Face and Face Practices in Chinese Talk-in-Interaction: An Empirical Analysis of Business Interactions in Taiwan

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ABSTRACT

While face in academic discourse was firstly introduced by Goffman (1967), the notion of face was actually originally borrowed from the Chinese concept of mianzi. Face is thus an integral part of East-Asian cultures, particularly in Chinese society (Gao 1998, 2009; Ho 1976). Face has also been adopted as a means of examining various social phenomena, such as (im)politeness, conflict management, and impression management (Arundale 2006; Brown and Levinson 1987; Goffman 1967; Ting-Toomey 1988, 2005). This research aims to integrate emic and etic perspectives on face and face practices in Chinese (Chang and Haugh 2013), by examining how face is interactionally achieved and managed in actual Chinese institutional settings. This research builds on my previous honours dissertation (Chang 2008), which focused on interactional aspects of face in Taiwanese business settings. A key finding of that study was that it illustrated the significance of employing conversational analysis, rather than imposing theoretically-defined notions that may misrepresent face practices in interactional discourse (Chang and Haugh 2011b). However, to generalise from these findings of my honours dissertation requires larger and more diverse data sets. This research will pay particular attention to emic conceptualisations of face in Chinese and face practices, which to date have received only passing attention in the literature, in order to investigate how the participants interpret the actions and meanings in the course of the interaction in the business settings.

There are five major face practices identified through the examination of the interactional data in this research, which are: establishing the participation framework, “evoking formality” through code-switching, strategic embarrassment, soliciting emotivity, “doing delicacy” and responding indirectly. They have shed light on the
Chinese folk notions of *guanxi* (social network), the dimension of *zijiren* (insider) and *wairen* (outsider), emic concepts of emotivity (i.e. *ganqing*, *renqing*, sincerity and consideration) and *mianzí*/*lian*, which should be all treated more holistically and need to be explicated as part of the complexity of Chinese face practices (c.f. Hwang 1987; Chang and Holt 1994). In addition, it is also suggested that the interactional code-switching can be applied to negotiate interpersonal relationships in face-threatening situations as a face practice. Face practices have thereby highlighted the diversity and dynamics of social communication in Chinese society as well as revealing the underlying purpose in the business negotiation/mediation contexts, namely, the interactional goal, which all participants attempt to achieve.

This research has adopted the Face Constituting Theory (FCT) as the theoretical framework to analyse the interactional achievement of face (Arundale 1999, 2006, 2009, 2010a, 2010b), which takes into account factors of *guanxi* (social network) and relational entitlement as the two main underpinnings of face in terms of connection and separation manifested by the interactants in Taiwanese business settings. Through the examination of face and face practices in the interactional data, the analysis has found that the dialectic interplay of *guanxi* and the relational entitlement has illuminated face as *relationality*-focused rather than identity-focused. In other words, face should be framed as relational phenomena, not as a personal possession, in order to avoid under-theorising face, particularly for analysing specific cultural interactions.

On the other hand, face is arguably both co-constituted in and constitutive of interaction, namely as cognitive and interactive constructs in the course of interaction. The cognitive construct of face (either *guanxi* or relational entitlement) exercises the
recipient design which leads to dynamic face practices in the interactions, whereas the interactive construct affords the interpreting of the participants’ relational connection and separation, which is conjointly co-constituted through the sequences with others (Arundale 2010b).

With the inclusion of a concurrent analysis of face practices, emotivity and related emic concepts of face, this research consequently has argued that the interactional achievement of guanxi and relational entitlement is the manifestation of connection and separation in Taiwanese interpersonal communication. It has demonstrated the interactants’ epistemological and ontological commitments of face through analysing the interactional data. This research thus aims to broaden the theories of face and face practice in Chinese and contribute to current studies.
SIGNED STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university.

To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

A NOTE ON ETHICAL CLEARANCE

An ethical clearance to collect sensitive interactional data from human subjects (LAL 04/10/HREC) was obtained from Research Ethics Office for Research, Griffith University in April 2010.
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• ‘Collaborative creation of spoken language corpora’. In Tim Greer, Yuriko Kite and Donna Tatsuki (eds.), *Pragmatics and Language Learning* (Forthcoming) *Volume 13*, National Foreign Language Resource Center, University of Hawai‘i, Honolulu (with M. Haugh).

• ‘Understanding (Im)politeness across cultures: an interactional approach to raising sociopragmatic awareness’, *Taiwan Journal of Linguistics* (Forthcoming) (with M. Haugh).

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