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Title: Linguistic Representation of “Self” and Narrative Co-Construction: A Comparative Discourse Analysis of Celebrity Interviews in American English and Mandarin Chinese.

Abstract

Drawing on 600-minutes of TV/radio interviews featuring celebrity guests, broadcast in Mandarin Chinese in China and American English in the U.S., respectively, this paper is a comparative discourse analysis of the interview as a form of narrative co-construction, as situated within the two cultures.

A preliminary analysis of six Mandarin interviews and six English interviews suggests that English speakers assume a parallel “you” vs. “I” dynamic in co-constructing the interviewee’s personal narrative; English interviewers tend to propel the narrative through mechanisms of A-Event and B-Event (Labov, 1972), i.e., the interviewer shares personal experience and/or reveals personal knowledge about the interviewee, which in effect elicits the interviewee’s autobiographical account. In contrast, the Mandarin interviews manifest a triangular structure whereby the interviewer assumes a mediating role between public consciousness and the interviewee (cf. Xiang, 2003), i.e., the interviewer highlights the general public’s knowledge gaps, and frames the interviewee’s upcoming narration as being different from, and corrective of, public knowledge. Particularly, both the interviewer and interviewee in the Chinese data highlight the conflict between the interviewee as a social individual (e.g. *wo* ‘I’, *ni* ‘you’) and the interviewee as “private” self (e.g. *wo/ni ziji* “I myself” “you yourself”). This duality in the linguistic construction of “self” is not obvious in the English data.

Further, the English interviewers display empathy and uptake the interviewee’s narrative primarily through confirmation requests (e.g. “Really?”) and Response Cries (Goffman, 1978), which stay outside of the narrative and originate from the interviewer, an independent, active listener. In contrast, a Mandarin interviewer often displays empathy by staying within the narrative, assuming an expressive narrative frame (Li and Zubin, 1995), particularly by resorting to utterances with a null subject or using the bare reflexive, *ziji* ‘self’, without an explicit co-reference. In such cases, the distinction between the interviewer as elicitor and interviewee as story-teller blurs.