

Similarities and Differences in Dialogue Delivery Between On-Camera Performance and Stage Drama: A Case Study of the Film and Play Devil and Angel

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Abstract: This paper examines the similarities and differences between on-camera performance and stage drama performance from the perspective of dialogue. Firstly, film and television performance and theatrical performance share certain commonalities in dialogue, such as constraints, action orientation, character development, and a tendency toward naturalism. Both require advancing the plot and shaping character personalities within specific contexts. However, due to differences in media environments and audience interaction modes, they exhibit distinct contrasts in aspects such as volume, tone, and coherence of dialogue. The language of theater emphasizes stage expressiveness and emotional tension, whereas the language of film and television is closer to real life, focusing on detail and authenticity. By analyzing both the theatrical and film versions of *Devil and Angel*, this paper uncovers the core elements and adaptive features of dialogue in film and theater, aiming to provide theoretical references and practical insights for practitioners in the performing arts.

Keywords: on-camera performance, stage drama performance, dialogue analysis, *Devil and Angel*, similarities and differences.

1. Introduction

With the diversified development of film and television arts, drama and film performance have gradually come to coexist, becoming focal points of public interest. In recent years, stage drama has regained popularity due to the promotion of variety shows, making offline theater-going a fashionable activity. However, disparities in actor performance between film and theater have often been criticized: film actors are said to lack intensity in theater, while theater actors appear exaggerated in front of the camera. This phenomenon is closely tied to the differences in how dialogue is handled in these two forms. Exploring the similarities and differences in dialogue techniques between on-camera and stage drama performance can help actors enhance their artistic understanding and performance skills, improve their adaptability, and provide scientific foundations for career direction.

2. Overview of *Devil and Angel*

Devil and Angel is a stage drama produced by Deng Chao, supervised and written by Yu Baimei, and directed by Chen Chang. It premiered at the PLA Opera House in mainland China from December 13, 2012, to January 2, 2013, and was subsequently broadcast as part of Hunan TV's Star Theater in June 2014. The play was later adapted into a comedy film of the same name, co-directed by Deng Chao and Yu Baimei, starring Deng Chao and Sun Li. The film was released in China on December 24, 2015, grossing 650 million RMB.

The movie tells the story of Cha Xiaodao (played by Sun Li), a highly intelligent but socially awkward academic, and Mo Feili (played by Deng Chao), a hot-tempered debt collector, who meet after a car accident. Despite their drastically different personalities—Cha Xiaodao being timid and Mo Feili being aggressive—they gradually grow through their shared challenges.

The film humorously explores social and educational issues, portraying the psychological changes and personal growth of its characters, which resonated with audiences and earned widespread acclaim.

3. Common Features of Dialogue in On-Camera Performances and Stage Drama Performances

It is well-known that the origins of film and television performances are deeply intertwined with those of stage drama. Stage drama, as a performance art, traces its roots back to ancient Greece, while film and television have only developed over the past few centuries. Zhao Meicheng's research highlights that stage drama is a complex art form integrating the first five artistic forms and is referred to as the "sixth art form," while on-camera performances are now considered the "seventh art form," encompassing elements of the earlier five arts as well as many theatrical expressions [1]. As a result, on-camera performances and stage drama performances share numerous similarities. Regardless of whether it is a film, television series, or stage play, the progression and development of the storyline fundamentally rely on dialogue. Influenced by the shared characteristics of these two performance forms, the dialogues in on-camera performances and stage dramas exhibit certain similarities.

3.1. The Restrictive Nature of Dialogue

Zhao Meicheng points out that neither films nor dramas can directly replicate real life on screen; instead, they are artistic representations of reality, marked by a certain level of condensation. This is why the dialogue in film and television performances, as well as stage drama performances, differs from the language of everyday life [1]. Both forms must operate based on concise, prearranged assumptions—specifically, the script lines that drive the narrative forward. The script serves as the foundational source of the content, the source of the work's unity, and a hypothesis for change. Directors, choreographers, cinematographers, musicians, and actors must all adhere to the script's storyline to carry out secondary creation. In other words, the dialogue in the original script conveys the story's content and offers a reference point for directors and actors in their secondary creation. While adapting the original script for their performance, they must ensure the development of the content aligns with the script's intended direction. In *Devil and Angel*, whether in the characterization of Mo Feili in the film or the stage drama, the character is designed as a comedic male protagonist with a distinct personality. This predetermined character design lends itself to dialogue with strong expressive tension, whether performed in front of the camera or on stage. Consequently, the dialogue in both forms of performance is inherently restricted and cannot be entirely dictated by the actor's subjective emotions. This restriction poses challenges for co-actors and can lead to unprofessional outcomes if discrepancies arise between the actor's and the scriptwriter's literary levels or understanding of the drama. Such situations may result in a performance where the language style deviates from the intended dramatic tone, potentially affecting the accuracy of character portrayal.

In character development, actors must cultivate emotions in alignment with the rhythm of the dialogue, avoiding arbitrary improvisation. Regardless of whether the medium is stage drama or film, the content of the dialogue is subject to specific constraints and is usually non-negotiable. Through their secondary creation, actors use vocal and physical expressions to explore character traits, convey thoughts, and enhance the story. However, these creative efforts must remain within the boundaries of established rules.

3.2. The Action-Oriented Nature of Dialogue

Wang Wensi highlights that both stage drama and on-camera performances are action-based art forms. In performance, actions are interconnected, and the entire narrative relies on a sequence of actions [2]. Without action, the performance cannot unfold, and the script's story progression halts. Both stage drama and on-camera performances must quickly develop their artistic expressions within limited space and time, gradually immersing the characters into intense plot conflicts to interpret their thoughts, personalities, and emotions. Dialogue plays a crucial role in connecting the narrative threads of both stage and screen performances, assisting in the development of the storyline. For example, in *Devil and Angel*, when Cha Xiaodao discovers Mo Feili's deceitful nature as a "scumbag," her emotional pain is conveyed through a transition of anguished facial expressions in front of the camera. Similarly, in the stage drama adaptation of *Devil and Angel*, after realizing Mo Feili's true character, Cha Xiaodao immediately responds with decisive actions: explaining, leaving, and blocking him on her phone. This seamless sequence of actions reflects her strong, independent personality. On stage, every character's dialogue inevitably arises from conflict, expressing their attitudes and reactions toward the conflict. This can profoundly affect the opponent's mindset, prompting their next move, which in turn pushes the conflict further, deepens character relationships, and advances the plot. Moreover, dialogue reveals the intricate and multifaceted inner workings of characters, conveying feelings, adding humor, or delivering double entendres.

Whether in stage drama or film, an actor's performance must align with the guidance of the dialogue, which serves as a supplement and externalization of their actions. As a time-constrained art form, dialogue must cater to the demands of the plot, continually propelling the story forward. At times, silence can be more expressive than words, creating the effect of "silence speaking louder than words" and motivating the opponent's actions. Therefore, every line of dialogue must be accompanied by corresponding action.

3.3. The Characterization of Dialogue

In both on-camera performances and stage drama, language serves as a vital tool for shaping a character's personality [3]. The dialogue in a script relies on the actor's performance and actions to bring it to life, all within the constraints of limited time and space. These limitations place high demands on the characterization of dialogue. To make dialogue align with the character's traits, actors must first master the linguistic features specific to their roles, which depend on factors such as the character's background, age, profession, education, experiences, social status, and lifespan. Additionally, the characterization of dialogue requires the actor to have a thorough understanding of the character's development, the dynamics of dramatic scenes, and the complex relationships between characters. Tone, intonation, and expressions must correspond to the current situation and be paired with suitable physical actions. This necessitates that actors familiarize themselves with the lives and personas depicted in the drama, delve deeply into the characters' souls, understand their emotions, and grasp their linguistic patterns and traits to express their inner feelings authentically. For example, in both the film and stage drama versions of *Devil and Angel*, the dialogue is designed to emphasize Cha Xiaodao's personality. Her lines, especially in the scene where she angrily scolds Mo Feili,

strongly reflect her character's traits, providing viewers with a sense of emotional release and enhancing their immersion in the scene.

In both mediums, the actor's ultimate goal is to fully realize the character. Only distinctive and vivid characters can captivate the audience and evoke empathy. As is well-known, the characters in artistic works are derived from vibrant, flesh-and-blood, and unique individual lives [4]. When a character's actions are recreated on stage or screen, their personality traits must be conveyed through distinctive language and actions. For instance, a physically strong and rugged man engaged in manual labor might speak in simple, deep, and gruff tones, complementing his personality. Conversely, if a frail, introverted woman were to communicate with cheerful, dialect-infused language, such a portrayal would seem unrealistic and jarring. Thus, the characterization of dialogue is a crucial tool for shaping characters and highlighting their unique traits.

3.4. The Realistic Tendency of Dialogue

With the exception of theater and films with specific themes, genres, or styles, most modern plays use language similar to that of films and television series. To enable audiences to clearly understand the story and characters while inspiring reflection and imagination, the dialogue in dramas must be clear, comprehensible, realistic, and natural [5], often possessing an immersive quality that mirrors real life. If the language in the dialogue is not vivid, natural, or conversational but instead disorganized and incomprehensible, it can distract the audience, impair auditory comprehension, and hinder the perception and understanding of motion and imagery [6]. Of course, not all stage or screen performances require naturalistic language. For instance, the poetic language of ancient Greek tragedies, avant-garde dramas, and classical theater often adheres to specific thematic, stylistic, or directional constraints. However, this specialized language treatment does not render it lifeless—it remains an artistic representation of reality. The author believes that language can imbue modern plays, films, and television works with both authenticity and a sense of naturalism. Dialect, colloquialisms, and even slang, when appropriately used, can enhance the realism of dialogue. While focusing on the lifelike quality of language, attention must also be paid to its norms and refinement. Language should be improved and artistically treated to transform it into a living art form—a true reflection of life. In *Devil and Angel*, the dialogue reflects a strong inclination toward realism. For example, in the scene where Mo Feili and Cha Xiaodao are in a game arcade collecting debts, Mo Feili, frustrated by Cha Xiaodao's timidity, teaches her to be fierce. He sharply retorts, "Shut up! What did I just teach you outside? Posture!" This line exemplifies the natural and life-like quality of the dialogue, creating a sense of immediacy and relatability for the audience.

Art that is detached from the reality of people's lives cannot truly be called art, as both stage drama and on-camera performances are forms of artistic re-creation that seek to present life authentically [7]. If the language of dialogue strays too far from real life, it risks coming across to the audience as harsh, unfamiliar, impersonal, or even alienating, contradicting the fundamental purpose of performance.

In stage drama, the emotional and expressive aspects of dialogue are often overemphasized, while its realistic characteristics are overlooked. This has led to the creation of an exaggerated and artificial "theatrical tone" [8]. Such performances frequently stray far from the experiences of real life [9]. However, with the evolution of the performing arts, this form of acting has increasingly been rejected by audiences. Modern viewers desire a natural sound—dialogue that is closer to real life and fosters a stronger connection between individuals.

4. Analysis of Differences in Dialogue Between On-Camera and Stage Drama Performances

However, due to the numerous intrinsic differences between film/television and stage drama, significant variations are inevitable, particularly in terms of language [10]. Stage drama performances rely entirely on the stage, whether it is a proscenium stage, an extended stage, a raised or lowered stage, or a shared-space stage providing a central performance area (such as Greek theaters). Actors perform live on stage, where lighting and stage effects collaborate to create a grand and intricate theatrical experience. In contrast, film and television operate based on the principle of "persistence of vision." Using photography and sound recording, the images and sounds of external objects are captured and stored on tape. The projection and playback of recorded sound and dialogue, combined with animated images on screen (or on a television monitor), allow film and television to reproduce and reflect life.

The direct audience of stage drama and film/television also differ significantly. Theater performances take place in public spaces, which is a defining characteristic of drama. Audiences are seated at varying distances from the actors, requiring stronger and clearer stage language to ensure that even those seated in the back rows can clearly hear the actors' lines. Film and television, on the other hand, rely on entirely different methods of distribution. Audiences can watch performances through modern video equipment at home or in cinemas. With the support of advanced audio systems, actors do not need to project their voices excessively, allowing the dialogue to maintain a natural and realistic tone.

Moreover, the media used for dissemination differs. Theater relies on direct, surface-level communication, while films and television can be broadcast and distributed on a much larger scale [11]. Due to the widespread accessibility of film and television, these mediums depend more heavily on media technology than theater. Additionally, because of the increase in ambient noise during production, most films and television shows record sound during post-production. As a result, the language in films and television places greater emphasis on fine details, such as lip movements, subtle eye shifts, or changes in breathing—details rarely used in theater because they are not easily noticeable by the audience.

Finally, the rehearsal processes differ. Stage drama requires actors to rehearse repeatedly backstage before the final performance in front of an audience. In contrast, film and television productions operate differently. To save time, manpower, and resources, the costs of producing films and television shows are significantly higher than those of stage drama. This difference in production approach leads to distinct characteristics in dialogue delivery. In theater, the language becomes more polished through repeated rehearsals, allowing for better control over elements like lighting and sound. Conversely, film and television dialogue is more flexible, often relying on actors to improvise under the director's guidance. These fundamental differences between film/television and stage drama manifest in their treatment of dialogue, with the following specific distinctions:

4.1. Differences in the Projection of Dialogue Volume

In simple terms, the projection of dialogue refers to the ability of sound to travel effectively to reach its audience. Because theater is a live stage performance, the language used in drama demands greater clarity and projection. Even the audience seated in the last row should be able to hear the dialogue clearly and effortlessly. This necessitates strong vocal expression in theatrical language. In contrast, the sound in film and television is controlled by sound engineers, meaning actors do not need to speak loudly as long as their delivery is clean and natural. Microphones and post-production equipment effectively address any issues related to volume. In fact, excessively loud speech might even cause issues like microphone distortion or unwanted noise. For example, in *Devil and Angel*, Mo Feili's

lines in the film version are delivered with calm yet commanding force, creating an understated intensity. However, in the stage drama adaptation of the same work, even when actors use microphones during live performances, their effort to project their voices is evident in the details of their performance, reflecting the physical demands of theatrical delivery.

4.2. Differences in the Distinctiveness of Intonation

This refers to the degree of emphasis and modulation applied to language. In general, theatrical language is more exaggerated than film language. Unlike on-camera performances, stage acting is a medium where subtle details are often diminished or overlooked. To make a character's emotions and intentions clear, actors on stage must deliver their lines with heightened emotion and compelling expressiveness. In the stage drama version of *Devil and Angel*, Mo Feili conveys his emotional changes vividly and expressively, using refined and precise delivery to convey complex ideas and deep meaning with the simplest language. To achieve this, theatrical dialogue often amplifies tonal contrasts, stretches breaks, slows speech, and even emphasizes subtle vocal variations. These techniques are adapted to the specific requirements of the stage environment, allowing the audience to feel the sincerity of the performance. Over-pursuit of naturalistic language in theater, on the other hand, could drown out the unique charm of dialogue, leading to mediocrity in some performances and undermining the artistic appeal of the stage.

Of course, this does not specifically apply to theater but is more relevant to film and television. Due to the constraints of large screens and close viewing distances, many details are magnified in film and television. For example, in *Devil and Angel*, Cha Xiaodao's transitions from crying to anger are meticulously portrayed through detailed expressions, including her labored breathing. The audience can even detect her faint, uneven breaths caused by intense sorrow or rage, capturing the raw emotional shifts in her character. Currently, the treatment of language in film and television appears particularly deliberate and precise, avoiding exaggeration. It may seem highly intricate and subtle, but the increasing focus on detail reflects a greater demand for realism and authenticity. Only by achieving this level of meticulousness can cinematic language and its environment feel genuine. If theatrical language emphasizes broad, bold treatment, cinematic language prioritizes the fine and nuanced handling of smaller details. This distinction underscores the contrasting ways in which the two mediums address the expressive and emotional depth of dialogue.

4.3. Differences in the Coherence of Dialogue

Coherence refers to the consistency between segments of dialogue, which progresses in sequence according to the actions and scenes. It has often been said that theater is the actor's art, while film and television are the director's art. In theater, a play is rehearsed repeatedly until everyone on stage can trust the actors to perform the entire sequence from beginning to end. As a result, theatrical dialogue exhibits a high degree of coherence. At this level, stage performances better engage the actors' emotions, showcase their skill, and allow the audience to appreciate their craft. In the stage version of *Devil and Angel*, Mo Feili's emotional expressions in his dialogue vary significantly, from shouting hoarsely to softly sobbing. The delivery of dialogue follows the emotional highs and lows of the character, maintaining a natural flow.

On the other hand, film and television are editorial arts that emphasize the complexity of performance. Due to the intricate nature of film and television production, as well as constraints in time, personnel, and environment, scenes are artificially divided into separate shots. This means that film and television productions are created piece by piece and finalized through editing by the producers. As a result, new demands are placed on film and television actors to maintain the internal consistency of their characters across fragmented shooting schedules. For example, in *Devil and*

Angel, regardless of how frequently the filming of Mo Feili's scenes was interrupted, the progression of the character's actions and emotions remained seamless. Thus, the coherence of cinematic language differs greatly from that of theatrical language in terms of rehearsal and performance processes. While theater relies on the live continuity of the actor's performance, film and television depend on maintaining character coherence through precise editing and consistent acting across disjointed filming sessions.

4.4. Differences in the Flexibility of Dialogue

There are notable differences between stage drama and on-camera performances in terms of dialogue and delivery. In stage drama, once a performance begins, any changes directly impact the entire production, requiring actors to strictly adhere to the script and dialogue. Actors are not allowed to arbitrarily modify or omit lines, as this would disrupt the overall coherence and unity of the performance. Stage acting demands a high degree of immediate responsiveness from actors, enabling them to adapt their delivery to the atmosphere and audience reactions. This makes each performance unique and unrepeatable.

In contrast, on-camera performances for film and television are typically presented to a production crew rather than a live audience, allowing for greater flexibility in adjustments. While the script and dialogue provide the foundation, directors and actors can make localized modifications or incorporate improvisation during filming. These changes do not directly affect the final presentation because the finished product undergoes editing and post-production to create a fixed version. In film and television, the finalized dialogue and performances are set during editing. While actors' improvisations are guided by the script and director's requirements, there is still room for creativity. Many actors adjust lines or add personalized elements based on the context, and these improvisations sometimes surpass the original script in emotional impact. Directors may adapt their shooting approach to capture these moments, enhancing the flexibility and adaptability of film and television productions. Despite this flexibility, film and television productions result in a finalized product that is fixed and replicable, unlike the evolving nature of stage performances. The replicability of film and television allows for widespread distribution and commercial success but also introduces issues like rampant piracy. Nevertheless, this fixed nature ensures that these works can reach larger audiences and achieve lasting influence.

In summary, while stage drama and on-camera performances differ significantly, both emphasize the close integration of dialogue and performance. Stage drama prioritizes immediacy and uniqueness, whereas film and television offer more flexibility and opportunities for adjustment, resulting in a finalized product for distribution.

5. Conclusion

The treatment of dialogue in on-camera performances and stage drama stems from the positioning of characters, emphasizing emotional resonance with the audience and demonstrating broader inclusivity. From a linguistic perspective, the dialogue in stage drama and film/television shares similarities in presentation and creative principles but also exhibits significant differences. Stage drama prioritizes the rhythm and immediacy of language to convey intense emotional tension, while film and television favor a natural and life-like linguistic style to align with the audience's everyday experiences. Regardless of these differences, both forms require a solid understanding and mastery of linguistic fundamentals, including pronunciation, intonation, rhythm, and emotional expression. Performers must adapt their use of language to the specific characteristics of each medium. Stage performances rely on the actor's physical movements, facial expressions, and voice to enhance the

dramatic impact, while film and television, facilitated by the camera, focus more on nuanced emotional expressions and the intrinsic power of language.

By combining the unique features of each medium with their own practical experience, performers can flexibly apply various linguistic techniques to dialogue creation and performance. This enriches the dimensionality of characters, creating vivid and dynamic artistic portrayals. Such adaptability not only elevates the artistry of performances but also strengthens audience engagement, enhancing the emotional and expressive power of both film and stage drama.

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