

# An Analysis of Contextual Correlates of Adaptability in the Dialogues of *Pirate of the Caribbean 1*

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## Abstract

Based on the theory of Contextual Correlates of Adaptability put forward by Jef Verschueren, this thesis aims at exploring the application of Contextual Correlates of Adaptability in the film, *Pirates of the Caribbean 1: The Curse of the Black Pearl* by analyzing the dialogues between Captain Jack Sparrow and Will Turner. Through the text analysis of the selected dialogues, the thesis found that the speakers continuously make linguistic choices such as conversation topics and words to adapt to their conversations in order to achieve their purpose. Among the three kinds of adaptations, the adaptations to the physical world echo the plots in front and behind and makes the film coherent. The adaptations to the mental world give a vivid description to the characters, which make the characteristics more distinctive. The adaptations to the social world take the social background and culture into consideration which make the film connotative and attractive.

**Key Words:** Contextual Correlates of Adaptability; the physical world; the social world; the mental world

## 1. Introduction

As technology and Internet developed, it is not impossible to bring English films into class as a conventional learning method. Many universities in China, even middle schools, have already adopted this method. Compared with traditional methods of learning English, learning English in films builds a world combined voice with pictures, language with context, visual effect with auditory effect. It provides students a vivid and active linguistic environment as well as a more accurate way to output what they have learnt from the films. As the movie goes, the ordinary and natural English is presented to students with the actor's emotion, tones and so on. Moreover, when students watch films which are designed to take place in the Middle Age or even before, the language of that time is not always as same as what we speak and learn today. To fully understand the films, culture knowledge, the history and other factors should be taken into consideration. As a result, from films students can not only enjoy the interesting plots but also practice their oral English, find out the history background and enrich their experiences.

Some English learners have already studied Verschueren's Adaptation Theory from the perspectives of literature and TV dramas. Only a few English learners attempt to explain the application of Adaptation Theory in film dialogues.

Based on the achievements and limitations of the previous studies, this thesis attempts to give a complete and specific explanation of *Pirates of the Caribbean 1: The Curse of the Black Pearl* under the guidance of Jef Verschueren's Adaptation Theory. The thesis attempts to explore the application of Contextual correlates of adaptability in the film and how the dialogues adapt to the physical world, the social world and the mental world. It also aims at offering a complete and specific explanation of the functions of using Contextual correlates of adaptability. Moreover, it wishes to give some contributions to increase the audiences' interests and knowledge of pirate topic and the culture hidden behind the movie.

## 2. Literature Review

Context is the environment for language users to communicate with each other, refers to any language adaptation or factors influencing the conversation, including the physical world, the social world and the mental world (Verschueren, 2000: 76).

The physical world is mainly dimensioned by temporal reference and spatial reference. The former includes event time, utterance time and reference time while the latter refers to the absolute spatial relations, utterer space, reference space, and the interlocutors' position in the physical world. Moreover, bodily postures, gestures, gazes, physical appearances, physical conditions and biological properties all fall into this world.

The social world comprises social situation, social environment and cultural atmosphere as well as the principles and guidelines of language behavior used to constrain and regulate the communication between the speaker and the listener. But, most of all, culture is the dominant factor which influences the social world. It is known that language originates from society and language is an integral part of and influenced by culture. It is the primary vehicle by which a culture transmits

its beliefs, values and norms.

The mental world contains the personalities, emotions, beliefs, desires and wishes, motivations and intentions of the both the utterer and the hearer. According to Verschueren, verbal interaction is not doubt communication from mind to mind, with “mind” referring to “mind in society” (Verschueren 2000: 87). Aspects of language users’ states of mind play an important role in utterance production and interpretation. The utterance should be inter-adaptable in accordance with the assessment of the utterer’s mental world as well as the interpreters. Though it is impossible to avoid communication problems by taking all these factors into account, it will help language users a lot to find a suitable way to communicate.

### 3. Methodology

This thesis aims to explore the application of contextual correlates of adaptability of Verschueren’s Adaptation Theory in the film *Pirates of the Caribbean 1: The Curse of the Black Pearl*. Two research questions are proposed:

1. How is the Contextual Correlates of Adaptability applied in the film?
2. What roles do Contextual Correlates of Adaptability play in the film?

Conversations between Captain Jack Sparrow and Will Turner were chosen as the research material. As two of the leading actors in the film, Will is the only person who can remove the curse of Captain Barbossa so that Jack can achieve his revenge and get the Black Pearl back. The delicate relationship between Jack and Will is also very interesting and meaningful. Altogether 18 dialogues were selected from the script of *Pirates of the Caribbean 1: The Curse of the Black Pearl* as the samples. The samples were selected with the same general topic of the process of Captain Jack Sparrow’s revenge on different occasions, such as the dialogues in the blacksmith’s shop, dialogues in the prison, dialogues in Tortuga and so on which are chosen according to the time sequence in the film. The samples contain valid topics including sword kill, women, pirates, revenge and so on, which ensure the diversity of the research data.

Text analysis is used in this thesis. First, the dialogues between Captain Jack Sparrow and Will Turner will be collected by certain standard which are the research materials. Then the materials will be divided into three categories under the guidance of Jef Verschueren’s Contextual Correlates of Adaptability. The third process is analyzing the materials from the perspective of adaptation to the physical world, to the social world and to the mental world. Finally, the findings and limitations will be concluded.

### 4. Discussion and Analysis of Contextual Correlates of Adaptability in *Pirates of the Caribbean 1*

Based on Verschueren’s Contextual Correlates of Adaptability, categories are set as the table shows. All samples can be divided into three categories which are the physical world, the social world and the mental world.

In the film *Pirates of the Caribbean 1: The Curse of the Black Pearl*, there are total 18 dialogues fitting the condition of conversation between Captain Jack Sparrow and Will Turner. Among the dialogues, conversation adapt to the physical world contains the most part, 39%. The social world shares 28% and the mental world shares 33%. From the list, it is found that adaptation to the physical world in the film contains the most part among all the six secondary categories which is most obvious to find. The adaptation to the physical world ties the plots which echo the plots in front and behind so many times to make the whole film complete. In the meantime, descriptions to the social background and culture are not ignored by mentioning the real pirate islands, navigation terms and sword culture. It is presented well in the film although it does not contain so much part. Besides, the dialogues apply several psychological descriptions, mental descriptions to help to make the characters alive and vivid.

#### 4.1 Adaptation to the Physical World

In Verschueren's Adaptation Theory, physical world contains four factors: utterer and interpreter, temporal reference, spatial reference and material conditions for speech. Time and place are most studied, and the most visible ways of anchoring language choices into a physical world (Verschueren, 2000: 95). Analysis will be discussed from the perspectives of time and place in this section.

In Verschueren's view, time is not an absolute value in relation to language. It interferes with a lot of other considerations (2000: 95). As the relationship between characters in the film goes closer and closer, time influences the speaker's topic selection of conversation, language style choosing, terms of address using.

Sample 1:

*Jack: You need to find yourself a girl, mate. Or perhaps the reason you practice three hours a day is that you found one and are otherwise incapable of wooing said strumpet. You're not a eunuch, are you?*

Sample 2:

*Will: The ship's real enough. Its anchorage must be a real place. Where is it?*

*Jack: Why ask me?*

*Will: Because you're a pirate.*

*Jack: And you want to turn pirate yourself, is that it?*

*Will: Never. They took Miss Swann.*

*Jack: Oh, so it is that you found a girl. I see. Well, if you're intending to brave all, hasten to her rescue, and so win fair lady's heart, you'll have to do it alone, mate.*

Sample 3:

*Jack: One question about your business boy. There's no use going. This girl, how far are you willing to go to save her?*

*Will: I'd die for her.*

*Jack: Oh, good. No worries, then.*

## Sample 4:

*Jack: If you were waiting for the opportune moment, that was it. If you'd be so kind, I'd be much obliged if you'd drop me off at my ship.*

All the four samples take place in different time in the film, but they are connected. From the beginning till the end, there is always a clear love line which is the love story between Will and Elizabeth. As a middleman, Jack uses "the girl" to refer to Elizabeth, because Jack has already met with Elizabeth before and he knows what a person Elizabeth is. When Jack mentions Elizabeth, the image of hers will come to people's mind who is a beautiful, clever and upright girl. The reason why Jack always reminds Will with "the girl" is that the journey is so dangerous that he must ensure Will will not be his encumbrance.

The spatial dimension plays an important part in communications. The elements related to geographical conditions consist of location, surroundings, and living styles, etc. They will influence the linguistic choice-making of people's conversation.

## Sample 5:

*Jack: More importantly, it is indeed a sad life that has never breathed deep this sweet bouquet that is Tortuga, savvy? What do you think?*

*Will: It'll linger*

## Sample 6:

*Jack: I'll tell you, mate. If every town in the world were like this one, no man would ever feel unwanted.*

The feelings to Tortuga are different between Jack and Will. Growing up in different living condition, Jack and Will of course have different opinions to Tortuga. As for Jack, when he talks about Tortuga, he chooses good words to describe it, such as "sweet bouquet", "no man would ever feel unwanted", because he is a pirate. He lives for freedom. Though Tortuga is in a mass, it is a place for people to be free and pirates gather there to supply. As for Will, he grows up in Great Britain. Laws and rules make him obey. When he describes Tortuga, he uses "linger" which is a word with some derogatory sense to echo Jack's opinion which shows he does not like the atmosphere of Tortuga.

## Sample 7:

*Jack: For having such a bleak outlook on pirates, you're well on your way to becoming one. Sprung a man from jail. Commandeered a ship of the fleet. Sailed with a buccaneer crew out of Tortuga. And you're completely obsessed with treasure.*

*Will: That's not true. I am not obsessed with treasure.*

*Jack: Not all treasure is silver and gold, mate.*

Jack and Will successfully slip into the treasure cave where Captain Barbossa and his crew are going to remove the curse. In the water, there are thousands of gold. In the cave, there are millions of treasures. Will is very impressed. Jack reads through his mind and tells him that treasure is not only silver and gold, but also other things can entertain one's heart. Among them, the most important is freedom.

Apart from Tortuga that has been discussed, another linguistic choice made by Jack refers to the physical world, “buccaneer” which means Jack is the pirate who attacks and steals from Spanish colonies and ships aboard at the American Continent in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The word “buccaneer” precisely points out the location of Jack’s range of pirating, which makes the story more accurate and reliable.

#### 4.2 Adaptation to the Social World

Every language use is not a single individual but lives in a society. In social communication, the linguistic choice-making is also greatly influenced by the social structures.

Verschueren claims that there is no principled limit to the range of social factors that linguistic choices are inter-adapted with. Most of them have to do with properties of social settings or institutions, and social settings and institutions impose many types of principles and rules on the ways in which certain types of linguistic acts can be performed or who has the right to perform them (2000: 91).

Sample 8:

*Jack: Do you think this wise, boy? Crossing blades with a pirate?*

*Jack: You know what you’re doing. I’ll give you that. Excellent form, but how’s your footwork?*

*If I step here, very good. And now I step again. Ta.*

When Jack and Will compete sword, Jack is very surprised. Since Jack is a captain, he must be enough powerful and intelligent to lead his crew. So, Jack makes a linguistic choice of “wise” to describe Will’s behavior. Another linguistic choice made by Jack is the word, “Ta” which is a British slang. At that time, Jack is in Royal Port, the Great Britain. He makes language choices to the social background. As one of the famous elements of pirate culture, sword culture is well applied into the film. Blades cross, excellent footwork and casting sword technology is all presented. As a business film, it not only gives an impressive story to the audiences but also a complete pirate culture.

Sample 9:

*Jack: But I can’t bring this ship into Tortuga all by me, savvy?*

*Will: Tortuga?*

*Jack: Tortuga!*

Tortuga is in Haiti. It is a real pirate island which is found by Christopher Columbus in 15<sup>th</sup> century. Because the shape of the island is like a turtle, so the island is given name Tortuga. This island becomes a main strongpoint for the pirates of the Caribbean. The citizens there are almost pirates, murderers and hookers. The film deals with the history of pirates well. It follows the history and pirate culture. Although the story is very fantasy, the place and the culture behind can be found in real world, which makes the film reliable and real.

According to Verschueren (2000), the social world does not only contain the culture and social settings. Elements like social class, gender, profession, and friendship also play a big role in people’s linguistic choice-making.

Sample 10:

*Jack: You seem familiar. Have I threatened you before?*

*Will: I make a point of avoiding familiarity with pirates.*

*Jack: It would be a shame to put a mark on your record.*

Sample 11:

*Will: We're going to steal the ship? That ship?*

*Jack: Commandeer. We're going to commandeer that ship. Nautical term.*

Sample 12:

*Jack: I knew him, probably one of the few who knew him as William Turner. Everyone else called him Bootstrap or Bootstrap Bill.*

*Will: Bootstrap?*

*Jack: Good man. Good pirate. I swear you look just like him.*

*Will: It's not true. He was a merchant sailor, a respectable man who obeyed the law.*

*Jack: He was a bloody pirate, a scallywag.*

In the film, the words are selected carefully by Jack, such as “threaten”, “Commandeer”, “a bloody pirate” and “a scallywag”. Jack is a pirate. From his view, he is a ruthless man. Threatening people is his way to communicate with ordinary people and a common behavior among pirates. Thus, when he first time meets Will, he thinks Will is someone he has threatened before. He takes things from others without permission, but it is not the same as steal. He does bad thing openly, not secretly. That is pirate’s behavior. Thus, he uses “Commandeer”. As for “a bloody pirate” and “a scallywag”, he uses these phrases to describe Will’s father. Will’s father is also a pirate. Being bad is pirates’ nature.

These linguistic choices adapt well to the interpersonal and relationship between Jack and Will. To fully adapt to pirates’ style, Jack need to be a ruthless man, likes fighting and killing and acts as bad as possible, which shows the audiences an impressive pirate’s character as well as a rich history culture of pirate.

Motivation is the goal-oriented behavior, which is usually driven by one’s wish or desire. Motivation is also seen as a process that leads to the forming of behavioral intentions in social-cognitive models. In the process of communication, if the motivation or intention of the speaker is fulfilled, he or she will be satisfied (Verschueren, 2000: 145).

Sample 13:

*Will: You cheated.*

*Jack: Pirate. Move away.*

*Will: No.*

*Jack: Please, move.*

*Will: No, I cannot just step aside and let you escape.*

*Jack: This shot is not meant for you.*

This conversation occurs in Will’s blacksmith’s shop. Jack cannot beat Will with sword, so he cheats to threaten Will to give up with a loaded gun. Obviously, it is not fair for Will. However,

considering the situation outside that the Royal Navy is chasing Jack, he has to get out of there. To adapt to the mental world, Jack makes linguistic choices three times. The first is “Pirate” which explains why he cheats in the sword battle, because he is a pirate that he does not always obey the rules. He only obeys the rules which can give him benefits. The second is “Please” which shows his good characteristic of not killing innocent people. The third linguistic choice adapts to his motivation directly, by saying “This shot is not meant for you”. Here he uses “this shot” to threaten Will to give up and let him go. Actually, “this shot” is left to kill Captain Barbossa to achieve his goal of revenge.

Sample 14:

*Jack: I see no profit in it for me.*

*Will: I can get you out of here.*

Sample 15:

*Jack: What's your name?*

*Will: Will Turner.*

*Jack: That would be short for William, I imagine. Good strong name. No doubt named for your father, all right?*

*Will: Yes.*

*Jack: Uh-huh. Well, Mr. Turner, I've changed my mind. If you spring me from this cell, I swear on pain of death. I shall take you to the Black Pearl and your bonny lass. Do we have an accord?*

*Will: Agreed.*

From the beginning to the end, Jack is always eager to finish his revenge. When Will comes for help, he pretends that he does not care. However, when he knows Will can free him, he changes his mind immediately. Then he learns Will's name and begins his plan with an important bargaining counter. Here Jack makes three linguistic choices to adapt to his motivation. The first is “I see no profit in it for me” which shows Jack's personality of pirates. He will not do things without profit and plan. So, he makes his second linguistic choice, by saying “No doubt named for your father”. This sentence is used to probe whether Will's family name is from his father so that he can make his plan for his revenge. Then he makes his third linguistic choice, by saying “I swear on pain of death”. With an important bargaining counter and a plan, Jack can restart his revenge. But he pretends that he is moved by Will and is so kind to help Will without any ask. On the surface, Will uses Jack to save his love. Actually, to the deep said, Jack uses Will to finish his revenge. He lies to Will so that he can hide his purpose of revenge in case that Will hinders him.

Sample 16:

*Will: You've been planning this from the beginning, ever since you learned my name.*

*Jack: Yeah.*

As the sample is discussed before, Jack will not do things without profits and plans. Will finally realizes that he is used by Jack to achieve his revenge. Here Will makes a linguistic choice, “You've been planning this from the beginning, ever since you learned my name”, which calls the



audiences to the beginning of the story where Will and Jack make a deal. It also shows Jack's motivation of revenge and his foxy personality.

Personality expresses people's attitude toward reality and surrounding society and is shown in their behaviors. It can be seen from one's attitude towards himself and others, and also his words and behaviors. People with different personalities have different thoughts, intentions, customs and therefore make different behaviors and words (Verschueren, 2000: 148).

Sample 17:

*Will: This is either madness or brilliance.*

*Jack: It's remarkable how often those two traits coincide.*

Sample 18:

*Jack: Put it away, son. It's not worth you getting beat again.*

*Will: You ignored the rules of engagement. In a fair fight, I'd kill you.*

*Jack: Then that's not much incentive for me to fight fair.*

These two samples show the cleverness of Captain Jack Sparrow. The former sample takes place at the Royal Port where Jack and Will are going to commandeer a ship from the Royal Navy. They use a small boat to form an oxygen tank for underwater walk. Will gives his evaluation to Jack's idea by making linguistic choice as "either madness or brilliance" which shows Jack is a clever man or even a madman. Jack's response is quite calm by saying "It's remarkable how often those two traits coincide", which shows Jack's rich personal experience. In the sinister life environment, being smart is not enough. Sometimes it recommends for unexpected thoughts.

The later occurs during the route to Tortuga. Will is going to threaten Jack. However, Jack does not care him but reacts immediately. He has beat Will once in the blacksmith's shop so that he can win again. But Will thinks Jack does not follow the rules. They have a quarrel. The linguistic choices of "getting beat again" and "a fair fight" bring audiences to the former part of the film where Jack cheats to win in the battle of sword in the blacksmith's which also adapts to Jack's personality. Jack is a pirate so the rules are only consultative. He does not care about the rules. He cares about whether his benefits can be achieved. "The fair fight" also shows Jack's personality of intelligence and patience to friends.

## 5. Conclusion

Communication is a process changing all the time. As the communication factors continuously change, linguistic choice-making also change to adapt to them. People change their conversation topics and words based on different contextual factors. The dynamic adaptation process can also be divided into three categories.

The first category refers to the adaptation to the physical world, including changing of time and space. Captain Jack Sparrow's adaption to the physical world changes with the development of the plot. His words adapt to the physical world which reflects to his intentions, that is, his pirate nature. As plot develops and the conversation deepens, he always changes his words and topics to adapt the time and place well. The adaptation to the physical world makes the whole story tight

and complete. It is not just a journey for revenge but also contains love, brotherhood and several rules for people to deal with the affairs.

The second category refers to the adaptation to social world, including personal relationship, culture, social background and so on. Considering the social background of the time in the film, it is in the age of uncharted oceans. So many plots are used to introduce the social background, such as Tortuga, Port Royal which are really existed in the history. Besides social background, the film thinks highly of culture elements, such as pirate culture, sword skill and navigation terms, which make it more attractive and impressive. It brings a vivid pirate world to the audiences.

The third category refers to the adaptation to the mental world, including characters' personality and motivations. The willing of getting back the Black Pearl and revenge pushes Captain Jack Sparrow. The linguistic adaptation to the mental world comes from the depth of one's mind. All the words chosen by Jack are pointed to one goal, his revenge. That is Jack's starting point. All words for the revenge describe a clever, even foxy pirate, Jack Sparrow. His behavior, plan, relationship between Will and himself make the character alive and attractive.

The thesis achieved some findings in analyzing the Hollywood film *Pirates of the Caribbean 1: The Curse of the Black Pearl*, but there are still some limitations in the thesis. First, only 18 pieces of dialogues in the film are selected as the linguistic data. The collected research material is limited and the selected dialogues occur in a concrete linguistic phenomenon. It only explores the adaptation in the dialogues between Captain Jack Sparrow and Will Turner. There are still so many other leading actors and actress in the film who make lots of conversation with Jack, which can be further discussed for a more complete analysis. Second, due to the author's finite knowledge, some analyses may be subjective. Some dialogues may be not divided in the most accurate way. Third, the thesis is only under the guidance of Verschueren's Contextual Correlates of Adaptability, there are still other three dimensions which provide different ways to analyze the dialogues.

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## Appendix

**Table 4.1 Percentage of Different Worlds**

Category	Physical World		Social World		Mental World	
	Time	Place	Culture	Interpersonal	Motivation	Personality
Percentage	22%	17%	11%	17%	22%	11%
Total	39%		28%		33%	