A Performative Perspective of Flouting and Politeness in Political Interview*

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This paper examines in the perspective of performance how politicians in political interviews rely on linguistic strategies to grapple with the conflict between being un-cooperative and being polite. Three pairs of question-answer regarding North Korea nuclear crisis between the spokesman for China's Foreign Ministry and the reporters were illustrated. As the illustration shows, the spokesman did not simply answer the questions as commonly anticipated, but rather flout frequently and draw on the information already raised by the reporters. It argues that to better understand how opinions and attitudes are expressed by politicians in reply, it is essential to study carefully their verbal acts as performance for particular interpretation.

Key words: *cooperative principle, flouting, nuclear crisis, performance, politeness, political interview*

1. Introduction

In talk exchanges, the relationship of politeness to cooperation, and vice versa, is entwined with one another (Brown & Levinson 1987; Grice 1989). However, as Bavelas *et al.* (1990) explicate, politicians in political interviews habitually equivocate and their utterance by nature is always 'ambiguous', 'vague', 'wishy-washy', 'indirect', and 'obscure'. The equivocal attribute of utterance by politicians naturally raises a question of how politicians deal successfully with the conflict between being un-cooperative and being polite in the language game of political interviews. A rich and varied body of literature has investigated interactional features of political interviews from a range of perspectives of, for instance, pragmatics (Wilson 1990), discourse analysis (Blum-Kulka 1997, Chilton & Schaffner 1997), conversation analysis (Heritage & Greatbatch 1991, Clayman & Heritage 2002), communication and cognition (Chilton 1987, 2004), and social psychology (Bavelas et al. 1990, Bull 1998, Hamilton & Mineo 1998). These studies, though, focus almost exclusively on the cooperative dimension, overlooking or ignoring that of politeness. On the other hand, scholars like Bavelas *et al.* (1990), Bull *et al.* (1996) and Chilton (1987) usually provide an underlying rationale for politicians' equivocation in interview by drawing upon the concept of face in politeness theory (Brown & Levinson 1987). Nevertheless, in addition to keeping different faces of those involved, the gap is equally evident of giving an adequate answer to the question of how politicians tackle strategically the incongruity of being un-cooperative with being polite.

This paper attempts to fill these gaps by examining empirically how politicians relying on linguistic strategies grapple with the dilemma of being un-cooperative and being polite, and how they save and enhance the face of the party or country they represent while avoiding bringing face-threatening acts (FTAs) (Brown & Levinson 1987) to the interviewer and the third-party concerned. To this end, the paper proposes to look into the flouting of conversational Maxims and politeness by politicians at discoursal level within the theoretical and analytical framework of performance. Performance is here meant to understand uttering as a special mode of situated communicative practice. The theory of performance is believed

analytic powerful for a comprehensive interpretation of the flouting by politicians and their way of handling politeness phenomena in interview. The findings show that the purpose of violating certain conversational Maxims is not merely to generate an implicature as Grice (1989) claimed, but rather, as a linguistic strategy, to serve particular goals or purposes by individual politicians of, such as establishing politicians as the agent, saving and enhancing their positive image and that of party or country that they represent, highlighting attention for the audience, and constituting a particular interpretive frame. It is concluded that strategic practices of flouting and politeness provide good means and opportunities for politicians to distinguish their identification, maintain a positive image for their country, and transform an interpretative frame.

The paper is organized as follows. In Section 2, the argumentation is developed to explain why the Cooperative Principle (CP) and the concept of face are not adequate for analyzing the flouting by politicians in political interviews as one particular activity type. Section 3 introduces the theory of performance. It is suggested that a focus on the performance of verbal practice promises a more comprehensive account of the flouting and politeness phenomena by politicians. After that, the background of the political interview as the data on North Korea nuclear crisis becomes the main concern of Section 4. Section 5 moves forward to a detailed data analysis within the proposed theoretical framework of performance, bringing into light the analytic power of this perspective for expounding flouting and politeness phenomena in political interviews. Finally, a number of conclusions are drawn in Section 6.

2. Political Interviews as Activity Type

In his discussion of the CP and Maxims, Grice (1989: 29) claims that 'people do behave in these ways' and 'most do in fact follow' in communication. This construal of a social basis for the CP to apply appeals to the intuition that political interviews are idealized as the one free of influence or interference by any internal factors, for instance, communicative competence of the interviewer or the interviewee, as well as external ones, such as topic, occasion, and time. Political interviews as a particular social interaction, however, are neither "the totally prepackaged activity" nor "the largely unscripted event" (Levinson 1992: 69). Levinson (1983: 279) critiques speech act theory, particularly as developed by Searle (1969), and suggests that what counts as a speech act of a particular type fundamentally depends on the activity type (Levinson 1992) that the act is embedded within. This suggestion seems also applicable to our discussion of the flouting and politeness phenomena in political interviews.

Political interviews as an activity type have its own distinctive features, of which one is the stereotype of politicians' vagueness and evasiveness in expression without reference to communicative situations (e.g., Harris 1991; Bavelas *et al.* 1990). For Bavelas and his associations, the motivation to equivocate can be explained by 'avoidance-avoidance' communicative conflict situations in which politicians find them being caught between two or more incompatible aspects of the situation, but where a reply is still nevertheless expected. More specifically, equivocation happens most frequently in situations when the information necessary to answer the question is unavailable, or the information is available but cannot be provided under current circumstances, or to do so would be somehow inappropriate under the circumstances (Chilton & Schaffner 1997: 212, Clayman & Heritage 2002: 264-269).

Inferably, utterances by politicians in interviews are more complex and unstable than as expected as usual.

Practices of equivocation by politicians, though, still operate within the constraints that govern communication in general. A lack of adherence to the norms may give rise to the likelihood that the politician is intentionally exploiting some maxims to generate an implicature (Blum-Kulka & Weizman 2003: 112). This aspect of verbal features in political interviews bears an intriguing resemblance to Grice's Maxims of conversation and implicature in that the generation of an implicature can only be achieved through the flouting of certain Maxims. Unless otherwise indicated, both the interviewer and the interviewee work with the assumption that the lack of adherence to the norms is intentional (Grice 1989: 31).

It needs to be underscored, however, that the flouting of Maxims through equivocation by politicians sets its intimate connection to their power in interview. Yet, while acknowledging the social basis of the CP, Grice (1989) oddly rejects social equality as a precondition for cooperation. According to Fairclough (1989), for the CP to apply in the way Grice defined it, communicators must be socially treated as equals. Specifically, what is even more important for the present purpose is that politicians and interviewers must have equal control over what counts as 'truthful', 'relevant', 'adequate', and 'sufficient' (in Grice's words) information for interactional purposes. Thus, the indeterminacy and complication of politicians' utterance can be further grounded in terms of power of politicians in transgressing and re-evaluating for their own purposes the very existence of hegemonic norms in their active production of meaning. Furthermore, the goals of the interviewer and the interviewee in political interviews are commonly incompatible. While the interviewer generally seeks from a politician as much information as possible, the politician often takes this opportunity to promote public image of his party or country and, simultaneously, calumniate his political opponents or related parties. For this reason, although interviewers are universally perceived as possessing considerable control over the agenda of an interview (Heritage & Greatbatch 1991), politicians with their authority often exert some control over it by means of shifting agenda shift, topic selection, relation positioning, assumption, and so on. In a word, the agency of politicians in producing the flexible and creative responses to interviewers must be highly valued in discussing the flouting by politicians in interviews.

The power factor is also incorporated as one of specific components weighing a FTA which is often dependent on individuals' volition in context. As face is a want that every individual has, in political interviews the face factor is frequently both exploited and challenged by politicians (Chilton 1990: 204). Here must be pointed out, however, that political interviews may appear to be taking place between just two participants, whilst they are presumed as a talk designed also for an overhearing audience potentially of millions (Heritage 1985). For Bull *et al.* (1996; cf. Tracy 1990), politicians must defend three superordinate categories of face – their own personal face, the face of the party which they represent, and the face in relation to supporting significant others. Plainly, a prime objective of politicians is to present the best possible face both for themselves and for the party or country they represent, while also seeking to enhance their face at the expense of their political opponents' face. Nevertheless, the individual face of a politician during political interviews is not as usually thought of as important as that of the state he or she represents. This is the truth especially when politicians are asked to give the attitude of their state towards world-concerned issues. The complexity of world-concerned issues themselves and the complex relations among countries involved contribute to the complication of politeness phenomena in political interviews. There is the consensus that failure to make a direct and

explicit reply to the world results in a loss of face of the country for which the politician stands rather than that of the politician's individual face. When facing such cases, politicians commonly equivocate when a direct and explicit reply becomes impossible. Conversely, the individual face of interviewers is much more important. The main reason for this is that although interviewers are supposed to be neutral for the topic being touched, their opinion and attitude actually stand for those of certain opinion community. Thus, if the individual face of interviewers were offended, the face of the whole opinion community would be damaged to some extent.

The complication of politeness phenomena in political interviews regarding international issues leads us to the simple corollary that acts of face-threatening and face-saving or –enhancing by politicians need to be understood on the basis of the context of politicians' utterances rather than their illocutionary force (Kallia 2004: 147). It means that in order to examine how politicians equivocate in reply, we need to concern ourselves with the flouting and politeness phenomena at discoursal level which stresses the importance of viewing the concerned issue as a whole, rather than separate utterances, towards the regulation of politeness (Usami 2001). This proposal to interpret the conflict between being un-cooperative and being polite at discoursal level, coupled with the agency of politicians in interviews, naturally raises the requirement for a dynamic, powerful analytic approach to investigating the verbal strategies by politicians to grapple with the incompatibility of being un-cooperation with being polite.

3. The Theory of Performance

Theorists have long asserted that we must attend to how and what institutional language does as much as to what it says. With specific regard to the flouting of Maxims by politicians in question, one approach that holds promise of an alternative perspective on it is the theory of performance. I have to make explicit at the onset that the notion of performance adopted here deals, instead of with Chomsky's 'use of the linguistic system' or Austin's 'doing of things with words', but with that largely comes from linguistic anthropology where special attention is given to the ways in which communicative acts are executed. As will be illustrated in Section 5, examining linguistic practices of politicians with the theory of performance reveals thoroughly how they grapple with the conflict between being un-cooperative and being polite.

Specifically, one distinctive feature of this notion of performance is its emphasis that not only do verbal acts 'conform(ing) to the conventions that govern their success', but also 'constitute it' (Hall 2001: 181). While underlining the conventions to which communicators have to adhere, this notion of performance at the same time acknowledges clearly the emergent creativity (Palmer & Jankowiak 1996) and improvisation (Sawyer 2001) in any communication. Thus conceived, 'performance becomes *constitutive* of the domain of verbal art' (Bauman 2001: 169, italics original). In this sense, the status of an utterance itself as act must not be confused with the act that is likely to result from it, or with the interpretation that is drawn from it by a listener. This realization is fundamental for the analysis of the act of flouting by politicians since what it counts is not its perlocutionary effect, nor its felicity, but the way performance occurs in the actualization of the linguistic system and the creation of subjectivity in the language use. On such an account, the flouting of itself is no longer the most important variable in determining the contribution to generating an implicature, but rather the use to which it is repeatedly put. For an investigation into the incongruity of being

un-cooperative with being polite, the advantage of this notion of performance lies in its capability to ground our claims in more concrete, contextualized accounts of verbal communication.

The potential creativity and improvisation of verbal communication occurring in social interactions entail that performance is highly deliberate and self-aware. Thus, to subscribe to this notion of performance also means that we need to take performance as a type of social display that is opened up to interpretive scrutiny and evaluation by an audience (Bauman & Briggs 1992: 73; Bauman 2001: 169). But Bauman simultaneously makes the note that success of performance is largely dependent upon the accountability to an audience for the way in which communication is carried out, above and beyond its referential content. The point to be emphasized here is that the notion of performance gives licence to us to examine the act of flouting by politicians in interviews at discoursal level.

In line with a focus on creativity and improvisation, this notion of performance has the following implication that performance potentially challenges or subverts dominant ideologies. This insight is useful in helping us highlight the central role of agency and individual action of politicians in interviews. The ideological associations of performance are significant for explaining several things about the relations between violations of Maxims and being polite. Bauman (2001: 171) provides a list of verbal devices for a diversity of performance, but the processes of decontextualization and recontextualization in texts are equally crucial in the force of performance (Bauman & Briggs 1992). One reason for this is that such verbal acts are intimately connected to the exercise and assumption of power, given the factors of the variable degrees of access to texts, legitimacy in claims to and use of texts, competence in the uses of texts, and values attaching to various types of texts. The arguments so far make explicit the point of the accountability of the theory of performance for the exercise and construction of power by politicians in interviews by examining in details their verbal communication. The perspective of performance is therefore a productive line of inquiry to which we need to subscribe for the present purpose.

4. Data

The data for the illustration of flouting and politeness phenomena was composed of three question-answer pairs derived from a political interview on the North Korea nuclear crisis taking place between the spokesman for China's Foreign Ministry and news reporters. As usual, after the spokesman made some brief announcements on the current domestic and international affairs, around ten minutes was left for the journalists and reporters in the presence to ask questions freely. This interview occurred at the end of the press release of China's Foreign Ministry on 22 October, 2002. At that time, the North Korean delegation was visiting in China. It was also the time after North Korea had just suddenly declared to the world that it had a secret nuclear weapons development program, and when there was hearsay of Pakistan's assistance in this nuclear program, which was well known among the opinion community of the United States, South Korea, and Japan.

The North Korea nuclear crisis was referred to the one started in early twenty-first century when North Korea suddenly announced to the world its decision to withdraw from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and recommence nuclear program. The declaration posed great threat to its traditional enemies South Korea, Japan and the Unites States. Scenarios for the resolution of the crisis generally lay in two diametrically opposed categories

of sanctions and engagement. However, the United States had had limited success in the application of either approach in dealing with North Korea. Alternative options included a greater role of China, given it has vital strategic interests at stake, or the use of multilateral negotiations, perhaps including Russia, Japan, and South Korea, to resolve the crisis. But both options had been rejected by North Korea, which sought a bilateral resolution of the crisis with the United States.

One feature of the data set is the range of countries this world-concerned issue involves. The interview in this regard was in most part a mediated conversation between governments and governments. The principled position of China on this issue, that is, the denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula, was often reiterated to the world. But because of the long-term good relationship of China to North Korea, the concerned parties and the world were more interested in and sensitive to China's would-be measures especially taken for the issue. When interviewed on the crisis, the spokesman was certainly faced with a large number of challenges in light of the sensitivity of questions and the anticipated consideration for the face of at least four different parties – the interviewer, China, North Korea, and the opinion community.

5. Data Analysis

This section is to investigate how the spokesman, when making a reply, violated certain Maxims for specific purposes besides the reasons of generating some implicature and politeness considerations. It also illustrates how the spokesman achieved a balance in replying between China's positive and negative faces in terms of face-threatening acts posed by three different interviewers, and simultaneously mitigated face-threatening acts to the interviewer and concerned parties. The three question-answer pairs were dealt with in their original sequence, and given the intimate connection of being cooperative to being polite, they were not individualized in the very analysis, but, rather, sometimes combined when necessary. In essence, a performance framework is argued to provide a useful insight into a pragmatic account of violation of the CP and politeness phenomena in political interviews.

The first question in Extract 1 was raised by a Western journalist. It is asked directly of whether China was aware of the Pakistan's assistance in North Korea's nuclear program. From the very beginning, the interviewer plainly tried to get the spokesman either confirm or deny the awareness of China on Pakistan's assistance through the yes/no question (Q1). The question was tactful in the presupposition of the hearsay, implicitly face-threatening to both North Korea and Pakistan. This question is surely a challenge to the spokesman, since whichever the reply might be it would indicate an acknowledgement of the presupposition, potentially threatening the negative face of North Korea and Pakistan.

Extract 1: (**IR1:** the first interviewer; **IE:** the spokesman; **Q:** Question)

IR1: Regarding the North Korean nuclear issue, (Q1) is China aware of Pakistan's help in North Korea's nuclear development program?

IE: I am not aware of what you have said. But I have noticed that the Pakistani denied this.

Perhaps more importantly, the truth of the hearsay itself was not necessarily the case capable of being demonstrated by substantial evidence either in the presence or in the future. If so, a simple YES or NO reply may also pose a potential threat to China's positive face and hamper China's future freedom of action. Meanwhile, even if it were to be proved as the spokesman claimed, the most possible inference would be that China indeed has possessed some evidence of its own. This evidence having not yet thus far been exposed to the world would surely evoke for the world a negative image of China. Confronted with such a situation, the spokesman had an obligation to protect China's face against even the possibility of threat (Goffman 1967).

In addition, because of the traditionally close relationship of North Korea to China, it was presumably most likely for the audience to assume that China on this special occasion must have been informed by North Korea of the fact. This question was undeniably raised on the basis of both this assumption and the presupposition of Pakistan's assistance. Therefore, to make a YES reply would potentially threaten the negative face of both China and North Korea inasmuch as it implicitly acknowledges this particular intimacy. So would to deny, just due to a corresponding inference that their relationship was being, or had been, changed. Besides, a negative reply would probably make the audience deduce that China was insensitive to the hearsay. This equally brings China negative image, for this fairly contradicts China's long-term stand of denuclearization on the Korean Peninsular.

Despite this, the spokesman was still expected to be able to give a reply since his failure might result in a loss of China's face. The reply, however, did not provide any information pertinent to the question anticipating a definite confirmation or denial with some further elaboration. Specifically, the question was 'is China aware of Pakistan's help in North Korea's nuclear development program?', but the utterance 'I am not aware of what you have said.' bears nothing on the question. This apparently violates the Maxims of Quantity and Relevance. The spokesman explicitly confessed his ignorance of what the interviewer had said and, by doing so, his personal face was damaged, but the presupposition was set aside or cancelled. Moreover, through the conjunction 'But', the spokesman further shifted the topic toward the Pakistani response to the hearsay, which being not expected definitely flouted the Maxims of Quantity and Relevance once more. The utterance of his free-standing assertion ('But I have noticed that…') of the Pakistani declaration also to some degree violated one sub-Maxim of Quality, because it was only one side of the story and its truth had not yet been sufficiently demonstrated. Clearly, with exception to his confession of no idea of 'what' the interviewer had said, the spokesman did not offer any relative information of his own as expected.

An account by Grice might be that the spokesman was engaged in a classic example of maxim exploitation, flouting a maxim to produce certain conversational implicature. Assuming the CP was adhered to, the reply as a 'response' could be read as a deliberate design for implicature. The former utterance showing his ignorance implicates his incapability to approve or disapprove of the presupposition, to such an extent that he had no obligation to confirm or deny the hearsay. The latter indicates that the information he knew of the current situation is a sharp contrast to the former, producing the conclusion that China knew nothing but thus only. An inference based on the Gricean CP is that what the spokesman tried to convey was twofold: to North Korea and Pakistan, China did not say to the world that Pakistan had helped North Korea; to the opinion community, China had no idea of it.

In terms of politeness theory, one may argue that in addition to making a reply to protect China's face, the way the spokesman replied is to avoid any FTA to both communities holding different opinions. It is fairly sensible that the spokesman was trying to lower the commitment of his utterances to protecting China's negative face in the future. The first utterance 'I am not aware…' based solely on what the interviewer had said circumvents his responsibility for the truth or false of the hearsay, resulting in the cancel of potential threat to China's negative face. The other Quality hedge 'But I have noticed that ….' dependent exclusively upon the Pakistani side also shows the intentional escape of any responsibility for its truthfulness. Both Quality hedges could be taken as a kind of strategies of negative politeness to satisfy the negative-face want of the interviewer and the opinion community believing the hearsay, as well as those to avoid potential threat to China's negative face in the further. Compared with a direct and explicit reply, say, 'No. China does not think that Pakistan has helped North Korea.', or vice versa, the spokesman's utterances definitely soften possible impoliteness and are indeed a form of politeness to the relevant opinion community.

Yet, these are by no means a thorough interpretation. In the perspective of performance, the reply of the spokesman first decontextualizes or suppresses the presupposition in the question and follows the recontextualizing of the Pakistani declaration by citation. For Butler (1997), when referring to or citing an utterance is referred to or cited, it is often appropriated and infused with new meanings whereby communicators can constitute themselves as agents. In this context, the spokesman actualized the system of language in a unique instance of flouting, converting both the presupposition of the interviewer and the Pakistani declaration into subjective utterances. The hedged performative 'I am not aware of *what you have said*.' equating 'I state that I am not aware of *what you have said*.' indicates the entailment of his denial to the presupposition; the hedged performative '(But) I have noticed that…' doing the work of 'I know that….', or further of 'I state that….' explicates his acknowledgement of the Pakistani declaration, an implicit denial again. Such an account apparently reveals that the spokesman was rejecting in an implicative way twice the interviewer's presupposition that Pakistan had helped North Korea. In terms of 'communicative presumption' (Bach & Harnish 1979, cited in Buck 1997: 103), when the spokesman uttered what was not expected and what might be false or wrong, it is mutually known that the spokesman intended for the audience to recognize his illocutionary intent and consider why. The flouting in the reply is a recognizable signal, by means of which the spokesman conveyed something special. Convincingly, the flouting functions to draw the audience's attention away to set up an alternative interpretive frame. The social pressures against doing FTAs yield a set of interpretations too. In this case, the hedged opinion performs to avoid a precise conveyance of his attitude and soften FTAs to the opinion community. It is through these ways that not only was China's negative face protected, but also the positive face of the opinion community was maintained.

This illustration tells us that when analysing certain practices of flouting to probe what, and how, a real implicature is generated, the Gricean CP does not work as properly and effectively as the perspective of performance. It is also observed that a conversational implicature at discourse level does not necessarily mean working merely for the purpose of being polite to the listener as Brown and Levinson (1987) expounded at length, but also to avoid any potential face threat to the country for which the politician stands. Thus it is advisable to direct our attention to considering under what condition(s) of the discourse level communicators violate certain Maxims and what their purposes are.

Extract 2: (**IR2:** the second interviewer; **IE:** the spokesman; **Q:** Question)

> **IR2:** The principled position of China on the North Korean nuclear issue is to support the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsular and China and North Korean has a good neighbourly friendship. Under the current situation that North Korea has admitted its nuclear program, (Q2) what measures will the Chinese government take to create a favourable atmosphere on the Peninsular to peacefully solve the issue?

> **IE:** We learned the North Korean nuclear issue that you have mentioned from the news report and we are not aware of the details. The Chinese side has all along supported the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsular and has made its own efforts for the maintenance of peace and stability on the Peninsular.

The next question (Q2) in Extract 2 belongs to the WH-question type. In contrast with the above yes/no question, this WH-question expresses an incomplete proposition, indicating the anticipated answer to be its completion. If the spokesman gave the information in response to the question as specified, then the response was coded as a reply and the spokesman was cooperative and polite. If failed, then the spokesman non-cooperative and impolite. The question itself seems not challenging except for the implicit presupposition of the crisis. However, the strategy of the interviewer in asking tells that it is not so simply assumed.

More precisely, before raising the request for specific information, the interviewer introduced a couple of contextualizing propositions. They are a positive element ('to support the denuclearisation'), which providing the spokesman with the opportunity to popularize the China's long-term positive policy is a face-enhancing act, and a negative element ('a good neighbourly friendship'), which is face-threatening due to its implication of the potential bias of China towards North Korea. Besides, because whatever measures to be taken by China would reflect China's position, this question actually to a degree confines the reply to China's attitudes towards the current situation. When faced with such a challenge, the spokesman might not be able to lay his hands on a specific. Nevertheless, given the spokesman being regarded as the person having some knowledge of it, he was still expected to at least give some general information rather than to simply evade or even refuse it (Gaylard & Ramsay 2004).

However, neither specific nor generic information desired regarding measures to be taken was provided in the reply by the spokesman, although it seemed still within the question's topic parameters. Also, the spokesman did not acknowledge or deny the current crisis having been presupposed by this interviewer. Through the hedge 'We learned the North Korea nuclear issue that you have mentioned from the news report…', the spokesman avoided a precise response of his disagreement with the interviewer, which in this context mitigates the FTA to the interviewer. This reference as part of the reply meanwhile implicitly subverted the precondition for questioning specific measures, which, it must be noted, potentially brings along with it threat to the interviewer's positive face.

The reference further constituted tactically the condition for his agency to continue the reply by uttering 'we are not aware of the details'. This verbal strategy as a means by which the spokesman legitimised himself to dodge the question on measures must be considerably appreciated. This line, however, did not serve to work only as thus explained, but also to imply that information of measures was so far unavailable in the light that any action would not be taken until the news report was confirmed and detailed. In this sense, this evasive maneuver drawing the attention of the audience away from the question facilitates,

and conceals, the shift of the agenda. Precisely because the spokesman was presumed to be cooperative, proceeding with the talk by answering the question, the audience were naturally obliged to follow his words accepting the shifted agenda. I would argue that this way of evading the question and transforming the agenda actually reflects the spokesman's consideration to minimize potential threat to the audience's negative face. This analyses show that not only positive politeness but also negative politeness to the audience was carefully considered by the spokesman. What is interesting is the co-presence in the same utterance of features of positive politeness and negative politeness.

We also notice in this case a subtle change of verbal tense whereby a new topic was formulated and the reply continued. More specifically, the WH-question was about what measures the Chinese government *would* take; the spokesman, however, deliberately shifted present tense to present perfect rather than to presumed future tense ('The Chinese side *has* all long supported…and *has* made its own efforts…'). According to the Gricean CP, the spokesman seemed have tried to implicate conversationally a generally favourable attitude of China that China would be devoting its own efforts to solving the current crisis as before. The fact, however, might be the opposite in this context based on the features of inadequate information uttered. One of arguments is that this reply being quantitatively inadequate in information to the needs or interests of the interviewer is also presumably most probably qualitatively misleading (Chilton & Schaffner 1997: 213). If so, the spokesman's reply concerning general measures having been taken in the past does not necessarily implicate China's intention to make its efforts as before.

The spokesman recontextualized as part of the reply what the interviewer had uttered for the preface to the question. Therefore no new information was provided in the reply. The repetition, though, was a kind of positive politeness strategies to show the spokesman's agreement with the interviewer in the point of the position of China. If it is so interpreted, the reply violated the Maxims of Quantity and Relevance but maintained the interviewer's positive face. The most reasonable explanation for the repetition as a reply might be that the spokesman had no intention to tell the audience of something regarding either specific or general measures to be taken for the crisis. On the contrary, he was in a sense taking advantage of this opportunity to popularize the contributions of China to the maintenance of peace and stability on the Peninsular. Tellingly, the utterances consistent with China's long-term principled position on the issue serve to enhance the positive image of China as a responsible and influential country to the world. Meanwhile, China's negative face was successfully protected since no sign of China's bias towards North Korea was observed in the reply. In short, the spokesman through this reply not only protected China's negative face in the future, but also promoted its positive face. Based on this realization and the spokesman's consideration of positive politeness for the interviewer, we may argue that the feature of positive politeness to the audience co-exists with the performance of intentional protection of China's negative face and the enhancement of its positive face.

Unfortunately, this evasive maneuver does not escape the attention of other journalists at the press. One of them called the spokesman to account for his failure to provide explicit answers to the preceding questions ('You have just said that … and China is not quite aware of ….') and pressed for an explicit answer with the question composed of two sub-questions Q3 and Q4 (Extract 3). This was a further FTA directed to the spokesman and the Chinese government as individual.

Extract 3: (**IR3:** the third Interviewer; **IE:** the spokesman; **Q:** Question)

> **IR3:** You have just said that China learned from the news report the North Korean nuclear program and China is not quite aware of the truth at present. (Q3) Can I understand that the visiting North Korean delegation has not informed the Chinese leaders whom they met with of the relevant situation of this issue? (Q4) Is China ready to raise this question to the delegation?

> **IE:** I have already briefed you on the visit of the North Korean delegation in Beijing and the delegation has already left for Shanghai to continue visit. During the meeting, the two sides have introduced each other's domestic economic and social development. Both have agreed that the two countries enjoy friendly relations and cooperation, and expressed determination to continue developing this relationship in the new century. As for your question, I don't think it will be touched in this visit.

Before moving forward, let us examine first the potentiality of each sub-question posing FTAs to China. Scrutinizing these two polar interrogatives, we may find that they are indeed the same in content but different in angle from which they were asked. To repeat them in a different yet simpler way, they are respectively 'Hasn't North Korea informed China of the issue?' and 'Is China ready to ask North Korea of the issue?', presumably raised on the basis of what the spokesman had just uttered in his reply to the preceding question. Besides, according to the preface to the question, the existence of North Korean nuclear program was presupposed in each sub-question. It was therefore hard for the spokesman to make a reply, because whichever the spokesman replied as usual, his agreement with the presupposition is evident, which contradicted, and further overrode, his previous utterances, bringing along with the threat to China's positive image.

      The subtlety of the interviewer could also be noticed in the deliberate change of agency in the sub-questions. Specifically, North Korea was designated in the first one as an initiative party raising the issue to China for discussion, while in the second, China became the agent. If a reply to the first were YES, it meant North Korea had not informed China, which being opposed to their close relationship is a FTA to the negative face of both China and North Korea. If NO, the previous utterances by the spokesman at the beginning of the press release were proved to be a downright lie, causing damage to China's positive image. As to the second, regardless of whichever the reply might be, it was most likely to produce an impression either of very concern and eagerness of China to discuss the current situation, or of China's indifference and insensitivity to it. Each connotation would be potentially negative to China's image. There are two reasons: first, China's initiative in inquiring of North Korea about the situation leaves the impression that the relationship between China and North Korea was very special; second, China's principled position on the issue was being, or had been, changed, and the assumed greater role for China to solve this issue would no longer be possible. Viewed in this way, the sub-questions have much potential threat to China's negative face.

      The spokesman was fully aware of this trick, and thus did not provide a direct answer to each but dodge instead. Through the utterance 'I *have already* briefed you…', the spokesman attempted to save China's negative face as well as evading the question, which was probably motivated by the consideration of keeping secret. At the same time, realizing such a simple reply was likely to result in the lose of China's face and causing offence to the audience, the spokesman following this immediately repeated the already briefed information

as a way to mitigate the offence and reserve China's face. This way of answering ostensibly flouts the Maxims of Quantity and Relevance. However, on the assumption that the reply did fulfil another maxim (Quality), we could reconstruct the following inferential path as Grice applied: the overhearing audience was being told what topics had been discussed in this visit of North Korean delegation, and since the issue of the crisis in question was not included in the mentioned topics, being told what topics had been discussed is informative enough for it entails that the issue was not discussed, and thus North Korea delegation had not initiatively informed China of this. Conclusively, the reply by the spokesman to the first is the repetition of the briefed information.

If this were the case, the last line, a self-legitimatised assertion, '*As for your question*, I don't think it will be touched in this visit', might also target the second sub-question. The presumed agent China, though, was strategically lost through a deliberate avoidance of the actor. This utterance was plausibly designed as a reply for both sub-questions, because the spokesman probably realized the audience's perception of his evasion in the preceding utterances. If so, the utterance 'As for your question' could be regarded as a positive-face redress for its overt redirection of his utterance back to the question. This bald-on-record change is no doubt opposed to the claim by Brown and Levinson (1987: 168) that topic changes must be done off-record for its sensitivity as imposition on the hearer's face. The overt utterance, though, was indeed a claim for relevance and in conformity with Relevance Maxim at the discoursal level of interview. It stresses the spokesman's cooperation and foregrounds his considerations of face want of the interviewer and the audience. Meanwhile, the spokesman was trying to soften certain offence to the audience in hedging his opinion through vague language 'I don't think it will be touched in this visit.' suggesting that he was not taking full responsibility for the truth of his utterance. On the other hand, since this arbitrary assertion was completely personal and subjective (flouting Quality Maxim), its potential threat to China's negative face was strategically eliminated.

Yet, the function of this grammatical transition, if viewed in the perspective of performance, is much richer than just thus discussed. In this context, as we have seen above, it is also fundamental to avoid an impression of initiative and eagerness of China to discuss this issue with North Korea. The transition for this reason may well be interpreted as a linguistic strategy to dissimulate or delete such an impression. Because the spokesman in the earlier replies had repeatedly denied implicitly China's awareness of the current situation, the avoidance of China as an actor was further performed to set up an alternative interpretative frame in which a conscientious and mature China was highlighted. This has the equal function of promoting the positive image of China to the world.

6. Discussion and Conclusions

This paper has examined in the performative perspective the flouting and politeness phenomena by the spokesman in the interview on North Korea nuclear crisis. Some useful findings may be attained from this empirical study applying the theory of performance as an entry point to investigating the conflict between being un-cooperative and being polite. Firstly, Quantity hedges were frequently employed in the spokesman's replies to avoid a precise expression of his opinions and attitudes, thereby protecting China's negative face in the future. To this end, the spokesman commonly cited or borrowed whatever information of various sources as a reply, while at the same time deliberately suppressing other relevant

information. Enough attention therefore must be paid to the factor of intertextuality in analyzing verbal acts of politicians in interviews. Furthermore, as we saw, not all violations of Quantity Maxim were designed to produce an implicature, or to show politeness to the audience; rather, they bore other pragmatic functions if perceived in the perspective of performance.

The second finding is pertinent to viewing the flouting and politeness phenomena at the wider discoursal level. Negative politeness features in reply in Extract 2, for instance, sometimes co-exist in the same utterance with the performance of intentional threats to the audience's positive face. Besides, a bald-on-record shift of agenda, as the analysis of Extract 3 indicates, in no way always means making some imposition on the audience's face, but rather perform to meet Relevance Maxim of communication. The theory of performance is useful in facilitating the exploration and interpretation of such interesting co-existences and their complicated functions in relation to the complex relationship among countries and the very context in which communication occurs.

Finally, whatever the question might be, the spokesman seemed have always tried to seize this opportunity to promote China's positive image to the world by whatever means, including that of flouting certain Maxims. The analyses made in the perspective of performance theory have demonstrated further that this goal is not accomplished at the cost of threatening or damaging faces of others; instead, the spokesman accomplished his goal of maintaining and enhancing China's positive image in such a manner that is congruent with his considerations of being polite to relevant parties.

Based on the performance-based inquiry of flouting and politeness phenomena in political interviews, at least two insightful conclusions can be made. In the first place, meaning is constructed performatively rather than authoritatively and systemically determined prior to the speech moment. The evidence is the frequent violations by the spokesman of certain Maxims for establishing himself as an agent during the interview. Not only do the CP and Maxims become negotiable in actual situations because of the nature of politicians' utterances, but what counts as 'truthful', 'informative', 'unambiguous' and 'relevant' may also be imposed by politicians upon the audience. Flouting in a sense has become the linguistic strategy for politicians to perform a variety of functions. In the second place, just because violation in speech events is no longer proved to be the most important variable, the act of flouting needs to be conceived as a specially marked, artful way of speaking that sets up or represents a special interpretive frame within which the act of speaking is to be understood and interpreted. There is something going on in the communication which says to the audience, 'interpret what I say in some special sense; do not take it to mean what the words alone, taken literally, would convey' (Bauman 2001: 167-68).

Notes

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