of two interview tasks featuring Zhelai Nv and Fly from *An Exciting Offer 7*, and finds that reality-show interview tasks are essentially interactive mechanisms centered on affect. In the stage of establishing mutual trust, discourse initiates interaction through emotional self-disclosure and identity adjustment. In the stage of personal experience, detailed questioning and emotional evocation make the narrative more infectious. In the stage of emotional expression, empathy and emotional guidance lead the interaction into a deeper level. Emotion is not an accessory in the interview task, but a key factor that drives the unfolding of dialogue and the production of meaning. One major reason why interviews attract audiences is that they successfully transform individual experiences into emotional experiences that can be shared. This analysis shows that, in the context of variety programs, the function of discourse has shifted from simple information transmission to the production of emotion and the construction of relationships.

Unlike traditional interview studies that start from turn-taking, the cooperative principle, or cohesion theory, this paper pays closer attention to how language creates an emotional atmosphere in interaction, mobilizes relational changes, and further influences the interview effect. From the perspective of methodological implication, in the special context of a “program within the program,” the interview is not a completely spontaneous daily conversation, but an interaction shaped by the reality-show task, camera presentation, and program effects. Therefore, the interviewer’s strategies become more visible and easier to observe. More importantly, this visibility is produced by the program’s own logic of displaying and evaluating communication strategies. Since the interview task is designed to assess participants’ communicative competence, interviewers tend to consciously highlight their questioning skills, affective responses, trust-building moves, and emotional guidance. Compared with ordinary interviews or daily conversations, these strategies appear more deliberate and explicit, which can serve as useful objects for investigating the affective function of discourse.

From an empirical perspective, this paper finds that high-quality interviews do not depend only on whether the questions have informational value, but also on whether the interviewer can use discursive strategies to build trust, elicit experience, and guide emotional expression. From the perspective of communication, this study investigates how discursive practices, with affective and emotional strategies, serve as important means of ensuring the quality of interviews.

The paper also has certain limitations. First, it selects only two interview task clips from *An Exciting Offer 7* as the objects of analysis. The small sample size means that the findings cannot fully represent the discursive characteristics of all reality-show interview tasks. Therefore, the conclusions of this paper are more suitable as a case analysis than as a universal judgment about all interview task programs. Second, since the

sample is drawn from the Chinese reality-show context, the discourse-affect generation mechanisms identified here may be shaped by specific cultural norms and production logics; their applicability in other cultural contexts therefore requires verification through cross-cultural comparative research. Nonetheless, in light of the limited sample size, this paper adopts a focused method of in-depth analysis. It examines the two interview tasks across a relatively complete process, from relationship building at the beginning, to the narration of experience in the middle, and to emotional expression at the end. This approach, in a more nuanced way, can show how discourse gradually promotes the generation of emotion. Future research may expand the sample size on this basis, for example by comparing different reality shows across different cultural contexts, different interviewers, or different types of interviewees, in order to further examine the applicability of affect theory to interview task discourse analysis.

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