THE EMPLOYMENT INTERVIEW

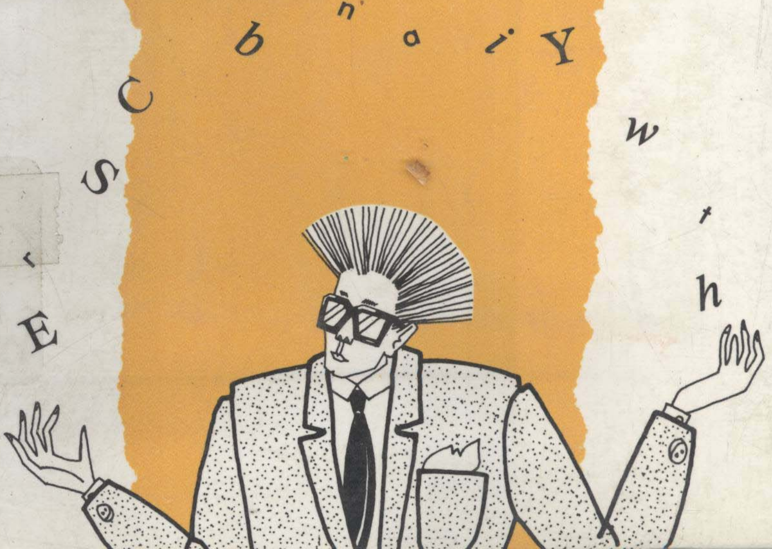
for both interviewers and candidates

成功的英語口試

—主持與應對

李慕白 著

PAUL M. LEE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To all interviewers 'Who know a
good chap when they see one' —

To all candidates who suffer under
them — this book

編輯例言

一、「成功的英語口試——主持與應對」係針對國內大專院校外文、國貿、工管、企管等系之需要而編寫。

二、最近教育部鼓勵私人興學，國際貿易系之設立爲其主要科系之一。而臺灣年來經濟之發展，國際貿易之拓展居功甚偉，因此與國際貿易有關之廠商對於新進職員之遴選，必須藉英文口試爲其主要之進階，而經理人員與求職人士對於「口試」(Interview)一事，多不明其範圍與程序，「求職口試」因而成爲一門專門之學問。本書對於口試者(interviewer)與被口試者(interviewee)如何發問，如何應對，均提供了一套有系統的方法。

三、絕大多數的僱主對於新進職員之錄用，口試爲唯一的選擇方法，但口試一項尚無專門課程可循；求職者亦多不知如何應對口試。近年來歐美各大學在外貿、工商、企管、人事管理各系均設有口試之課程。本書均有詳細及有系統之闡述。

四、本書作者在國內外大學任教英文逾四十年，現爲美國加州大學終身教授，與本書有關之著作有「最新商用英文」(*Modern Business English,* Cambridge University Press) 本公司爲配合國內之需要，特請其寫成此書。

五、本書每一章之後，附有習題問答，便利學者之練習。

幼獅文化事業公司　謹識

民國七十四年九月

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Preface

J'accuse! Most companies rely upon the employment interview as the sole means of selecting new staff – and make the fatal assumption that managers are capable of conducting a searching interview without previous training in the technique. This is not only grossly unfair – to interviewers and candidates alike – but it is also very costly. What, then, can be done? When writing this book, I set myself three aims:

1. To lift the stones at the base of the traditional interviewing edifice and see what is wriggling underneath.
2. To stamp on some selection maggots and offer some cures.
3. To bear in mind that the practical manager at the sharp end of the organization has little time for other than short, sharp and down-to-earth comment.

So – this book is not intended to be a scientific and erudite treatise on interview techniques but, rather more important, an invitation to the practical manager to take a step in the right direction.

P.M.L.

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1

So We Interview — But What Are We Looking For?

The process of selecting employees by interview is as old as employment itself. Faced with the task of picking the best from a band of strangers, the employer can use records and recommendations from other people in an attempt to infer future behavior from this second hand knowledge of the candidates' past – but the face-to-face interview will cement his decision. The fact is that the interview has been the principal tool of selection for so long that it is often continued even though there may be no clearly defined objective indicating what the process is to accomplish. It is largely due to this unquestioning faith in interviewing as a tradition – as part of the very fabric of business itself – that few employers give any consideration to the vital necessity for training in the technique. Despite a volume of evidence over many years that interview judgements are often inadequate, biased and always highly subjective, there has been little or nothing in the way of tangible pressure on employers to justify a change in this happily complacent attitude. But that was yesterday.

The acceptance of the successful candidate, the marriage ceremony of man and job, is now permeated with the sinister overtones of a drastic and often expensive divorce procedure. *'Each employee shall have the right not to be unfairly dismissed by his employer, and the remedy of an employee* *so dismissed . . . . . shall be by way of complaint to an industrial tribunal.'* The message is dire and simple; bad selection can cost a great deal of money. It behoves the employer, more than ever before, to look to his interviewing laurels.

A face-to-face interview is necessary and well justified in terms of the human relations value involved; *its purpose is to carry out a comprehensive and accurate background investigation – to seek out and verify the facts of past achievement and failure.* The name of the interviewing game is *perception* and *prediction.* The technique must enable the interviewer, having perceived the facts, to form a valid and reliable prediction of the candidate's future performance in a given role in comparison with the predictions made for other candidates. This is no mean task. The crux of such personal, face-to-face assessment is that information about the candidate filters through the highly subjective screen of the interviewer's own views, needs and prejudices. In short, the interview is not an *objective* tool of selection.

A fully objective selection process is one in which every assessor inspecting a certain performance arrives at precisely the same report. To achieve this measure of objectivity, the same degree of attention must be paid to exactly the same aspects of the performance. The human brain – and thank God for it – is utterly incapable of performing in this manner. That which is 'good' in the eys of one man is merely 'average' in the eyes of another. John's view of the essential ingredients of, say, 'leadership' varies with that held by Jack. We are all different and, when it comes to weighing up people and pronouncing on their qualities, our individual scales have infinite variance. There is really only one way in which the interviewer may partly overcome the barrier of his innate subjectivity, and that is to recognize the characteristics of his own views and prejudices. Very fortunately, there are some characteristics – or to be precise, failings – which are common to a great number of interviewers.

The Halo Error

An interviewer tends to judge a candidate in terms of a general attitude towards the subject's personality as a whole. Thus, it may happen that the average healthy male – when faced with a particularly delectable young miss who aspires to be his secretary – will tend to over-rate her typing ability. Those gorgeous legs have had their halo effect . . . . . Similarly, the interviewer who is an ardent golfer, having discovered that a candidate shares his love for the game, may tend to over-rate the applicant in terms of highly different qualities. It must always be remembered that an individual can be rich in one quality and lacking in another – and almost certainly is.

The Logical Error

This is a dangerous pitfall for the inexperienced interviewer. He is very often inclined to arrive at similar assessments in respect of qualities that *seem* logically related. The candidate who gives every appearance of being a quick thinker may *not* possess a high degree of intelligence. The poor applicant who possesses a "foxy" countenance, with deep-set and 'mean-looking' eyes, may *not* be a devious scoundrel.

The Error of Leniency

Again, there is a tendency for inexperienced interviewers to exercise undue leniency with candidates. When placed on the hot-seat and required to justify an over-lenient assessment, such timid souls usually protest that they cannot bring themselves to be 'too hard' on a candidate. The fact that their error may well land an applicant in the unhappy situation of trying to cope with a job that is totally unsuitable never seems to occur to these interviewers.

The Mirror-image Error

Who will be man enough to admit to this failing? The creed is simple: 'I know I am good – therefore, to be good, he must be like me'. Beware of the interviewer, Mr. Boss, who tells you that he knows exactly what he seeking in a candidate – he is probably in the grip of mirror-image fever. The honest interviewer who recognizes this failing in himself is well on the way to success.

The Contrast Error

The siniater opposite to the mirror-image symdrone. Too many interviewers tend to assess others in the opposite direction to themselves in given qualities. The reason is self-preservation, pure and simple – it happens and it must not.

Having discovered, albeit painfully, that it is necessary for an interviewer to examine the peculiar characteristics of his own views and prejudices – what then? The next task is to evaluate the nature and potential value of the information to be sought during the interview process. Luckily, research has provided some important milestones on this particular road to effective selection.

Skill

The quality of skill, which involves the ability to coordinate mind and body in the efficient performance of relatively complicated operations, is recognized as the most universally considered quality. Some jobs require varying degrees of many types of skill, e.g. mental, reading and reasoning, and certain positions require specific combinations. Other jobs, such as tool and die making, require certain levels of specific skills. The identifications of candidates' skills is an essential pre-requisite to any selection process.

Experience

The value of experience has had wide acceptance in the selection world. Most recruitment advertisements specify some form of experience as a required qualification for the job – which poses the question: where *do* 'starters' find work?

Age

Experience may be closely related to age and, conversely, age may be regarded as a very approximate measure of a candidate's experience. The somewhat hackneyed story of the job advertisement which, having quoted an upper age limit of 25, then requires 10 years' experience, has some foundation in fact. Many authorities have questioned the recent emphasis by employers on recruiting youth to the helm. There is growing evidence that the practice of lightly discarding experience and wisdom in preference for youth is a somewhat risky business. Employers – tread warily.

Sex

The question of sex and employment is now hopelessly enveloped in the vast and often pure cloud-kuckoo ramifications of *The Labor Act, 1985* – but this must not deter an employer from closely examining the requirement of the job concerned. As is well known, the Chinese legislation permits exceptions to be made in cases where a person's sex can be shown to be a 'genuine occupational qualification' and – hilarity apart – the possibility of such a qualification must be fully exploited.

Education and training

These qualifications obviously provide corroborative evidence of the abilities of the individual and, in many cases, levels of education and training are specified for the jobs concerned. It should be noted that many 'qualifications' gained in adult life, e.g. membership of certain societies and institutes, do not entail study or qualifying examinations – or, for that matter, entry on the basis of experience. A further point to remember is that the educational system in the Republic of China has been subjected to considerable change in recent years – older interviewers, do your homework.

Physical Qualities

Certain job specifications may require specific physical qualities, such as strength, perfect vision, or height. One important quality often overlooked by employers is color vision – an essential requirement for jobs that entail the identification of color codes, as in many forms of electrical engineering tasks.

Appearance

This criteria is a trap for the unwary. The domed forehead and thick rimmed spectacles do *not* provide evidence of intelligence. The question of appearance may be important – receptionist, sales jobs and so on – but mistakes are encouraged by interviewers assuming that appearance provides an indication of character, skill, ability, etc. The immaculate suit, impeccable accessories and an upright manner may be the trappings of an idiot.

Intelligence and Initiative

Many job specifications will state 'intelligence' and 'initiative' as essential pre-requisites for the post, and employers have a penchant for mentioning them in recruiting advertisements. The simple fact is that these personal qualities are extremely difficult to identify and measure without resource to specialized tests. The interviewer may succeed in making a broadbrush and thoroughly subjective assessment, but it will be of little or no value as an aid to *final* assessment of the candidate.

Maturity and Emotional Stability

Assessing these places the interviewer in a cleft stick. Maturity and emotional stability are essential to the acceptance of responsibility – a common and important requirement – but accurate assessment by means of interview is virtually impossible. A candidate's achievement in the past will enable the interviewer to arrive at a subjective judgement – a 'gut-feeling' will probably mislead.

Attitude to Work

The proficient interviewer will probe the candidate's reasons for applying for the job, his aims and intentions at work, and his ambitions – the resulting judgement will provide a valuable indication of the candidate's attitude to work.

Personality

Interviewer, beware. What is personality? Suffice it to say that, by the time we become adults, we display a range of relatively unchanging characteristics – some inherited and some learned along the rocky path of life. The sum and disposition of these traits can be termed 'personality'. The assessment of personality by interview was once summed up by an eminent and very senior British naval officer. 'Just ask yourself, m'boy, would you have the fella' in your Mess?' Without resource to personality tests – and heaven protect the employer who decides to dabble in these murky waters – the poor interviewer may have to follow the admiral's lead.

Hopefully, I have established that the employment interview is, and

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