



# Silence and face-work in two chinese TV talk shows

Lee Cher Leng\*, Chen Yao, Tan Gek Leng

National University of Singapore, Singapore

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 31 October 2011

Received in revised form

14 January 2013

Accepted 25 January 2013

Available online 11 February 2013

### Keywords:

Silence

Face-work

Politeness

Chinese

Talk shows

Frame

## ABSTRACT

This study examines the phenomenon of silence and face-work in Chinese TV talk shows. In general, TV talk shows aim at entertaining the audience by interviewing celebrities either about their work or their personal life, subjects that will interest the audience. Since air time is limited, silence in such TV talk shows is not preferred. However, our study shows that there are many instances of silences in these talk shows. Silences are seen as meaningful turns in the conversations. The data is taken from two Chinese TV talk shows: *Lu Yu You Yue* (A Date with Lu Yu, henceforth *LY*) which is a popular information talk show in China and *Kang Xi Lai Le* (Here Comes Kang Xi, henceforth *KX*) from Taiwan. This study explores how the frame or expectations of the type of a talk show will determine how the silences are used in relation to face-work given the media specificity and cultural expectations.

© 2013 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## 1. Introduction

Since the nineties, there have been more and more studies on English media talk (Fairclough, 1995; Hutchby, 2006; Scannell, 1991) including radio talk (Hutchby, 1991, 1992, 1995, 1996a, 1996b), TV talk shows (Carbaugh, 1988; Gregori-Signes, 2000; Ilie, 2001; Livingstone and Lunt, 1994; Martinez, 2003; Tolson, 1991, 2001), and quiz shows (Culpeper, 2005). This paper focuses on Chinese media talk examining the relationship of silence and face-work in Chinese TV talk shows.

The genre of talk show interaction is semi-institutional (Ilie, 2001) in that it is not as institutionalized as news interviews (Jucker, 1986; Greatbatch, 1992; Clayman, 1993; Heritage and Roth, 1995). Talk-shows can be regarded as a particular kind of face-to-face conversation (Schegloff, 1995). They may consist of several discourse types at the same time, i.e. information and entertainment ('infotainment'), news interview, celebrity interviews, as well as casual conversation.

There are many scholarly works on silence in various types of discourse. The more general studies, to name a few, include (Jaworski, 1997; Kurzon, 1997; Saville-Troike, 1985, 1994). Other studies of silence focus on the functions of silence (Ephratt, 2008), silence in particular speech community (Agyekum, 2002; Kogure, 2007; Morsback, 1988), in the classroom (Leander, 2002; Liu, 2002), and in the courtroom (Easton, 1998; Mirfield, 1997; Cotterill, 2005). So far, there has yet to be a study on silence in TV talk-shows. Although there have been some studies of (im)politeness in media talk (Culpeper, 2005; Hutchby, 2008), the focus has not been on silence. This study aims to answer the following question: is there a correlation between silences in TV talk shows and politeness? If there is, how are they related?

The approach in this study draws on research in (im)politeness (Brown and Levinson, 1987; Culpeper, 2005), discourse and conversational analysis (Du Bois et al., 1993; Gumperz, 1982; Hutchby and Johnfitt, 1998; Sacks et al., 1974; Schegloff, 1995; Schiffrin, 1994; Tannen, 1984, 1992), as well as media studies (Hutchby, 1991; Livingstone and Lunt, 1994; Scannell, 1991; Tolson, 1991). The data is taken from 10 episodes of *LY* and *KX* broadcasted between 2007 and 2009. In TV talk shows, one second pauses are considered long as viewers will be waiting for what will follow and talk shows are expected not to have any 'dead air'. Thus, pauses greater than 1 s are considered as silence in this study. These silences are transcribed in the contexts using the conventions of (Honda, 2002). Silences related to (im)politeness or face-works are noted.

The structure of this paper is as follows: Section 2 discusses silence in relation to politeness and in TV talk shows. Section 3 explores how the frame or cultural expectations determines the tone of the TV talk show. Section 4 analyses how the host and guests of *LY* use

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [chsleecl@nus.edu.sg](mailto:chsleecl@nus.edu.sg) (C.L. Lee).

silence. Section 5 analyses how the hosts and guests of *KX* use silence. Section 6 compares the two TV talk shows in terms of silence of the hosts and guests, as well as TV talk shows in the US. Section 7 concludes the paper.

## 2. Silence

### 2.1. Silence and politeness

In the early classic work of politeness theory by Brown and Levinson (Brown and Levinson, 1987), silence was not discussed in the light of politeness. However, there was a breakthrough when researchers noticed that silence is an important feature of politeness (Jaworski and Stephens, 1998; Kurzon, 1997; Lebra, 1987; Sifianou, 1997; Tannen and Saville-Troike, 1985). This is especially so in particular cultures such as the Native Americans (Saville-Troike, 1985) and Japanese (Nakane, 2006). It is found that silence can be used in social encounters to avoid the imposition, confrontation or embarrassment which may not be inevitable when one uses verbal expression (Hutchby, 2008; Jaworski, 1993, 1997; Jaworski and Stephens, 1998).

It has been observed that on one hand, silence can be used as a positive politeness strategy when it functions as a sign of solidarity and rapport; on the other hand, it can be used as a negative politeness strategy if it functions as a distancing tactic (Sifianou, 1997). Similarly, while silence has a positive value in avoiding imposition, it can also be 'the least polite' form because it "places high inferential demands on the addressee" (Sifianou 1997: 73). In addition, it is also possible to use silence as an off-record strategy when it serves as the most indirect form of a speech act (Saville-Troike, 1985; Tannen, 1985). In politeness research, it is important to avoid making sweeping statements about cultures (Eelen, 2001; Mills, 2003; Sifianou, 1992; Spencer-Oatey 2000). Nakane (2006: 1812) rightly points out that we need to "base our analysis and discussion of silence and politeness on participants' behavior and perceptions in relation to the local context of interaction, the specific institutional context, and the wider cultural context." (Holmes and Stubbe, 2003; Mills, 2003; Watts, 2003). Most research on silence have been carried out in classroom interactions (Leander, 2002; Liu, 2002; Nakane, 2007) or on cultures that give meaning to silences, little is known about silence and face in TV talk shows.

### 2.2. In TV talk shows

Tolson (2006) identifies three key concepts of media studies: Interactivity, performativity, and liveliness. In talk-shows, the host and guests share the institutional role as entertainers/co-entertainers, whereas the audience members are institutionally regarded as entertainees. Talk shows are also audience-oriented events that target simultaneously a multiple audience: the directly addressed audience (i.e. show guests), the on-looking audience (i.e. those present in the studio), and over-hearing audience (home viewers). The first two audiences are actual or potential co-participants in the show while the home viewers are intended as recipients. In studying silence in TV talk shows, one has to bear in mind that while the host and guest are interacting, they are at the same time performing for the studio audience and the home viewers at large at the same time. Therefore, one has to consider how the host, the guests, the responses of the immediate audience, and the expectations of home viewers affect the production and interpretation of silences in relation to the face work.

Since talk shows are clearly a form of entertainment, one does not expect there to be many occurrences of silence in the mediated text. A host may remain silent while waiting for the guest to answer; a guest may be silent while searching for an answer. Yet there are some occurrences of silences that have more implied meaning involving face work. Silence can be seen as a turn in conversational analysis in that there may be no speech (Anderson, 2008; Burgoon et al., 1996; Richmond et al., 2008) but through gesture (Axtell, 1991; Bull, 1987) or facial expressions, the person is still communicating. Silence from the host may mean missing a turn to let the guest elaborate, or maybe the host does not understand what the guest enough to continue, or it may serve as a turn for the host gesturing the audience to pressure the guest into giving a particular answer. Silence from the guest may mean that the guest is unwilling to answer the question, or tongue tied, or pondering over the question from the host. This paper will show that given the different frame or expectation of the particular talk show, silence may be used intentionally or unintentionally to save one's face or to threaten another's face.

In a talk show, although the show host is generally supposed to have control over the question-asking, the show guests are also entitled to ask questions and make non-elicited comments; in this way they are able to challenge the pre-established asymmetrical power relations. As a result, the relations between the hosts and guests, on the one hand, and between the hosts and the audience, on the other, are constructed and re-constructed so as to involve new and unpredictable, sometimes even provoking, forms of interaction. It is precisely this dynamic interaction among host-guest and host-audience that may sometimes bring about face threatening moments of tension and embarrassment. For the host, these FTA moments may occur when he/she fails to understand the implications of what the guest has just said and therefore is not sure how to continue with the conversation. For the guest, these FTA moments may occur when he/she is put on the spot to answer questions that he/she does not want to answer. These are the moments when silence is used as a rescue strategy.

## 3. Frames and cultural expectations

This paper explores one TV talk show from Mainland China, and another from Taiwan. Although there are many talk shows in the USA, these Chinese talk shows are culturally rather different from those in the USA. Talk shows in the USA include different categories such as late-night talk (e.g. *The Tonight Show*, *Late Night with Jimmy Fallon*, and *The Late Late Show*), daytime talk (e.g. *Oprah*, *The Ellen DeGeneres Show*, *The View*), news personality interviews (e.g. *Piers Morgan Tonight*, *Anderson Cooper 360*), and gossip/shock talk (*Maury* and *Jerry Springer*).

The two Chinese talk shows discussed in this paper feature interviews with celebrities, but the frames are quite different (Goffman, 1974). In this paper, I will use the idea of 'frame' or 'expectation' to mean how a particular talk show chooses to present itself to the audience. For example, in a standoffish talk show, the host, guest, and studio audience as well as TV audience will expect the show to follow a more respectful mode of interaction. In contrast, when the frame or expectation of another talk show is one where the hosts are given full license to embarrass the guests, then the hosts, guests, studio audience and TV audience are all tuned-in with the same expectations. The frame or expectation of a particular TV

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1100639>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1100639>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)