

Follow-up Questions in Televised Mediation in China's Sociocultural Context

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ABSTRACT: This paper has investigated the sequence of follow-up questions in televised mediation sessions from the point of Conversation Analysis. The high frequency of mediators' follow-up questions displays hosts or hostesses or mediators' initiative. Besides clarifications, elaborations and consistency follow-up questions in press conference and news interview context, in mediation context we also have verification and argumentation follow-up questions. The factors for these additional two follow-ups are discussed in the final part.

KEYWORDS: Televised mediation; follow-up questions; Conversation Analysis

1 INTRODUCTION

For decades, many western scholars have done a lot of research on mediation in foreign countries from both macro and micro (linguistic) perspectives. A few foreign scholars have done some research on China's mediation from macro perspective, whereas only one scholar, Lv Wan-ying (2005), has investigated China's mediation from micro perspective (for detailed review, see An Mei-li & Peng Ming-e, 2013).

In recent years, televised dispute mediation has become increasingly popular in China. Only a legal scholar, Li Li-jing (2009), dealt with this type of televised mediation from macro perspective. This paper aims at dealing with televised mediation sessions from micro perspective, specifically, it focuses on sequences with follow-up questions with the point of departure in Conversation Analysis.

2 STUDIES ON FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

Follow-up questions have received great attention in press conferences and journalism. In this context, follow-ups can be used to pursue what appear to be evasive or insufficient answers (for detailed review, see Goran Eriksson, 2011). From above, we can see that follow-ups, if not all, at least some, will inherently bear adversarialness. Clayman and Heritage (2002a) distinguish between two forms of questions: the "why did you-type" and the "how could you-type". The former is seen as less hostile towards politicians than the latter (Goran Eriksson,

2011). Also, follow-ups obviously are generated by politicians' responses to previous questions. Smith (1990), who studies press conferences from a rhetorical perspective, takes the preceding answer into consideration in defining follow-ups. Greatbatch (1986) gives a similar definition in his study of news interviews. According to him, follow-up questions are "(i) produced following a response to a prior question, (ii) addressed to the author of that response, and (iii) built off, or on to, the talk which precedes them" (cited from Goran Eriksson, 2011). Both Smith and Greatbatch's definitions can be adapted to our context with some modification. With (i), a response is not necessarily produced to a prior question, it can also be produced to a prior statement; as to (ii), a question addressed to the other of both disputants is also counted as a follow-up question in our data; we do not do any change with (iii).

With the modified definition as a starting point, sequences in which a host or hostess asks a second question which is topically related to the first question and is linked to the answer provided by the disputant are examined in this study. By closely examining follow-ups, we see how participants intersubjectively manage each other's action in the context of mediation.

3 PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS

The data for this study are from televised mediation sessions in five local TV channels, Peking, Inner Mongolia, Shanghai, Jiangxi, Nanjing, which are

also broadcast on the Internet. Altogether 10 mediation sessions, every two selected from each local TV channel respectively, are transcribed. Each session is about 30 minutes in length.

A televised mediation session is composed of a host or hostess, both parties to the dispute, several mediators and present audience. Each session begins with the host or hostess asking questions of the disputants. The first question routinely is what goal the disputants expect the mediators to help to achieve. Following the first question, a series of questions ask both parties to present their own cases, that is, evidence is usually elicited in the form of answers to questions from the host or hostess. We refer to questions asking as investigation stage. Follow-ups frequently occur in this stage. When the host or hostess thinks that the dispute is quite explicit, the session proceeds to the stage of mediating. The boundary between the two stages is not so neat. Sometimes, the host or hostess or mediators start their mediation in the first stage when they think the disputants' answers are problematic, or they return from the second stage to the first to ask to clarify or challenge what the disputants have said before.

We count follow-ups in the data, in counting, we also divide these follow-ups into mono and multiple ones. A mono follow-up means that the host or hostess initiates one follow-up question; while a multiple follow-up question is one that the host or hostess initiates more than one follow-ups within one topic.

The result of the counting is: There are 146 topics initiated by hosts or hostesses. Among them, there are mono follow-ups in 82 topics and multiple follow-ups in 39 topics. That is, the frequency of follow-ups is very high in our data. This means that hosts or hostess closely focus on what disputants are presenting. In technical terms, they have high consciousness of the process of discourse production.

4 FORMS OF FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

In press conferences context, Smith (1990) identifies what she sees as three basic forms of follow-up questions: *clarifications*, *elaborations* and *consistency questions*. In news interview context, Greatbatch (1986) detects diverse forms of follow-up questions. He also demonstrates that follow-ups sometimes have an adversarial character (cited from Goran Eriksson, 2011). In our data, in the context of mediation, clarification, elaboration and consistency forms of follow-up questions are also present. Yet, there are another two forms of follow-up questions that are absent in press conference and news interview context: *verification* and *argumentation questions*.

In the following part, we will discuss each form of follow-up questions in detail.

4.1 Clarification questions

Extract 1:[Shanghai TV Station, 2010-05-09]

(In this case, the disputant (D3) did not get along well with his mother. Once in a quarrel, D3 slapped his mother in the face, because she said he was not born of her. The hostess and mediator (H) is focusing on the issue of D3 hitting his mother.)

68 D2 (二女儿): 打我妈妈耳光。

(the second daughter): Slapped Mother in the face.

69 H: 谁打妈妈耳光?

Who slapped mother in the face?

70 D3(三女儿):他(当事人1)打妈妈耳光。

(the third daughter): He (D1) slapped Mother in the face.

71 H:什么事情打妈妈耳光?

For what did he slap Mother?

In talk exchange, speakers and hears frequently have problems of expressing, listening and interpretation. In extract 1, D2 (line 68) does not give the actor of slapping, then the hostess asks in the follow-up question to determine the actor (line 69). After D3 gives the answer (line 70), The hostess proceeds to initiate another follow-up question to ask the reason of slapping Mother (line 71). The two follow-ups not only show that slapping Mother catches her attention, they also imply strong accusation of D1 if we take sociocultural context into account. In any society, slapping mother is immoral, even illegal in some countries. In China, for thousands of years, doing filial respect to the elders is a good virtue to advocate, therefore, D1's behaviour is objectionable in the audience's eyes. The hostess uses the two follow-ups may also suggest that D1 should realize his wrong behaviour.

4.2 Elaboration questions

Extract 2:[Peking TV station, 2013-08-15]

(In this case, Two brothers have long disputed over providing for their mother. The little brother is telling one thing that has happened in the past.)

26 H: 就是那次打起来了吗?

You fought with each other then?

27 D1:对 我哥把我爱人打了。

Yes, My elder brother hit my wife.

28 H: 怎么打的? 为什么会打呢?

How did it happen? For what did you fight?

In extract 2, the hostess's first question (line 26) is a Yes-no interrogative, D1 not only produces a type-conforming response “对(Yes)” (line 27), but also gives excessive information which is non-conforming response to the first question. Also from

his answer, we know the actor of the predicate (hit) is the other party (his elder brother). That is, he implies that it is the other party who initiated the fighting. If he just responds with a “对(Yes)”, he would be to risk acknowledging that he was irrational, after all, fighting would be regarded as uncivil behaviour. However; he just gives the result of the story, not the cause. So the hostess in the next turn uses the follow-up questions (line 28) to ask D1 to elaborate on what has happened by giving the cause for fighting. In mediation context, finding out the cause for fighting helps mediators see who is at the wrong side, and asking the disputant the cause of fighting might remind the disputant of being conscious of his or her irrationality.

4.3 Consistency questions

Extract 3:[Nanjing TV station, 2011-07-16]

(In this case, before the dead mother is buried, the sons and the daughters dispute about family property division.)

67 H:我们现在就把这个问题谈具体了
(Now we shall discuss the issue specifically.)

68 D2:这个我一个人还做不了主
(I have no right in making the decision.)

69 H:你不是说你能做了主吗?
(Do not you say you have the right to make the decision?)

70 D2:我做90%。
(I can own 90 percent of the right.)

In extract 3, the host blatantly uses the follow-up question to challenge D2's response being inconsistent with what she has said before. It is equivalent to say that D2 is lying. Pointing out that one is lying in the public will damage one's face, but, in mediation context, learning about the truth is a necessary condition to resolve the dispute. It has been written into The People's Mediation Law that disputants should tell the truth. In response to the host's follow-up question, D2 concedes that she owns 90 percent of right. By saying so, D2 saves her face by implying that she does not lie completely, indeed, the family member still owns part of the right. D2's response is strategic, for 90 percent right almost means the whole right.

4.4 Verification questions

Extract 4:[Inner Mongolia TV station, 2013-06-17]

(In this case, the young couple can not reach agreement on whether the wife's name should be added to property ownership certificate.)

22 H: 现在为什么又特别在意这个房子呢?
(Why are you so concerned about the property ownership?)

23 D2: 因为以前这个情况吧, 它是属于共同财产, 现在新《婚姻法》不是规定.....

我发现现在这房子跟我半点关系也没有。

(Because in the past it was our common property, now according to the new Marriage Law I find out that I have no right to own the property.)

28 H: 所以你觉得就是不公平, 是吧?
(So you think it is unfair, is not it?)

29 D2: 那肯定是
(Sure)

In extract 4, D2 answers the host's first question by explaining why she is concerned about property ownership now, it is due to the new stipulations in Marriage Law (line 23-27). The host in the next follow-up question (line 28) to make explicit what might be implied in D2's response to his first question and ask for her verification by using a tag-interrogative. D2 confirms the host's inference (line 29). In mediation context, learning about the truth and also knowing disputants' psychological state as much as possible will have great effect on the result of mediating.

4.5 Argumentation questions

Extract 5:[Peking TV station, 2013-10-27]

(In this case, the third does not acknowledge that the house his elderly father lives now is in his elder brother's ownership and refuses to provide for Father.)

84 M: 我想问一下您 你现在居住的房是怎么来的

(I want to ask you, who gave you the house you live now?)

85 D2:我现在居住的房是由我老岳母二次嫁人
(It is the house my mother-in-law got when she got remarried.)

86不是 你分那几套房是怎么来的?
(No, I mean the apartment houses in your ownership.)

87我分那两套房都是分家分来的
(The two apartment houses was divided to me when we divided up family property.)

88分家分来是分谁的房?
(Whose family property is divided up?)

89分我父母的房
(My parents' property)

90那你父母需要赡养的时候 为什么不...
(Now when your parents need to be provided for, why do not you.....)

In extract 5, in line 85, D2 does not give the answer the mediator needs, which makes him realize that there is something wrong with his questioning. Therefore; in line 86, the mediator's follow-up question is his last question's reformulation. The

follow-up question in line 88 is initiated because D2's last response does not give adequate information or does not answer the mediator's question in line 86 at all. With the present context being taken into account, it is common knowledge that D2's two apartments come from his parents' property being divided up, thus, D2's answer obviously is evasive. In the same way, the mediator's two follow-ups, in line 86 and 88, can be categorized as rhetorical questions, they are strategic, with the tint of argumentation. When D2 has to answer the mediator's follow-up in line 88, the mediator goes further to challenge why D2 does not provide for Father by using another follow-up, also rhetorical, question in line 90. Argumentatively, one who gets parents' property should provide for parents.

5 CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Different from previous studies on follow-up questions in press conference and news interview context, besides clarifications, elaborations and consistency functions, follow-up questions in mediation context have another two important functions, that is, verification and argumentation. The existence of verification questions in our data is closely connected with interests of each party of the dispute. In presenting the case, especially with the audience present, each party is anxious to prove that he or she is not wrong in the dispute. Each party tends to justify their behaviour by selecting what he or she has done to the other party that he or she thinks is approved of by people rather than things that he or she thinks does harm to the other to tell, even telling lies. Thus, a host or hostess sometimes turns to the other party to ask for verification. The absence and presence of argumentation questions can be attributed to the following two factors: one is the social distance between participants. In press conference and news interview context, it is

reporters to ask politicians questions, the latter have higher social status and power; while in Chinese mediation context, social status is not clear-cut between hosts or hostesses and disputants, there is the possibility of using questions bearing the character of argumentation to let both parties realize their inappropriate, even wrong behaviour towards each other. The other factor lies in different goals to achieve in different contexts. The questions asked of politicians in press conferences and news interviews are to seek more information by querying the politicians' words and actions, and to hold them accountable for their deeds. In mediation sessions, the goal is to resolve the dispute by advising both disputants to make some concessions to each other. Argumentation questions are intended to change disputants' ideas.

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