Emotivity and face: Displaying and soliciting emotivity in Chinese mediation interactions

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Abstract

This paper builds on the previous studies of emotion in relation to face which suggest that emotion/emotional reactions are fundamental component of relational work (Culpeper, 2011; Langlotz and Locher, 2013; Spencer-Oatey, 2007; Terkourafi, 2007), and thus they might be constitutive of facework. Based on a detailed discussion of natural language data, it is argued that Chinese participants in a mediation session display their emotional concerns as part of their topical requests in order to solicit emotivity from the other party. A proposal is thus put forward to move beyond the current focus on lexemes in studies of face in Chinese, and to provide empirical evidence regarding emotivity invoked as a discursive resource in the interactional accomplishment of face. It is hoped that this paper can stimulate more research not only on face in Chinese in relation to emotivity, but also on other contexts in different languages and cultures where emic concepts of emotivity are strategically invoked in relational work.
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1. Introduction

The notion of face has been widely investigated since the seminal work of Goffman (1955, 1967) introduced it into academic discourse. It has generally been theorised and analysed in connection with a sense or feeling of pride, satisfaction, humiliation or embarrassment, something that every individual is assumed to be concerned about (Brown and Levinson, 1987; Goffman 1955; Spencer-Oatey, 2005). Yet despite the assumption that face is a universally held concern, studies across different languages and cultures have indicated that it can be conceptualised in different ways. The concept of face introduced by Goffman was heavily influenced by Hu's (1944) anthropological analysis of *mianzi* and *lian*, which are argued to be central to the social constructs of face for Chinese speakers. A number of studies of face in Chinese have subsequently followed, which have attempted to explicate the notions of *mianzi* and *lian* and their related collocations, as these are invariably embedded in folk and academic discourse about Chinese language, culture and social practice (e.g. André, 2013; Gao, 2009; Hinze, 2005; Ho, 1976; Mao, 1994; Yabuuchi, 2004; Yang, 2010; Yu, 2003). Yet despite the fact that the studies of emic concepts of face have shed considerable light on Chinese culture and social practice, they do not necessarily help us better understand how face actually arises in the first place (Arundale, 2013; Chang, 2008). In other words, there has been relatively little attention paid to how face is actually accomplished in face-to-

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face interactions amongst speakers of Chinese, with just a few notable exceptions (e.g. Chen, 1991; Su, 2009; Wang and Spencer-Oatey, 2015).

Another issue is that, while research into the role of emotion in communication has been increasingly undertaken in various disciplines, for instance, in social psychology (e.g. Ekman and Friesen, 1969; Manstead et al., 2004; Gross, 2007) and conversation analysis (e.g. Coupler-Kuhlen, 2009; Heritage, 2011; Peräkylä and Sorjonen, 2012; Kupertz, 2014), emotion has not been the object of extensive study in (interpersonal) pragmatics, particularly in relation to the notion of face, despite numerous calls for it to be studied in more depth (Culpeper et al., 2014; Langlotz and Locher, 2013, 2017; Spencer-Oatey, 2007). In order to examine the role and influence of emotions vis-a-vis face, Langlotz and Locher (2017) have suggested the inner-psychological feeling states corresponding to the conceptualisation of self and the involved situated identities in relational work should be taken as a whole in order to understand the complex system of connections between emotion and the management of im/politeness (p. 291). Nevertheless, while it has been well established that emotion is immanent to face, there have been few systematic studies that examine how emotion is drawn upon as a resource in the interactional accomplishment of face in interaction.

The aim of this paper is therefore to demonstrate the interconnection between face and emotion in social interactions through a detailed interactional analysis focusing on attempts by participants in mediation interactions in Taiwan to display and solicit emotivity. The analysis highlights the way in which displaying and soliciting or invoking emotion (*ganqing*/*renqing*[1]) and empathy/sympathy (*tiliang*) from their co-participants is intimately related to the interactional accomplishment of face, and appears designed to strategically achieve their interactional goals, in the specific interactional context addressed here, a mutually agreed amount of financial compensation for both at-fault and victim parties in a mediation setting. I begin this paper by first considering how the relationship between face and emotion has been theorised thus far, and discuss the significance as well as the relevance of emic concepts of emotivity in Chinese to such debates.[2] In the subsequent analysis, I report on an instance of displaying and soliciting emotivity, a practice that was found to recurrently occur across a dataset of recordings of Taiwanese business mediation interactions. This paper involves close interactional analysis of an extended sequence where the participants are negotiating the amount of financial compensation for a car accident. This sequence is analysed in order to elucidate how participants explicitly orient to or acknowledge emotivity as a means to accomplish their own (competing) interactional goals. The analysis shows how participants index and interpret the acts of displaying and soliciting emotivity by means of a chain of implied requests (and refusals) in the course of the mediation interaction. It is in this sense, then, that emotivity cannot only be treated as a product of threats to face or 'losing face', but also as constitutive of face itself. The implications of this analysis for face, relational work, im/politeness research more broadly are then considered.

2. Face and emotivity

2.1. Previous work linking facework and emotions

While Goffman (1955, 1967) noted in passing the affective outcomes of ''losing face'', Brown and Levinson (1987) subsequently claimed that displays of emotions or showing lack of control of emotions is potentially face-threatening, with cultural and situational expectations about what and how feelings should be displayed linked to the notions of face and politeness (p.28). Further theorisation of the link between face and emotion in pragmatics can be traced back to Spencer-Oatey's (2005) claim that emotions are one of the key bases for the ''rapport'' between interactants being perceived as maintained, enhanced or damaged. She claims the relationship between face and rapport is twofold: face is associated with ''affective sensitivity'', as well as with ''emotional reactions''. According to Spencer-Oatey's (2000, 2005, 2007, 2008) rapport management theory, people develop preconceptions as to what frequently or typically happens in a given context and come to expect particular behaviours. They may then develop a sense that others should or should not perform particular behaviours. As a result, people start perceiving rights and obligations in relation to these, and so if the expected behaviour is not forthcoming, for instance, those people may then feel annoyed (Spencer-Oatey, 2008:16). In other words, emotions naturally arise when there is an expectation associated with social behaviours, and thus emotional reactions may also be involved in interactions where face becomes salient. Spencer-Oatey (2007:644) points out that face itself can also be associated with affective sensitivity, as ''our attention is captured because we are affectively sensitive to those evaluations''. If others' perceptions of one's behaviours are not in line with one's expectations, some emotional reactions will likely result, which may, in turn, crucially impact on the perceived relationship between interactants.

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[1] *Ganqing* and *renqing* are the two key emic notions of emotivity in Chinese and are both translated as 'emotion' in English. They are explained in more detail in the following section.

[2] It is worth mentioning here that in this paper I only focus on explicit meta-discourse relating to emotivity which arises in interactions, rather than the biological or psychological underpinnings of emotions. In other words, meta-comments about relational work that involve emotional assessments in relation to face and how the interactants orient to displaying or invoking emotivity are the main foci of this paper.