
Ritualistic self-display: The interruptions in a Chinese academic talk

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Abstract: This paper engages in a politeness-based investigation of cases when forms of interruption operate as ritualistic self-display. By “ritualistic self-display” we refer to instances of language use in which an interruption is a form of “showing off,” by means of which the interrupting person indicates their skill, power, social status, and so on. We point out that such instances of language use may not merely trigger complex evaluations. Even in hierarchical settings in which ritualistic self-display could be easily condoned, paradoxically it may be utilized by the interrupted person as an interactional resource to boost her or his self-image, i.e., ritualistic self-display is a leeway for a counter-display. As a case study, we examine an incident that took place in a Chinese institutional setting. Chinese data has particular relevance to the study of ritualistic self-display, considering that Chinese is often perceived as a lingua-culture in which interruption is not tolerated due to prevailing social hierarchies.

Keywords: interruption; ritualistic behaviour; self-display; politeness research, scholarly communication

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