

# The Pragmatic Empathy of Person Deixis in TV

## Interview

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**Abstract :** Person deixis is the common language phenomenon. It plays a very important role in the process of verbal communication in daily life. It is directly involved in the relationship between the language structure and context. Influenced by the context, the choice of person deixis in actual communication does not completely follow the grammatical rules and often deviates. This paper analyzes the use of person deixis in CGTN's interview to Dong Yuhui from the perspective of pragmatic empathy. The results show that there is a pragmatic empathy of person deixis in the interview. The reasons for this phenomenon are various. This paper discusses the reasons from the perspective of adaptation theory.

**Keywords:** Pragmatic empathy; Personal deixis; Context

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## Introduction

Deixis belongs within the domain of pragmatics, because it directly concerns the relationship between the structure of languages and the contexts in which they are used.

Different person deixis reflects different pragmatic stance. Pragmatic stance can reflect the pragmatic relationship between linguistic elements and context, because the choice of stance is influenced by the context, including the stance, emotion and attitude of the speaker towards the referent, and the speaker's perception of something (Field, 1997).

Deixis is directional and organized in an egocentric way. In the use of personal deixis, the speaker usually takes himself as the deictic center. The address of the speaker to the hearer or other participants is based on himself as a reference point. Because of the dynamic nature of context, the deixis of personal deixis varies with different contexts. Deictic expressions are used in ways that shift this deictic center to other participants. Lyons (1977) calls this deictic projection. The need for pragmatic empathy in discourse communication explains the phenomenon of deictic projection (Xin Qinglian, 2016).

The existing researches on personal deixis mainly fall into two categories. The first type of research focuses on the relationship between the use of personal pronouns and personality and social factors. For example, Kuo (1999) measured the use of personal pronouns in scientific papers. He found that the first person plural was used the most; the first person singular was used zero; and the second person appeared only eight times. He believes that the choice of personal pronouns often reflects how the writer sees himself and his relationship with the reader.

The second type of research only takes personal deixis as one of the research parameters. Wen Qiufang (2003) studied the oral tendency in the written English of Chinese college students. The results show that Chinese advanced learners tend to use more personal pronouns in their written English, but this tendency tends to decrease with the improvement of their language proficiency.

This paper analyzes the use of personal deixis in CGTN's interview to Dong Yuhui from the perspective of pragmatic empathy. This paper aims to explore the reasons for the speaker's choice of different personal deixis and the listener's dependence on context in understanding the utterance. By analyzing the unconventional use of personal deixis, this paper reveals the underlying pragmatic and cognitive motivation. The purpose of this study is to enable readers to have a deeper understanding of pragmatic empathy, to help them master pragmatic strategies, and to promote successful communication.

## 1 Theoretical Foundation

### 1.1 The categories of Deixis

Deixis encodes grammaticalized features of the speech event such as the role of participants, the activities being talked about or referred to and the spatial-temporal context. Deixis means "pointing via language" and concerns the relationship

between the structure of languages and the contexts in which they are used.

The categories of deixis are person, place, time, discourse and social deixis. Person deixis is generally centered on the speaker. Then the recipient should make corresponding changes to the person deixis. It is the conventional use of person deixis.

#### Example 1

Liu Tao: Actually, we're old friends. You know me as well as you think you do. So today we can get to know each other better.

In this context, "me" and "We" are Liu Tao's self-centered frame of reference. The use of the first person singular "me" indicates her own point of view. And the use of the first person plural "We" suggests that she is on the same side as Yang Lan and the other participants. When the listener's point of view or is different from her own, Liu Tao uses the second person deixis "You" to address the listener, Yang Lan. Liu Tao's use of personal deixis follows strictly the classification of personal deixis and "Egocentricity". This is the conventional use of person deixis.

When deixis is used in a specific speech context, it may cross each other. It is the unconventional use of person deixis. For example, in daily conversation, we sometimes use the third person deixis to refer to the first person.

#### Example 2

Tom's father said to his son, "Daddy is happy today. What do you want to eat? Daddy will make it for you!"

In this sentence, the father uses "Daddy" instead of "I". It shortens the distance between Tom's father and Tom. The expression is affectionate and makes Tom happy.

## 1.2 Pragmatic Empathy

Empathy is a concept in late 19th century German aesthetics. Literally, "empathy" refers to the transfer of emotions. In the Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics, Richards (1985) defines it as "the quality of being able to imagine and share the thoughts, feelings and points of views of other people." He Ziran is the first person to introduce empathy into the field of pragmatics and put forward the concept of pragmatic empathy.

Pragmatic empathy means that the communicators put themselves in each other's shoes, understand each other's intention, and try their best to meet each other's needs (He Ziran, 1991). It reflects the attitude towards the listener or other participants, highlights the social status of both sides of the communication, and plays a good supporting role in the expression of the speaker's pragmatic purpose.

## 2 Analysis and Discussion

### 2.1 Data Collection

The corpus of this paper is CGTN's interview to Dong Yuhui on September 14th, 2023. CGTN is short for China Global Television Network. CGTN is a multi-language, multi-platform media broadcaster with 6 TV channels. CGTN's program content is rich and varied, including global news, financial news, sports reports, interviews, national news and Chinese cultural stories. CGTN has a significant influence in international communication.

Dong Yuhui used to be a teacher, an English teacher for eight years. In 2021, he became a salesperson in the "Oriental selection" live studio. In the field of live streaming, Dong Yuhui stands out with his unique style and large knowledge reserves.

His introduction is full of idioms, traditional culture and philosophy of life.

The reason why I choose the interview program as the corpus is that the use of person deixis between the characters in the dialogue is more representative. I transcribed the interview video into written form, totaling 1617 words. The corpora are in the appendix at the end of the paper.

This study attempts to answer two research questions. First, is there a personal empathy deixis in the interview? Second, what are the reasons for this phenomenon of pragmatic empathy?

### 2.2 Conventional use of person deixis

#### Example 3

Until one day, I learned a story behind a farm product from Gansu province. A small county, young people go to big cities for better jobs. The elderly, lack of care. And they still need to work in the fields. So I suddenly realized that. Yeah, that was me.

In this passage, Dong Yuhui takes the self as the center of communication. Using “they” refers to the elderly in the small county.

### 2.3 Unconventional use of person deixis

The first person plural refers to the first person singular

#### Example 4

I tried to convey sth. that was positive, energetic. We face challenges in life, but we cannot be upset all the time. I read feedbacks from the Internet that people with very serious mental disease watched our livestream studio. And after months, half a year, or a whole year, they recovered. Sometimes we may face that kind of challenge too. In life, we worry. You need a reason. Some people can find this reason on their own way. But still a lot of people they may need to be kindly reminded, and be repeatedly.

Dong Yuhui said that the significance of his live broadcast is to convey something positive. Actually, “we” means “I”. The deictic center shifts from “I” to “Me and the audience”. He told his story to encourage the audience. He shares personal insights and opinions in a collective voice, making the expression more universal and infectious. In this way he shortens the psychological distance between himself and the audience.

The collective concept of “we” is used to refer to the individual concept of “I”. This phenomenon is influenced by the positive face imperceptibly. Based on the face notion raised by Goffman in the late 1950s, Brown and Levinson put forward the face theory. They (1987) define face as the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself, which consists of two related aspects: “negative face” and “positive face”. Negative face is a person’s desire to be unimpeded by others, to be free to act without being imposed upon. Positive face is a person’s wish to be desirable to at least some other who will appreciate and approve of one’s self and one’s personality.

The first person refers to the third person

#### Example 5

On the Internet, you find most of the things are superficial. Basically showing off, very stupid repetition of some kind of gestures. I don’t think it’s meaningful. Sometimes we are too sensitive. “I don’t want to be criticized.” “I just want to be flattered.” “I just want to be praised.”

He was talking about the attitude of netizens to outside voices. Internet users care too much about what others say about them on the Internet. Actually, “I” refers to sensitive Internet users. The deictic center shifts from Dong Yuhui to sensitive Internet users who just want to be flattered and praised. Using “I” allows the listener to understand easily.

The second person refers to the first person

#### Example 6

Come on. You were from a certain kind of village just like that, a small county just like that. You tried hard. You learned a lot. And now you have the chance to do the right things. Why are you hesitating for a long time?

This passage is about Dong Yuhui’s turning point from a teacher to a promoter. Actually, “you” means “I”—Dong Yuhui himself. He was born in Tongguan County, Weinan city, Shaanxi province. In the interview, Dong Yuhui changes his speech habit and shifts the deictic center from Dong Yuhui himself to interviewer Wang Mangmang. In this way, the interviewer can deeply feel Dong’s feelings and emotions. Dong Yuhui uses pragmatic empathy in his choice of personal deixis. It shortens the psychological distance between him and the listener, and realizes the psychological convergence.

The second person generally refers to everyone

#### Example 7

First, you need to be focused. Second, you need to be determined. Third, you do need to be open minded and to collect your ideas.

This passage is Dong Yuhui’s advice to the involution generation. “you” in this sentence does not refer to the listener Wang Mangmang, but refers to anyone in general. When using personal deixis, Dong Yuhui avoids the first person and the third person, and chooses to put the listener at the center of communication from the perspective of Wang Mangmang. Using “you” allows the audience to feel like they are talking to Dong Yuhui face to face. This makes it easier for the audience to become more involved in the situation and to think about the advice more deeply. In other words, it improves the acceptability and persuasiveness of discourse. The speaker Dong Yuhui uses pragmatic empathy strategy to achieve the desired communicative effect.

To sum up, verbal communication is in fact the exchange of feelings on both sides. Certain deixis expresses certain

emotional tendency of both sides of communication. Therefore, in the use of personal deixis, we should pay attention to the choice and use of deixis.

### 3 Influencing factors

In 1999, Verschueren put forward the adaptation theory of language in his book *Understanding Pragmatics*. The reason why people can make choices in the process of language use lies in the three characteristics of language: variability, negotiability and adaptability. Adaptability is the core of language use.

The variability of language means that the range of language selection is variable, that is, language has a series of possibilities for selection, which provides the basis for language selection. Negotiability means that the process of language selection is uncertain and needs constant negotiation. All choices are not mechanical, but are made on the basis of highly flexible principles and strategies. Adaptability refers to the ability of language to allow the user to make flexible choices from alternative items to meet the communicative needs.

The choice of language and context is a process of mutual adaptation. Such contextual elements are called “Contextual relevance elements of adaptation”. Among these elements, we can summarize three dimensions: the physical world, the social world and the mental world.

#### 3.1 The mental world

The mental world mainly includes the motivation and communicative intention of both sides of communication. In the actual process of verbal communication, the communicative intention and psychological motivation of the speaker cause the self-centeredness of personal deixis to deviate. In other words, the pragmatic perspective of person deixis has shifted. In the process of verbal communication and choice, something on the psychological level of both sides of communication is activated. These contextual elements include cognitive elements and affective elements.

##### Example 8

We are not sellers. We get attention, very much attention. When you have people’s attention, you need to cherish the time they spend with you, what kind of values, what kind of knowledge, what you are trying to spread.

In this sentence, Dong Yuhui uses the second person deixis “you” to refer to the first person deixis “I”. He intentionally transfers his own experience and perception from himself to the addressee, so that the addressee can feel what he is feeling. This is the rendering of the emotional elements we mentioned above. In the process of adapting to the mental world, language choice should not only adapt to its own pragmatic intention, but also meet the cognitive and psychological needs of the listener. At the level of pragmatic empathy, person deixis is a two-way adaptation process.

#### 3.2 The physical world

In the process of communication, the speaker’s choice of language must adapt to the current context, that is, the time and space when the communication occurs. We cannot leave the two dimensions of time and space in the process of verbal communication.

Time is the period of time in which verbal communication takes place. The speaker will choose the appropriate person deixis according to the time period. Therefore, the time factor has a restrictive effect on our verbal communication.

##### Example 9

Dong: I wasn’t myself at the beginning when I was trying to sell goods to viewers in front of the screen. I belittled myself. I thought that was meaningless. Because I used to be a teacher, an English teacher for 8 years. So I defined myself as someone who spreads the knowledge and what ambition, what mission they should make for their future. I’m not the person to yell in front of the screen. That wasn’t something a teacher should do.

Wang: You don’t take pride in what you had to do.

Dong Yuhui mentioned his transition from an English teacher to a promoter. The time dimension plays a key role here. He said he didn’t adapt to his new role because he had been an English teacher for the past eight years. This contrast in time reflects his redefinition of his identity and the process of adaptation. As time went on, he gradually accepted his new role and found a new sense of mission and value. This shift in time affects not only his state of mind, but also the way he interacts with the audience. In the last sentence, Dong Yuhui uses “a teacher” to refer to himself. It is a relatively euphemistic and indirect way of expression. In a more subtle way, Dong Yuhui expressed his discomfort and disagreement with the behavior of shouting and selling goods in front of the screen. He indirectly expresses his inner feelings by means of the code of conduct represented by the identity of teachers, which not only conveys his own views, but also avoids the

rigidity that may be brought about by too direct expression. He uses pragmatic empathy strategy to make the expression more appropriate and artistic, and make the audience more likely to accept his point of view.

## 4 Conclusion

In actual conversation, in order to achieve the expected pragmatic effect, the speaker does not always follow the principle of “Egocentricity” of personal deixis. The speaker will change his previous speech habits and transfer the deictic center to the hearer or other participants, so as to achieve emotional transfer. The listener’s understanding of personal deixis is also highly context-dependent, because the same personal deixis has different pragmatic functions in different contexts.

Based on an interview, this paper analyzes how Dong Yuhui expresses different emotions and achieves different interpersonal pragmatic purposes within the theoretical framework of personal deixis and pragmatic empathy. The results show that there is a pragmatic empathy of person deixis in the interview. The reasons for this phenomenon are various. This paper discusses the reasons from the perspective of adaptation theory.

Because our verbal communication is in the context of social network, this context includes the physical world, the mental world and the social world from the perspective of adaptation theory. In the process of adaptation, the speaker should adjust his language structure and communication strategy according to the change of context.

The theoretical significance of this study is as follows. Firstly, this study enriches the research content of deixis. It probes into the unconventional use of person deixis in TV interview, especially deictic projection. In addition, the study has also made progress in the theory of pragmatic empathy. It discusses in detail the embodiment and function of pragmatic empathy in the choice of person deixis by analyzing the data of TV interviews. This paper provides a new empirical basis for the pragmatic empathy theory and helps us to deepen our understanding of the mechanism of pragmatic empathy.

This study also has some practical significance. This study is conducive to enhancing language users’ awareness of pragmatic strategies. Language users can use personal deixis more flexibly and appropriately to improve their communicative competence.

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