



Metapragmatic Analysis of Audience-Oriented Metadiscourse by International News Program Hosts

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Abstract. Audience-oriented metadiscourse demonstrates the speaker's self-reflexive awareness to the audience's existence, ideas, and attitudes during the communication process, yet there is a scarcity of literature to carry out detailed studies based on corpus. From the perspective of metapragmatics, with the international news program *Leaders Talk* as the corpus, the study explores the categories of audience-oriented metadiscourse used by hosts, which aims to reveal the metapragmatic awareness embodied in the audience-oriented metadiscourse. The study has found that hosts often use expressions containing the personal pronoun "you" and the audience "we" to highlight the audience existence and choose rhetorical questions to predict audience expectations and trigger audiences to think. The research findings provide certain enlightenment for related metadiscourse researches and for the enhancement of international discourse construction practices.

Keywords: audience-oriented metadiscourse; metapragmatic awareness; corpus

1 Introduction

Leaders Talk is an interview program launched by China Media Group (CMG) in October 2022, in which the host asks questions to different interviewees about national development concepts from the View as an Outsider. In terms of linguistics, interviews maintain a relatively fixed domain with stable themes, syntax and structure and the means and contents of hosts to interact with the leading figures largely reflect the Chinese narrative and cognitive style to the hot topic around the world.

However, most existing studies have analyzed the innovativeness of international communication discourse in *Leaders Talk* from the perspective of media communication, neglecting the management of audience-oriented metadiscourse by the hosts. Therefore, the paper analyses metalinguistic representations and metapragmatic awareness of the host in *Leaders Talk* to reveal how the host uses audience-oriented metadiscourse to focus on audience presence, to guide them understanding his com-

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municative intentions and finally achieves his goal of shaping a better Chinese Image as well as consolidating international consensus.

2 Research Status of Metadiscourse

Metadiscourse is a linguistic form to explain discourse, including all words that do not involve the topic content¹. Currently, researches on metadiscourse applications mainly adopt two models, which are Interactive Model proposed by Hyland and Reflexive Model proposed by Ädel. Hyland² shows that metadiscourse is characterized by its non-propositionality, interactivity, and references within the discourse, dividing it into textual interaction and interpersonal interaction categories. Ädel³ introduces the Reflexive Model, which emphasizes the directive and reflexive functions of metadiscourse towards the audience.

In the early stages, researchers tend to generalize all metadiscourse phenomena occurring within a discourse. Mauranen⁴ compares the metadiscourse used by Finnish scholars and native English-speaking American scholars in economic journal literature, finding that the latter have stronger audience-oriented awareness in guiding readers. Huang and Gong⁵ compare the metadiscourse used in 30 news reports and 30 news commentaries and find that interactive metadiscourse is more prevalent in news reports, whereas the usage of interactional metadiscourse is the opposite.

In recent years, researchers focus more on individual instances of metadiscourse. Ädel⁶ analyzes metadiscourse used in teacher feedback on student writing and thereby proposing relative modifications in the metadiscourse model. Chen⁷ suggests that the choice of metadiscourse reflects the speaker's metapragmatic awareness, whereupon proposes the metadiscourse classification. This paper builds on one category of Chen, the audience-oriented metadiscourse.

Audience-oriented metadiscourse, from the audience, is a discourse expression that reflects the metapragmatic awareness of speakers (authors) towards some qualities of audiences such as existence, perceptions, attitudes etc.⁷ Awareness and consideration of the audience are significant dimensions of metapragmatic awareness in verbal communication, as one distinguishing feature of human cognition is the ability to see things from the View as an Outsider⁸. Successful communication encompasses the process where the discourse intentions are recognized by the speaker and understood by the audience, which can be realized by the audience-oriented metadiscourse to be explored in this paper.

3 Corpus and Methodology

The study takes 36 English interviews from *Leaders Talk* between March 2023 and March 2024 as its corpus, which is extracted through the transcription of video material. The interviews cover various fields such as politics, technology, environmental protection, etc., with durations ranging from 20 to 30 minutes (totaling about 14 hours) and amounting to 31,590 tokens.

The study uses Sketch Engine as a supplementary tool for retrieval, manually identifying audience-oriented metadiscourse in specific contexts, and categorizes them according to the five categories of audience-oriented principles: the first category is expressions containing the personal pronoun “you” (hereafter referred to as “you” expressions), such as “You can imagine”; the second category is expressions containing the audience “we” (hereafter referred to as “we” expressions), such as “we all know”; the third category is generic references to the audience (hereafter referred to as generic references), such as “one”, “guys”; the fourth category is imperative expressions with an implied “you” subject (hereafter referred to as imperative expressions), such as “give me”, “tell us”; the fifth category is rhetorical questions, including rhetorical questions and interrogatives, such as “right?”.

According to this criterion, the paper first identifies and classifies the audience-oriented metadiscourses used by the hosts in the *Leaders Talk*, and then analyzes from a metapragmatic perspective how the hosts use them reflecting audience-oriented awareness to facilitate civilized communication and disseminate Chinese voice.

4 Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Representation Forms of Audience-Oriented Metadiscourse in *Leaders Talk*

The corpus search reveals a total of 1,347 instances of audience-oriented metadiscourse in 36 English interviews. Among them, “you” expressions are the most used, followed by “we” expressions, rhetorical questions, imperative expressions, and generic references, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. The Representation Form and Distribution of Audience-oriented Metadiscourse in the utterance of hosts in *Leaders Talk*.

Categories	Examples	Frequen- cy	Percent- age
“You” Expres- sions	as you mentioned; how do you think about; you know	936	69.49%
“We” Expres- sions	we believe; tell us a bit about that; for our communities	190	14.11%
Generic Refer- ences	one; people	5	0.37%
Imperative Ex- pressions	given that; tell us a bit about; welcome to; talk to us	38	2.82%
Rhetorical Ques- tions	Right? How is it?	178	13.21%
Total		1347	100%

According to the results in Table 1, “you” expressions total 936 times, accounting for 69.49% of all instances, indicating the highly interactive nature of the discourse in interview programs, which not only assist to adapt linguistic forms to contexts but

also provide the interviewees with some reflexive information related to the current speech activity.

“We” expressions and rhetorical questions are less frequently applied, appearing 190 times and 178 times. Most “we” expressions are used to establish a common stance between the host and the audience, which also contribute to maintain the positive face of audience. And the usage of a small number of rhetorical questions lowers the seriousness of international topics and creates a relaxed yet respectful communication atmosphere. The topic position and nature of *Leaders Talk* determine its formality, hence, imperative expressions and generic references are the least applied, only appearing 38 times and 5 times.

These forms of audience-oriented metadiscourse play a crucial role in the interview environment, where their in-depth analysis and application can enrich the levels and effectiveness of the dialogue. The following section will analyze how hosts use them to reflect different types of metapragmatic awareness in the context of the corpus.

4.2 Metapragmatic Awareness Embodied in the Audience-oriented Metadiscourse

The major objective of *Leaders Talk* is to lead audiences expressing their understanding of Chinese concepts and universal human values and the key to achieve which is that the audience could understand and respond to the questions asked. From the perspective of metapragmatic theory, with the combination of the representational forms of audience-oriented metadiscourse, the study divides the audience-oriented metadiscourse awareness into the following three aspects:

(1) Awareness in Managing the Audience's Understanding Process of the Host's Discourse

The process of the audience understanding the discourse of the host is central to the achievement of communicative objectives. For the audience, their comprehensions of information could suffer many restrictions, such as the dynamism of the interview, the academic depth of the content, etc. Therefore, audience-oriented metadiscourse could aid the host in effectively managing the audience information understanding process, specifically manifested in the following two sides.

First, its application could guide the information comprehension of the audience by previewing information to be delivered or summarizing information already received. (see Ex. 1 and Ex.2).

Ex. 1. Let's talk about the role of China and Africa, which is a hotly discussed issue over the years and decades. (*Leaders Talk*, September 1, 2023)

Through the choice of “we” expression “Let's talk about”, the host not only expresses the forthcoming discussion topic, namely the roles of China and Africa, but also establishes an implicit consensus and connection.

Ex. 2. Exactly, as you mentioned, the Chinese government has made great emphasis on the importance of basic scientific research. (*Leaders Talk*, December 29, 2023)

The introduction of the “you” expression “as you mentioned” reaffirms the interviewee's viewpoint, which also lays the groundwork for the topic that the host designs to explore next, effectively easing the abruptness of topic transitions. Furthermore, it

implies an affirmation to the audience's statements, helping to maintain a positive discussion atmosphere and motivating the audience to share more in-depth insights and experiences.

Second, its usage could enhance the acceptability and absorption of the audience to information. The cognitive load on the audience in processing information can be reduced by clear identification of information sources and appropriate explanation of messages (see Ex. 3).

Ex. 3. You earlier said that you don't support efforts to try to split China. (*Leaders Talk*, August 11, 2023)

The above analyses find that the hosts, based on presuppositions about the audience capacity for cognitive information processing, consciously select the forms of audience-oriented metadiscourse to construct cognitive reference frameworks, which enable the audience to apply their existing knowledge base while understanding the dialogue and subsequently link new information and experiences.

(2) Awareness in Guiding the Audience to Comprehend the Host's Pragmatic Intentions

The transmission of intent and the recognition or inference of the audience for discourse intent play a crucial role in the complex communicative process. In interviews, hosts apply the first person to enact specific speech acts, thereby signaling the cognitive awareness of the audience to their pragmatic actions. (see Ex. 4 - Ex. 6).

Ex. 4. I hear from your colleagues that you are working tirelessly every day, and keep a very active and exercise routine. (*Leaders Talk*, January 19, 2024)

Ex. 5. And I can tell you, Mr. President, the learning of the Spanish language is very popular. (*Leaders Talk*, November 24, 2023)

Ex. 6. Doctor Te Xiaomei. We want to show you something. I don't know whether you still remember this. (*Leaders Talk*, December 15, 2023)

The host uses "you" expressions "I hear from your colleagues that" (as in Ex. 4) to explain to the audience the source of his relevant knowledge, which is conducive to the audience understanding of the host's pragmatic intention with minimal effort.

Furthermore, in the process of using these performative verbs to express intentions, to avoid threats to the face of the audience, the host might use linguistic hedges like "I can tell you" (as in Ex. 6) or verbs expressing desires like "want to" (as in Ex. 7). The choice of such linguistic hedges skillfully balances the paradox of the directness of information transmission and the emotional receptiveness of the audience, helping to mitigate possible face-threatening acts, which also could increase their receptiveness to the information.

By the usage of these intentional action verbs and the choice of linguistic hedges, the host could interact with the audience in a clear and efficient manner during the interview, thereby effectively managing dialogue intentions and speech acts.

(3) Awareness in Activating Audience Background Knowledge and Co-constructing Common Knowledge

In the interview process, the role of the host extends beyond being a provider of information to being a facilitator of knowledge construction. By thoroughly understanding the cognitive state of the audience, the host can tailor the interview content to

stimulate the background knowledge of the audience and encourage their active participation in the thought process. (see Ex. 8).

Ex. 7. I remember you talked with many kids in primary school and you asked them, what do you want to be? (*Leaders Talk*, September 22, 2023)

Furthermore, the application of “you” expressions like “you know” indicates to the audience that they share common background knowledge and viewpoints, being in the same subject position so as to establish their knowledge community (see Ex. 9).

Ex. 8. And as a matter of fact, as the chief of UNEP, you have repeatedly emphasized the need for multilateralism in tackling, you know, the natural crisis and also climate change. (*Leaders Talk*, September 15, 2023)

From the analyses above, it is evident that the choice of audience-oriented metadiscourse facilitates effective information transfer as well as promotes the co-construction of knowledge through cognitive interaction between the host and audience, which play a crucial role for the audience to enhance cognitive abilities, deepen understanding, and foster contemplation.

5 Conclusions

Audience-oriented metadiscourse is a particular discourse choice used by the speaker (author) to signal metapragmatic awareness of the audience, through the description and analysis of which, the research explores its metalinguistic representations and the metapragmatic awareness it reflects in *Leaders Talk*.

It has been shown in this study that hosts in *Leaders Talk* frequently use “you” expressions to highlight the presence of the audience. Considering the cognitive level and knowledge reserves of the audience, the host demonstrates directionality and sensitivity towards them, who also ushers their cognitive information understandings and satisfies their emotional needs, inviting the audience to participate in knowledge construction, in order to the full realization of the audience's subjectivity.

The findings facilitate the audience's better comprehension of the host's communicative intentions, which also enhances the interactivity and dialogism of information transfer, providing a new visual angle for enhancing the metapragmatic capabilities of the language user. Furthermore, this research underscores the crucial role of media communication in shaping national identity, demonstrating how media can utilize metadiscourse strategies to convey specific values and cultural concepts. However, the study scope is relatively small. Future researches could consider constructing a larger corpus to facilitate a more in-depth and systematic analysis.

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