

# Analysis of Conflict Talks in Zootopia from the Perspective of Adaptation Theory

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**Abstract:** Conflict talk is a common and complex linguistic phenomenon existing in life, mainly referring to verbal interaction events such as disputes, dissent, and refutation between the two parties in the conversation. This paper is based on Verschueren's adaptation theory, combined with the representative conflict cases in the movie Zootopia, and the multi-angle analysis of the expression of dialogue conflicts. And it tries to find the specific causes of conflict talks, in order to provide methods to solve or alleviate the discourse conflicts in life.

**Keywords:** Adaptation theory; Conflict talk; Zootopia

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## 1 Introduction

Zootopia is a popular film published by Disney. This film tells the story of Judy, a rabbit, who realizes her childhood dream of becoming an animal policeman through her own efforts in an animal city where all animals coexist peacefully. It's very thought-provoking.

Linguistic adaptation theory was put forward by Belgian pragmatist Verschueren, who believed that the process of using language is a process of continuous language selection. According to his pragmatic overview, adaptation theory is about the use of human language from cognitive, social, and cultural perspectives, which is also a different characteristic of adaptation theory from previous pragmatic theories. The reason why language users

can make the correct language choice in the process of language is that they conform to the target environment of language communication, that is, they conform to the negotiability, variability and adaptability of the language itself. Among them, the adaptability enables humans to make a deliberative choice from various possible options to meet the basic needs of human communication. The generation of conflict talks is to some extent one language choice of adaptability.

This paper mainly analyzes the manifestation of conflicts talks in the movie Zootopia in conjunction with context adaptation from the perspective of psychological world, physical world and social world. And the paper tries to find the specific or internal causes of conflict talks and provides a method for resolving or alleviating the conflict talks in life.

## 2 Theoretical Framework

Linguistic Adaptation Theory is a pragmatic theory founded in the 1980s by the famous Belgian linguist Verschueren in the 1980s. Adaptation Theory mainly includes the choice of language forms and strategies in verbal communication, that is to say, Adaptation Theory is mainly the output of discourse, also involves discourse comprehension in language communication, especially the cognitive inference of pragmatic information.

Adaptation was originally a concept in biological evolutionism, it was introduced as a perspective into pragmatics, then Adaptation Theory emerged. From the point of view of adaptation, language use is seen as the process of continuous choice between the speaker and the receiver. Choices take place both at the language structure level and the strategic

level. The process of selection is a dynamic process in which both context and language choice are in adaptation with each other. In this process, the language users' awareness of the communication process is highlighted through language selection.

Verschueren's Adaptation Theory takes an overall view as the guide, comprehensively expounds various phenomena of the use of language, deeply explores the psychological mechanism, process of language communication and the role of society and culture, reveals the essence of language use.

Verschueren believes that language adaptability has four main research perspectives: (1) Contextual correlates of adaptability. Contextual correlates of adaptability has a broader meaning and refers to any relevant factors in the environment of the language and text, including the context, the background of the text, the social dimension, and the mental level. (2) Structural objects of adaptability. Contextual correlates of adaptability and structural objects of adaptability jointly define the scope of adaptation. (3) Dynamic adaptability. Dynamic adaptability depends on the randomness and uncertainty of discourse, and it is the result of the cooperative principle and the choice of communication strategies. (4) The degree of awareness of the adaptation process. The degree of awareness of the adaptation process is embodied as psychological motivation, which involves many psychological factors in the adaptation process.

So far, adaptation theory has been widely applied in many fields such as linguistics, pragmatics, and translation are used, and related scholars have conducted a lot of research on this.

### 3 Analysis of Conflict Talks in Zootopia

The movie "Zootopia" brings us a visual feast with its wild imagination. In this animal city gala, we can see not only funny plots full of joy, but also more deeply the irony of the phenomenon of discrimination and prejudice in society and the seemingly harmonious but real contradictions and conflicts among all classes, which is undoubtedly a real society mapping. This paper analyzes the reasons for the conflicting discourses of the characters in the film from multiple perspectives in accordance with the contextual adaptation in adaptation theory.

#### 3.1 Declarative discourse conflict

The declarative discourse conflict in the film refers to

the discourse strategy that the listener disagrees with the speaker's statement about something, and states the different situations he thinks, aiming to express what he knows, which leads to the conflict of speech. (Shen Danxia, Wu Geqi 2015) This paper selects part of the dialogue in the movie for analysis.

Tiger: I don't have to be a lonely hunter anymore. Today, I can hunt for tax exemptions. I am gonna be an actuary!

Judy: And I can make the world a better place. ...I am going to be ...a police officer!

Gideon: Bunny cap? That is the most stupidest thing I ever heard.

Judy: It may seem impossible to small minds...I'm looking at you, Gideon Grey. But, just 211 miles away...stands the great city of Zootopia! Where our ancestors first joined together in peace...and declared that anyone can be anything!

Judy, a rabbit, performed in a drama held in her hometown. She said she wanted to become a rabbit policeman. At this time, Gideon, the fox, mocked her under the stage, and said that rabbits as a policeman is the most stupid and ridiculous thing in the world. Judy expressed anger and disapproval of Gideon's ridicule and sarcasm. She mocked him for being short-sighted and declared that all animals live in peace and anyone can achieve unlimited possibilities. Gideon's mocking of Judy is not unreasonable. He just conformed to his inner thoughts. From ancient times to the present, rabbits are timid and afraid. The only thing they can do is to grow carrots, so he mocks Judy. Judy was stimulated by Gideon's words and responded to Gideon through "small minds" and "I'm looking at you" to vent her inner anger. At the same time, she explained to everyone that being a police officer in Zootopia is quite remarkable.

It can be seen from this dialogue that the reason for the conflict between the two parties is to adapt to their own inner thoughts. Both sides are very strong in personality, and each express their own unwillingness to give in, so they use conflicting discourse to express negative emotions and express their opposition to each other. Dissatisfaction caused emotional opposition. This conflicting discourse conforms to the psychological world of the two sides, showing that there is a fundamental difference in the views of the two sides. Gideon is more inclined to the old concept, thinking that the rabbit cannot be a policeman, and Judy is a representative of the new

concept, determined to become People who are at the forefront of the new world. Both parties' adaptation to their respective psychological worlds is the direct cause of the conflict in discourse, and this adaptation actually reveals that the root cause is the conflict between the old and the new ideas. In the real world, we find that the conflicts caused by this new and old ideas are widespread. Reflecting the conflict in the discourse through the adaptation of the psychological world is one of the manifestations of the conflict between old and new ideas.

### 3.2 Euphemistic discourse conflict

Euphemistic discourse conflict refers to the speech strategy that the listener disagrees with the speaker's statement about something and uses indirect language to state the different situations he thinks. The aim is to indirectly express his views, thus triggering speech conflict. In fact, euphemism is the result of people choosing languages according to a certain context. In essence, euphemism is also a language selection strategy that adapts to the context. Therefore, euphemistic discourse conflict is also a product of language adaptation. Its main purpose is to alleviate the degree of conflict, but it cannot be avoided.

Chief Bogo: Abandoning your post. Inciting a scurry. Reckless endangerment of rodents...You did stop a master criminal from stealing two dozen moldy onions.

Judy: Hate to disagree with you, sir, but those aren't onions.

They're a class C botanical, sir. Well, I grew up in a family where plant husbandry was kind of a thing...

Chief Bogo: Shut your tiny mouth now!

Judy: Sir, I got the bad guy. That's my job.

Chief Bogo: Your job is putting tickets on parked car!

In the film, Judy is assigned to be a traffic policeman, who is responsible for paying the tickets every day. On the second day of taking office, her boss Bogo blames her for leaving her post without permission to track the thief who stole two bags of moldy onions, causing public panic and endangering carious animals. When facing her boss, Judy is afraid to have a positive conflict with her. She can only express her disagreement with her boss through euphemism and indirect words, or try to reduce the verbal conflict through continuous explanation. As Fraser said, "in order to solve the contradiction

between our own context demand and the other 's face demand, we attach some explanation to the conversation response to explain the reason or state the reason." (He Ziran, 2011) For example, "hate" in "hate to disagree with you" is obviously to respect the boss and ease the atmosphere. And the following sentence "they're a class C bilateral, sir. Well, I grow up in a family where plant husbandry was kind of a thing..." is an obvious increase of explanation. On the one hand, it is to maintain the face of the boss, convey the words in a flattering tone, on the other hand, it is to explain for yourself that it is reasonable to catch thieves. This kind of seemingly euphemism is actually to achieve the appropriate refutation effect in language. This kind of euphemistic discourse conflict reflects the adaptation of Judy 's psychological world and social world. On the one hand, I think it's not wrong to arrest thieves psychologically, but I can't form opposition with my boss emotionally, showing anger, dissatisfaction and other emotions. We can only express our opinions through euphemism in social communication and maintain the face of our superiors. This kind of language adaptation or choice with unequal status under the constraints of social factors is more likely to reflect that the high position side will implement impolite or conflicting language, and the low position will selectively conduct conversation according to the language environment. This kind of euphemism discourse conflict is the result of adaptation to the context, so the linguistic adaptation and choice can sometimes reflect a person's social status, which is the root cause of discourse conflict.

### 3.3 Interrogative discourse conflict

The interrogative discourse conflict in the film is caused by the speaker or the listener's intentional or unintentional initiation of interrogation. In this kind of discourse, the listener disagrees or is dissatisfied with the speaker's verbal behavior of asking and repelling questions, thus causing conflict.

Judy: Wait, sir. I'm not the only one who saw him. Nick!

Chief Bogo: You think I'm gonna believe a fox?

Judy: Well, he was a key witness, and I...

Chief Bogo: Two days to find the otter...or you quit. That was the deal. Badge.

Judy: Bur, sir, we...

Chief Bogo: Badge!

Nick: Uh, no.

Chief Bogo: What did you say, fox?

Nick: Sorry. What I said was, "no". She will not be giving you that badge.

In the movie, Judy discovered that the disappearance of the otter was related to the mad leopard. She and Nick spent the effort to escape from the leopard, and handcuffed the leopard to the bridge to let Chief Bogo come to arrest. And found that there was no mad leopard at all. Judy explained to Chief Bogo that Nick was also a witness, and Chief Bogo scornfully asked her if she wanted him to believe a fox? Judy is helpless but still defends Nick and herself. Chief Bogo was angry and warned Judy again with words, asking her to hand over the badge, but Nick refused for Judy. Chief Bogo could not believe that a fox dared to refute him. From Chief Bogo's perspective, as an officer, he used his power to create verbal conflicts with exaggerated and biased inquiry. In the process, he raised his tone, with his left hand on his hips and his right hand pointing at Judy as a warning, to increase the level of conflict, so that the fox Nick can't stand it and wants to help Judy speak. At this time, the verbal conflict is transferred from Judy and Chief Bogo to Nick and Chief Bogo. Nick is not a subordinate of Chief Bogo, and he doesn't care about maintaining the interpersonal relationship with Chief Bogo. Therefore, in response to Chief Bogo's enquiries, the gesture of shaking hands and shaking his head will stimulate Chief Bogo.

In this part, interrogative discourse conflict not only shows the adaptation of the speaker and listener's psychological world and communicative world, but also reflects the adaptation of the physical world. Chief Bogo, relying on his own police officer rights, when asking his subordinates, whether in terms of voice, tone, emotion, or physical movement, shows that he conforms to the superior social status, and at the same time, he integrates his body posture, expression, and tone into communication, the conflict is further escalated. Combining the content of the film, from the perspective of adaptation theory, the fundamental reason for the discourse conflict is the discrimination between different types of people. Chief Bogo didn't believe what he said because he discriminated that Nick was a fox, so he asked Judy "You think I'm gonna believe a fox?" because he didn't believe the rabbit could solve the case and asked Judy to hand over his badge. All psychological,

communicative, and physical compliance of Chief Bogo stems from the distrust and discrimination of their respective abilities and characteristics from the bottom of their hearts. This article believes that this is the essence of the language conflict reflected in the adaptation theory.

## 4 Conclusion

This paper analyzes the movie *Zootopia* from a multi-angle by combining adaptation theory and finds that the adaptation of the psychological world, social world and physical world can not only create conflict talks, but also alleviate conflicts. On the one hand, Gideon and Judy adapt to the psychological world and produce verbal and emotional conflicts and conflicts; on the other hand, Judy adapts to the communicative context and uses euphemism to try to alleviate the conflict, which all reflect the impact of adaptation on conflicting discourse. In fact, adaptation theory plays an irreplaceable role in guiding conflictive discourse analysis. It can help us discover the root causes of conflicts, such as the three fundamental causes mentioned above: conflicts between old and new ideas, unequal social status as well as discrimination between different types of people, it is these fundamental reasons that have caused speech conflicts in movies. In the real life mapped in the movie, people often also have conflicts of words because of these reasons. This is what this article is trying to find. In addition, this article divides the character discourse conflicts in the movie plot into three categories, but in real life there are far more than these categories. The paper hopes to provide readers with ideas for analyzing speech conflict behaviors.

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