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

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## 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.

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## 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-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 Johnffitt, 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

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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

talk show determines how silences are used intentionally or unintentionally to observe face works or perform face threatening acts. The act of silence, the interpretation of it, and reception of it are all based on the given frame of expectation.

The China TV talk show is *Lu Yu You Yue* or *A Date with Lu Yu* (henceforth *LY*). *LY* is probably the most popular Chinese interview Talk show, broadcast on the *Fenghuang* (Phoenix) Channel and *Central* Channel weekly. It consists of a regular anchor host, Lu Yu, a celebrity guest who could be an actor, sportsman, singer, or writer, an on-looking studio audience, and home viewer TV audience. This China TV talk show aims at giving the celebrities a platform to discuss their personal struggles in achieving success. It is a standard chat show which treats guests and studio participants with some degree of deference. The audience of this Talk show ranges from young to old. In *LY*, the interviewee is the center of the show while the interviewer is mostly leading the interview with questions, rephrasing the questions, listening attentively and giving feedback to the answers.

The second talk show *Kang Xi Lai Le* (henceforth *KX*) (Chinese: 康熙來了; pinyin: *Kāngxī Lái Le*; literally *Kang Xi Arrives* or *Here Comes KangXi*) is a Taiwanese comedy talk show hosted by Dee Hsu (徐熙娣 a.k.a. Xiao S) and Kevin Tsai (蔡康永). The program's name *Kangxi* is derived from the names of both hosts: the word “康” (*Kang*) was taken from the Chinese name of Kevin Tsai and the word “熙” (*Xi*) was taken from the Chinese name of Dee Hsu (this is also a pun on the name of the Emperor *KangXi* of the Qing Dynasty). *KX* is the most successful talk show in Taiwan since its debut in 2004. It has also become very popular across the world among Chinese speaking audiences who watch uploaded re-runs over the internet or through DVDs. Unlike most talk show programs in Mainland China, the hosts in *KX* often embarrass celebrities by asking them sensitive questions, while employing comedic banter in front of a live studio audience. The aim of this TV talk show is to create embarrassing situations for the guests by asking sensitive questions in the name of the viewers' entertainment. The interaction is more complex as the hosts may try to out-do one another in embarrassing the guests. In this case, the main figure of the talk show is the host or hostess. They are given the liberty to ask any question, aiming to elicit laughter from the audience. The interviewees are not expected to be respected. In other words, the hosts are not expected to give face to the interviewees, nor save their face in any way. The more face-threatening they are with the interviewees, the more thrilling it is for the audience. The interactions are sometimes staged to a degree, the hosts having rehearsed some of the questions with the guests beforehand. However, this does not render the FTA null, because of the added element of audience participation and impromptu questioning and responses.

Although humor is a large part of the celebrity-oriented TV talk shows in the USA, they are never overtly exploitative or embarrassing. For example, Ellen DeGeneres may tease a celebrity about his or her personal life and relationship status but will quickly divert to another issue if she senses her subject is uncomfortable. However, *KX*, is comparatively, outright merciless. *LY* is not meant to put the guests on the spot, although the host may sometimes use an awkward or clumsy turn of phrase.

In the USA, the hosts of TV talk shows never try to embarrass the interviewees, instead employing self-deprecating humor, therein threatening his own face. While self-deprecating humor is sometimes employed by the hosts of the Chinese TV talk shows, they tend not to threaten their own face as often as those in the US do. *LY* does not aim to embarrass the interviewee in the name of entertainment the same way *KX* does, but may put the interviewee on the spot in the process of the interview, intentionally or otherwise. This paper will discuss the occurrence of silence in these two Chinese TV talk shows with respect to politeness and face-works given the media specificities.

There are more and more studies on talk shows in relation to politeness and face work. Honda's (2002) paper on conflict management in Japanese public affairs talk shows has shown how conflict management is largely shaped by two opposing processes: 'conflict' and 'face-work' against conflict. Culpeper's (2005) work on impoliteness and entertainment in the television quiz show: *The Weakest Link* argues that the salience of 'impolite' signals engulf the context, with the result that targets often take offense in contexts where they theoretically should not. He shows that although the context is one that is supposed to be entertaining, the target who receives impoliteness can still take offense. While Culpeper studies the impoliteness that constitutes the entertainment factor, this paper studies the silences in the TV talk shows. Although these silences per se have no voicing, the expressions on their faces will tell us what these silences mean. According to Harris (2001) [886], the most commonly reported non-verbal behaviors associated with embarrassment include “blushing, smiling, avoiding eye contact, and self-touching”. These emotions can be seen as symptoms of face-loss (see Goffman, 1967:8). Moreover, the conversation that follows these silences will show whether or not the guests are comfortable or they are offended.

#### 4. Silence and politeness in Lu Yu You Yue (*LY*)

This section examines how the host and guests in *LY* use silences in the TV talk show bearing in mind the specificities of a TV talk show. In other words, silence is used when the host interacts with the guest as well as with the studio audience given the circumstances that they are on national or international TV. *LY* is supposed to be a standoffish program, with the host interviewing successful celebrities, writers, etc. to give them a platform to talk about their success stories. Given the frame of *LY*, the host is expected to ask questions that will make the guests look good.

##### 4.1. Host

###### 4.1.1. Host saves own's face

As mentioned earlier, it is relatively uncommon for hosts of Chinese talk shows to mock themselves the way Ellen DeGeneres may talk about how silly she was as a child compared to an accomplished young guest, or how Conan O'Brien may poke fun at his pale complexion and gangly build. In other words, the Chinese hosts do not often do FTAs on themselves to elicit laughter. In the excerpts below, we will see how Lu Yu uses silence to save her own face instead.

In excerpt (1) below, Lu Yu is interviewing the famous sports commentator, Huang Jianxiang who tells her that his essay was published in a magazine while he was in school. Upon hearing this, Lu Yu remains silent for 2 s (line 6). After this silence, the audience claps their hands and cheers (line 7). Lu Yu then turns to the audience to ask if the publication is of any significance (lines 8–10). Some audiences gave her the answer (line 11). Lu Yu's silence shows that when she is unsure about the implication of what the guest is trying to imply, she will remain silent in case she makes a wrong comment. Given the specificity of a live audience, Lu Yu is seen to use silence to save her own face while waiting for the audience to help her along.

(1)

Background:		
Host: Lu Yu.		
Guest: 黄健翔 Huang Jianxiang. One of China's best-known TV Sports commentators.		
In this episode, they are reading and talking about an essay that Guest Huang wrote in his high school days.		
1	黄 Guest Huang	其实我个人以为这不是我最高水平, qishi wo geren renwei zhe bu shi wo zui gao shuiping Actually I personally think this isn't my the best level. "I for one don't think this was my best work."
2		但是老师觉得这比较好。 danshi laoshi juede zhe bijiao hao But teacher thought this better. "But the teacher thought it was the best anyway."
3	鲁 Host Lu	这登在什么地方? zhe deng zai shenme difang This published at what place? "Where was it published?"
4	黄 Guest Huang	呃-, 全国十三所重点中学的, 作文通讯杂志上。 e quanguo shisan suo zhongdian zhongxue de zuowen tongxun zashi shang ASP nationwide thirteen CL main high school POS essay journal magazine "Er-, <i>Essay Collection Journal</i> , featuring essays from the students of thirteen popular high schools nationwide."
5		((朝鲁微微点头)) ((Slightly nods at Host.))
6	→ 鲁 Host Lu	...(2.0) ...(2.0)
7	众 Audience	((鼓掌)) ((Applause))
8	鲁 Host Lu	((朝观众))这是很了不起的是吧? zhe shi hen liaobuqi de shi ba This is very great yes? ((Face turning to some audience)) "It was marvelous, wasn't it?"
9		...(1.0)是很了不起的( / hang / )? shi hen liaobuqi de / hang / Is very great ASP? "Truly marvelous, right?"
10		...(0.8) 啊? a ASP? ...(0.8) "Sorry?"
11	众 Audience	((有人小声回答鲁)) ((Somebody talks to Host.))
12	鲁 Host Lu	挺出名的。 ting chuming de Quite prolific "Quite prolific."
13		((扭头问那位观众))是他这篇作文出名还是这本杂志出名? shi ta zhe pian zuowen chuming haishi zhe ben zazhi chuming Is his this essay famous or is this journal famous? ((Turns again to the audience she talked with just now.)) "Was his <b>essay</b> very prolific, or was the <b>journal</b> ?"
14	众 Audience	((笑)) ((Laughs))
15	黄 Guest Huang	不, 我现在肯定比这杂志有名儿。 bu wo xianzai kending bi zhe zazhi you mingr No, I now must more than this journal famous. "Hey, now I'm definitely more famous than the journal."
16	全体 All	((全场笑)) ((All Laugh.))

《鲁豫有约-黄健翔》(LY2<sup>nd</sup> Feb 2007)Supplementary material related to this article can be found online at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.dcm.2013.01.002>.

## 4.1.2. Host does FTA through audience

In excerpt 2 below, Lu Yu is interviewing leading national sports commentator Huang Jianxiang. Lu Yu reiterates three times (in lines 1, 4, 8) that Huang is a good singer; ostensibly hinting that she wants to sing for the audience. However, in all three instances, Huang denies that he is a good singer, indirectly declining her invitation. Lu Yu then remains silent while gesturing to the audience, encouraging them to pressure Huang into singing. Here, Lu Yu is doing an indirect FTA on Huang through the audience. In the USA, although some subtle pressure may be applied, one hardly finds a host doing an FTA through the audience in such an overt manner.

(2)

Background:		
Host: Lu Yu.		
Guest: 黄健翔 Huang Jianxiang.		
In this episode, the topic is Huang's hobby of singing.		
1	鲁 Host Lu	哎真的你真的是不是唱歌很好? ai zhende ni zhende shi bu shi changge hen hao ASP really you really yes not yes sing very well "Say, you're actually pretty good at singing, aren't you?"
2	黄 Guest Huang	没有没有没有, 我就是...(0.8) meiyou meiyou meiyou wo jiu shi No no no, I just be "No no no, I'm just..."
3		中国人就 [这儿] zhongguoren jiu zhe dianr Chinese people just this only "Chinese people simply"
4	鲁 Host Lu	[我没让你唱你别 [紧张 wo mei rang ni chang ni bie jin zhang I not ask you sing you don't be nervous "I'm not asking you to sing, don't be so nervous."
5	黄 Guest Huang	[ [中国人就这儿娱乐, zhongguoren jiu zhe dianr yule Chinese people just only this entertainment "Just to entertain the locals."
6		看看电影儿, 唱唱歌儿, 打个牌, 你说, kankan dianyingr changchang ger da ge pai ni shuo see see movies, sing sing songs, play some cards, you say "seeing movies, singing, playing cards, and so on "
7		踢个球儿, 还能干嘛。 ti ge qiur hai neng gan ma play some ball, besides can do what "playing football, nothing else then."
8	鲁 Host Lu	不是, 你〈MRC 很客观 MRC〉那个=评价自己唱歌 bu shi ni hen keguan na ge pingjia ziji changge no, you very earnestly that judge your singing "But, in earnest, do you think your singing, "
9		是好还是不好 shi hao haishi bu hao is good or not good "is it good, or isn't it? "
10	黄 Guest Huang	一般。... 一般。((看着鲁)) yiban yiban normal. normal. "Just so so. Just so so. ((Looking at Host))
11	→ 鲁 Host Lu	...(2.0) ((看着黄)) ...(2.0) ((Keeps looking at Huang.))
12	众 Audience	((鼓掌起哄要求黄唱一个)) ((Applauses, someone shouting and asking Huang to sing a song.))

## 4.2. Guests in LY

### 4.2.1. Guests use silence as ‘Don’t do the FTA strategy’

In LY, there are instances when the guests use silence as a ‘Don’t do the FTA strategy’. These instances occur when the host asks an awkward question that would be difficult for the guest to respond without being rude to the host. Given that the guest is well aware that he is facing a live audience and national TV, he will try to respond as politely as he can to save his own image. The guest then chooses to use silence as a ‘Don’t do the FTA strategy’ to the host to avoid being impolite. In TV talk shows in the USA, the host hardly does this to the guest. Most of the time, the host will ‘rescue’ the guest from awkward situations or even make fun of themselves to diffuse the pressure on the guest.

In excerpt (3), Lu Yu is interviewing the international famous martial arts movie star Jet Li. Jet Li recounts the difficult times he went through in life, commenting that when one is faced with great adversity and is still not afraid of death, one becomes courageous. Jet Li is clearly showing that he had to face many odds to arrive at his present state of success. Instead of picking this up, Lu Yu retorts that there is no need to go to such lengths and suggests that Jet Li should have just quit being an actor given the circumstances. Suggesting this to Jet Li is highly inappropriate on the part of Lu Yu as a host. If this were said during a face-to-face conversation, one might expect Jet Li to be annoyed and vehemently refute her suggestion. However, since this is a TV talk show, Jet Li would need to be polite; therefore keeping silent for 2.4 s. Jet Li’s strained smile and direct stares show that he is obviously upset with what Lu Yu says (see Anderson, 2008 for eye expressions). He is refraining from offering his rebuttal and is also trying to think how best to reply, as he is facing live and TV audiences. After the silence, he replies by asking the rhetorical question *shima* or “is that so” (line 13). By remaining silent, he refrains from doing the FTA to Lu Yu after receiving a highly inappropriate suggestion from her. After regaining composure, he asks Lu Yu in return that she might also consider quitting her job as a TV host under the circumstance of strong self-consciousness (lines 16–17), clearly using this to subtly get back at Lu Yu. Lu Yu agrees and Jet Li uses another rhetorical question *dui, shima?* or “really?” (line 19) to show his displeasure at her inappropriate line of questioning.

(3)

Background:			
Host: Lu Yu.			
Guest: 李连杰 Jet Li.			
In this episode, Guest Jet Li is talking about the hard time he experienced when he just started to develop his career in Hollywood.			
1	李	[就是, 如果, 如果有人被逼逼逼逼,	
	Guest Li	jiu shi ruguo ruguo ren bei bi bi bi bi	
		That is, if, if someone be forced forced forced forced	
		“That is, if, if you are forced and forced, “	
2		逼到一个死角儿, 无路可退了,	
		bi dao yi ge sijiaor wu lu ke tui le	
		force to one CL death corner no way out ASP	
		“into a corner, with no way out, “	
3		或者没有东西可以保护了,	
		huozhe meiyou dongxi keyi baohu le	
		Or no things can protect ASP	
		“with nowhere to seek shelter, “	
4		你就变得非常勇敢了。	
		ni jiu bian de feichang yonggan le	
		You then become very brave ASP	
		“you would become totally fearless. “	
5	鲁	那 [往开	
	Host Lu	na wang kai	
		Then to open	
		“What if [just take it ea]”	
6	李	[因为再往后退就死了,	
	Guest Li	yinwei zai wang hou tui jiu si le	
		Because again to the behind step then die ASP	
		“ [Because, one step back, and you’re dead. “	
7		死都不怕的时候, 你的本性, 就是本能就会反,	
		si dou bu pa de shihou ni de benxing jiu shi benneng jiu hui fan	
		Death even not fear POS time, your instinct, that is instinct then will	
		turn over	
		“And when you’re not afraid of death anymore, your instinct will be	
		to fight, “	
8		就是 [站出来。	
		jiu shi zhan chulai	
		That is stand out	
		“to [take a stand.”	

9		鲁	[怎么就叫死了呢?
		Host Lu	zenme jiao jiu si le ne How say then die ASP QN " [What do you mean by 'dead'? "
10			就是, [ [大不了 jiu shi dabuliao That is, at the worst, "Well, [ [at its worst, "
11		李	[ [就是你无路可走啊
		Guest Li	jiu shi ni wu lu ke zou a That is you no way out ASP " [ [I mean when you have nowhere to run."
12		鲁	(0)大不了就不拍电影了呗 / dabuliao jiu bu pai dianying le bei At the worst then not shoot film ASP DM "At its worst, you could have simply quit acting altogether / "
13	→	李	...(2.4)是吗((较勉强的微笑))
		Guest Li	shi ma Really "Really?" ((a strained smile))
14		鲁	啊~
		Host Lu	a ASP "Yeah" ~
15		李	...(1.3) 哎=..
		Guest Li	ai ASP "Well=.."
16			如果你还在自我中心很强的意识的状况下, ruguo ni hai zai ziwo zhongxin hen qiang de yishi de zhuangkuang xia If you still be self-center very strong POS conscience POS situation under "If you're still very self-conscious, "
17			大不了您就别做, 节目主持人啦 \ dabuliao nin jiu bie zuo jiemu zhuchiren la At the worst you then don't do TV hostess ASP "at its worst, you could simply quit your job as a TV presenter"
18		鲁	对啊 \ 就是, 就是这个意思 [嘛 \
		Host Lu	dui a jiu shi jiu shi zhe ge yisi ma Yes ASP just is just is this meaning ASP "Yes \ This is <b>precisely</b> what I [mean. \ "
19		李	[对, 是吗?
		Guest Li	dui shi ma Yes, right ASP " [Em, are you serious?"

《鲁豫有约·李连杰》(LY27<sup>th</sup> Apr 2007)

Except (4) is in an episode when Lu Yu is interviewing singer Zhang Liangying. Lu Yu asks Zhang if should she happen to forget her lyrics, would she then use the common trick of passing the microphone to the audience so they could complete the song for her. Zhang is taken aback with this question, and remains silent for 2.5 s before replying that she does not use this tactic of forgetting the lyrics and pretending to ask the audience to sing along. Zhang could have disagreed with Lu's suggestion and shows displeasure by answering back to her, but because this is a TV talk show, she has to try to be polite to the host. Therefore, she chooses to use silence as the 'Don't do the FTA strategy' to the host.

(4)

Background:		
Host: Lu Yu.		
Guest: 张靓颖 Zhang Liangying. A popular singer.		
In this episode, Guest Zhang is describing what is usually on her mind while she is performing onstage.		
1	鲁 Host Lu	你想这么多不会忘词儿啊? ni xiang zheme duo bu hui wang ci a You think so much don't forget lines ASP "Don't you sometimes forget the lines if you've thought about it too much?"
2	张 Guest Zhang	...(0.8) 词儿应该是早就=, 记得很熟的, ci yinggai shi zao jiu ji de hen shu de Lines should be early already remembered very fluent ...(0.8) "The lines should be pretty well memorized. "
3		那偶尔也会有卡住的时候, 会忘词儿, na ouer ye hui you ka zhu de shihou hui wang ci Then occasionally also can have stuck POS moments can forget lines "Yeah there are times when I get stuck and the words just don't come naturally, "
4	鲁 Host Lu	((模仿歌手举话筒的动作)) ((Imitating a singer passing the microphone towards fans))
5		让观众唱, 这个时候 ((看着张, 微笑)) rang guanzhong chang zhe ge shihou Let audience sing, this moment "In this case, let the audience sing." ((Looking at Zhang, smiling))
6	→ 张 Guest Zhang	...(2.5) 好, 我还没养成这个习惯 @ [@@@ hao wo hai mei yang cheng zhe ge xiguan Okay I still not develop this habit ...(2.5) "Okay, but I'm not really accustomed to it. "@ [@@@
7	鲁 Host Lu	(((笑)) (((Laughs.))
《鲁豫有约·张靓颖》(LY30 <sup>th</sup> Dec 2006)		

Both episodes above show how the guests are forced to use silence as a 'Don't do the FTA strategy' to the host when the host happens to ask them questions that seem rather rude to them.

#### 4.2.2. Guests use silence as an 'off-record' strategy

The most common politeness strategy for silence among the guests in both shows is the 'off-record' strategy. In *LY*, when the guest does not wish to continue the topic of discussion, he uses silence to terminate the subject, i.e., the guest is using silence as an 'off-record' strategy. In excerpt (5), Lu Yu asks Jet Li if he is the kind of man who lets his wife wear the pants in their home life. Jet Li remains silent for 4 s (line 2), then leaning forward and looking thoughtful, opens his mouth but says nothing. This is followed by laughter from the audience. Jet Li then makes a remark that the discussion is getting too personal for his liking and then laughs it off. This remark implies that he does not want to continue this line of discussion. The 4 s silence from Jet Li is an 'off-record' strategy to steer away from the personal topic that Jet Li would rather avoid. By remaining silent, Jet Li is indirectly declining to answer.



(5)

<b>Background:</b>			
Host: Lu Yu. Guest: Jet Li.			
In this episode, Host intends to make Guest Li talk about his family life.			
1		鲁	听说你们家里事儿你是什么都不管的?
		Host Lu	tingshuo nimen jia li shir ni shi shenme dou bu guan de Hear your family inside matters you are anything all not care POS “It’s said that you don’t deal with matters at home?”
2	→	李	...(4.0)((身体倾斜, 口略张, 但未说话))
		Guest Li	...(4.0) ((leans his torso forward, lips slightly opened, no words uttered))
3		众	((笑声起))
		Audience	((Starts laughing and applauding.))
4		李	越谈越深了, [@@@@@
		Guest Li	yue tan yue shen le Further talk further deeper ASP “You’re digging deeper and deeper...” [@@@@@
5		鲁	[@@@@@@@@@@@@@
		Host Lu	[@@@@@@@@@@@@@
6		李	行啦! 到此! ((笑))
		Guest Li	xing la dao ci Okay ASP at here “Enough! Let’s stop here!” ((laughs))
7		鲁	((笑))
		Host Lu	((laughs))
《鲁豫有约·李连杰》(LY 27 <sup>th</sup> Apr 2007)			

In the next excerpt (6), Lu Yu is interviewing singer Zhang Liangying. Both the host and the guest are performing some voice acting which is followed by a long stretch of audience applause. After laughing for some time, Lu Yu praises Zhang for doing a good job (line 1). Zhang responds with a gentle laugh (line 2). Then, Lu Yu asks if Zhang always has fun with voice acting roles. Since Zhang’s forte is singing, voice dubbing is not something she is as proud of doing. When faced with this awkward question, Zhang remains silent before giving a negative answer (line 4). This is followed by a short pause from Lu Yu, the audiences’ applause, and more laughter from Lu Yu. Zhang also laughs while adjusting her dress as if wishing to terminate the subject. Instead of changing the subject, Lu Yu continues to tell Zhang that she is really good at voice acting (line 9). At this instance, Zhang takes a deep breath and remains silent for 2.5 seconds then code-switches to the Sichuan dialect in affirmation (line 11). The silence here shows that Zhang desperately wants to terminate this line of discussion and therefore uses silence as an ‘off record’ strategy. Zhang seems to be using the Sichuan dialect here showing her frustration. Although Zhang is obviously put off by Lu Yu’s insensitivity in continuing on the subject of voice acting, she has to remain polite through laughter.

(6)

Background:		
Host: Lu Yu.		
Guest: 张靓颖 Zhang Liangying.		
In this episode, Guest Zhang has just finished a voice acting performance for a cartoon, as invited, and now Host Lu is giving response and comments.		
1	鲁 Host Lu	((长时间笑)) 真的很不错哎 / ((继续笑声)) zhende hen bucuo ai Really very not bad ASP ((Long laughter)) "You did a very good job / " ((Keeps laughing.))
2	张 Guest Zhang	((轻笑两声)) ((Gently laughs.))
3	鲁 Host Lu	你常这么玩儿吗, 平常? ni chang zheme wanr ma pingchang You often this way play QN normally "You often do this for fun, normally?"
4	张 Guest Zhang	... (1.0) 没有。((轻笑一声)) meiyou No. ...(1.0) "No. "((Laughs a little bit.))
5	鲁 Host Lu	... (0.7) ...(0.7)
6	众 Audience	((鼓掌)) ((Applauses.))
7	鲁 Host Lu	((笑)) ((Laughs.))
8	张 Guest Zhang	[@@@. [ ((THROAT)) ((调整衣服)) [@@@. [ ((THROAT)) ((Adjusting her blouse.))
9	鲁 Host Lu	[ [你真的学得很像哎 / ni zhende xue de hen xiang ai You really imitated very similar ASP [ ["Truly a perfect impression / "
10	→ 张 Guest Zhang	((吸鼻子)) ... (2.5) ((Sniffs.)) ... (2.5)
11		〈L2 那确实。L2〉 ... ((长笑)) na que shi That indeed. 〈L2 "Absolutely. "L2〉 ... ((Long laughter))
12	鲁 Host Lu	((更多笑声继续)) ((Laughing))
13	众 Audience	((鼓掌)) ((Applauds.))

《鲁豫有约·张靓颖》(LY 30<sup>th</sup> Dec 2006)

#### 4.3. Host's indirect FTA vs. Guest's off-record strategy

In excerpt (7) below, when Lu Yu is interviewing Jet Li on the topic of romance, the camera focuses on Jet Li. He hesitates and remains silent for 4.2 s (line 3). His long pause of 4.2 s is clearly an indication that he is uncomfortable with answering the sensitive question. Given that he is faced with studio and TV audience, Jet Li is trying to find an appropriate answer. He is therefore using silence as an off-record strategy to Lu Yu. This is followed by laughter from the audience (line 4). Then Jet Li responds that he should not say too much about this subject in a laughing manner (line 5). The audience continues to laugh and urge him to answer. All this while, the host Lu Yu remains silent and is seen to wave to the audience to encourage them to press Jet Li for an answer. Instead of rescuing him from this

awkward situation, Lu Yu gestures to the audience to press him for an answer (line 6). She is doing an indirect FTA on him through the audience. Jet Li finally answers reluctantly (making an impatient “tut-tut”) (line 7).

So far, we have seen that although *LY* is supposed to be a talk show to showcase the success stories of celebrities and well known personalities, the guest seems to be subject to FTAs from the host. In the USA, one hardly sees a host putting the guest on a spot in this subconscious manner. The host will find a way of rescuing the guest, instead of letting the guest face the audience not knowing how to answer the question.

(7)

Background:			
Host: Lu Yu.			
Guest: 李连杰 Jet Li. An Action Movie star.			
In this episode, Host asks Guest Jet Li to share the most romantic gestures he and his wife do for each other.			
1		李	其实我   你说什么最浪漫呐?
		Guest Li	qishi wo ni shuo shenme zui langman na Actually I you said what most romantic QN “Actually I   You asked, what’s the most romantic thing we do?”
2		鲁	((微点一下头))
		Host Lu	((Slightly nods.))
3	→	李	((视线向前方, 回忆状))最浪漫我就记着=...(4.2)
		Guest Li	zui langman wo jiu ji zhe Most romantic I just remember ((Looking ahead, thinking)) “The most romantic thing, well I remember”
4		众	((笑))
		Audience	((Laughing))
5		李	哎说多了, 不说了。@@@@@
		Guest Li	ai shuo duo le bu shuo le ASP said too much ASP, do not say ASP “Alas, I’ve said too much. Stop. @@@@”
5		众	((笑。随之个别高呼, 要求李说。))
		Audience	((Laughs, some urging Li to talk more.))
6	→	鲁	((不发言, 只做手势暗示观众继续强烈要求。))
		Host Lu	((Says nothing, simply inciting the audience.))
7		李	((啧啧))我觉得一个女孩子就期望有安全感,
		Guest Li	wo juede yi ge nvhaizi jiu qi wang you anquangan I think a girl expects sense of security “((tut-tut)) I think, a girl always expects that sense of security, “
8		鲁	[ <P 嗯 P>
		Host Lu	en Em. “Em. “
9		李	[对吧。
		Guest Li	dui ba Right DM “Right? “
《鲁豫有约·李连杰》(LY27 <sup>th</sup> Apr 2007)			

#### 4.4. Summary

In *LY* which is a more standard talk show, the host is seen to use silence to achieve her own means by (a) saving her own face in times when she is not sure what to make out of the guest's answer and (b) doing an indirect FTA to the guest through the audience. At the same time, her guests also use silence as 'Don't do the FTA strategy' to her or as 'off record' strategy when they do not want to answer her embarrassing questions. In the USA, TV hosts seem more skillful and subtle in drawing out answers from the guests, often also more sensitive in consciously deciding not to put them on the spot.

### 5. Silence and politeness in Kang Xi Lai Le (*KX*)

#### 5.1. Hosts of Kang Xi Lai Le

##### 5.1.1. Hosts do FTA on guests

The frame and cultural expectation of the *KX* talk show is one that thrives on playfully humiliating the guests, making them feel as embarrassed as they possibly can, pushing their limits to the furthest point while in good fun. Given this frame, we expect the hosts of *KX* to be merciless to the guests in their questions. In the excerpts below, we will examine how the hosts often use non-verbal ways to humiliate the guests. The guests in this show are all prepared, and most of them take the harassment in good faith, laughing it off.

In excerpt (8), they invite new singers who are winners from singing competitions. There are two hosts Dee and Kevin interviewing Lai, who is the new champion of Taiwan's most popular TV singing competition, *One Million Star*. The competition has been held for three seasons and coincidentally, the winners of all three seasons are more on the heavy side compared to other competitors. The host Kevin capitalizes on this and comments openly that Lai's figure is considered quite plump for a singer. Kevin is clearly doing an FTA on the guest. Lai tries to defend himself by saying that he has lost some weight since winning the competition and should not be considered plump (line 1). When he says that, Kevin expresses shock (line 2). Here, the host Kevin is clearly 'performing' this look of shock for the audiences to entertain them. This is followed by the other host Dee's silence while sizing up Lai from head to toe only to conclude that his 'figure' is still present (line 4). In this case, host Dee remains silent but uses the act of staring the guest from head to toe to do an FTA on the guest. Host Dee knows well that the audiences at the studio and in front of the TV will enjoy this rude staring while remaining silent. In this episode, both hosts are aiding each other in embarrassing the guest.

(8)

Background:		
Host :		
徐熙娣 (熙) Dee Hsu (Dee)		
蔡康永 (康) Kevin Tsai (Kevin)		
Guest:		
赖铭伟 (赖) Yuming Lai (Lai)		
In this episode, the topic is about Guest Lai's body figure.		
1	赖	对, 就 我 现在 摆脱 那个 行列。 ((看着主持人))
	Guest Lai	dui jiu wo xianzai baituo neige hanglie ((looking at host))
		Yes and I now leave that category
		"Yes, and I don't belong to that (fat) category anymore."
2	康	你 现在 摆脱了? ((惊奇))
	Host Kevin	ni xianzai baituo le ((looked surprised))
		You now leave ASP
		"You have left the category?"
3	赖	对。 ((康小小地发出笑声))
	Guest Lai	dui ((Host kang laughs quietly))
		"Yes."
4	→ 熙	(... 1.0) ((徐用手上的道具和眼神打量赖铭伟))
	Host Dee	(1.0) ((looking at Lai from head to toe))
5		可是你, 身体还在啊。
		keshi ni shenti hai zai a
		But you body still exist
		"But you've still got your figure."
6		就你身体还在那个行列里啊!
		Jiu ni shenti haizai neige hanglie li a
		That your body still at that category in DM
		"Your figure can still be deemed 'fat'!"
《康熙来了·素人变明星》 (KX 29th Aug 2008)		

In the episode in excerpt (9), the popular singer/artiste Jay Chou and three of his close friends (Jaycee Chan, Jeffery Huang, and Darren) are invited as guests. The host Dee comments that Jay Chou seems to be unsuccessful in grooming his friends into big stars as compared to Jeffery Huang. The host Dee is obviously doing a direct FTA on Jay Chou. Another host Kevin continues to taunt Jay by asking him whom he has helped groom to fame so far. To this question directed by host Kevin to Jay, host Dee replies that *Nan Quan Mama* (南拳妈妈; literally *south fist mother*) is a Taiwanese music group that Jay had something of a hand in getting off the ground. The conversational implication here is that objectively speaking, Jay has not been successful in grooming anyone in show business to success. Then host Dee remains silent for 1 s (line 4). On the surface, host Dee's reply seems positive—observing that Jay has helped someone to succeed so far. However, Dee says this with a hedge *suanshi* 'considered' which is used in irony. Moreover, after this answer, there is a deliberate silence from Dee (line 4) to make the impact of the irony felt. Here Dee is using the deliberated silence to do a non-verbal FTA on Jay. The silence conveys the message that he has so called help someone who is not considered very successful after all. As the conversation proceeds, the host Kevin asks again if Liu is the only person Jay has managed to bring to fame, again driving home the message that Jay has not been successful in grooming someone. Here, we see how the hosts mercilessly return to the subject to embarrass Jay again and again. This blatant rudeness is rather rare in TV talk shows in the USA but the guests in *KX* are mentally prepared for this and often take it with a smile.

(9)

Background:		
Host :		
徐熙娣 (熙) Dee Hsu (Dee)		
蔡康永 (康) Kevin Tsai (Kevin)		
Guest:		
周杰伦 (周) Jay Chou (Jay)		
In this episode, the topic is about whom Guest Jay has groomed to fame so far.		
1	康	那 周杰伦 捧红 的呢?
	Host Kevin	na zhou jielun penghong de ne Then zhou Jielun carry red POS QN "Well, then, who did Jay groom to fame?"
2	周	(@)感觉有点 越 帮 越 忙 </Hor/>
	Guest Jay	ganjue you dian yue bang yue mang DM Feel have bit more help more busy "Feels like the more you're trying to help, the worse it becomes. "
3	熙	周杰伦 就是 ((尴尬笑了一下))
	Host Dee	zhou jielun jiushi ((embarrassing smile)) Jay is "Jay is..."
4	→	南拳 妈妈算是...(1.0)
		nanquanmama suan shi NanQuanMaMa should be "We could consider NanQuanMaMa."
5	周	那是 还蛮 尽力在捧的。
	Guest Jay	na shi hai man jinli zai peng de That be still very all strength at carry one "Indeed, (I) tried my best to bring them to fame."
6	熙	对。
	Host Dee	Dui "Yes."

7		周	但他不是我们公司的哦。
		Guest Jay	dan ta bushi women gongsi de wo But they not our company POS DM “But they’re not under our record label.”
8		康	所以周杰伦捧红唯一的是刘畊宏吗?((看着熙))
		Host Kevin	suoyi zhou jielun penghong weiyi de shi liu jinghong ma So Jay carry red only pos be liu jinghong QN “So the only person Jay has brought to fame is Liu Jinghong?”
9	→	熙	((看着康)) ... (2.0) 是吧?
		Host Dee	((Looking at Kevin)) (2.0) Shi ba Yes QN “Right? “
10	→		...(1.0) 刘畊宏 算是 在你手中 要捧起来吧? liu jinghong suanshi zai ni shou zhong yao peng qilai ba Liu Jinhong is considered someone you are grooming, right? “You were going to groom Liu Jinghong to fame right?”
11		周	其实一直都在捧的当中。(@@)
		Guest Jay	qishi yizhi dou zai peng de dangzhong ((laughter)) Actually always all at carry POS inside “Actually (I) have been grooming him to fame all this while.”
			《康熙来了·周杰伦》(KX 7 <sup>th</sup> Jun 2010)

### 5.1.2. Hosts transfer the FTA to other guests

In episode (10), the program invites new singers in the Chinese music market who were previously winners from singing competitions. In this example, the two hosts Dee and Kevin are commenting on two guests—Lai and Jane, who are winners of Taiwan’s popular reality TV singing competition, *One Million Star*. These two winners have formed a duo and have released a new album. The show invites both of them to perform individually, after which the host Dee asks the panel guests who are professionals in the music field to comment on their performances. Both panel guests think Lai performs better but the host Dee thinks otherwise. The intention of host Dee asking the FTA question of who is a better singer in front of the singers themselves is obviously to embarrass the singers Jane and Lai, and by doing so, entertain the audience. Host Kevin challenges host Dee asking her again if she is voting for Jane against the choice of the panel guests. Kevin does this to reinforce the embarrassment on Lai and Jane. Host Dee turns back to Host Kevin to ask if he is of the same opinion as her, i.e. voting for Jane, almost forcing him to concur. Host Kevin stares back at Host Dee and remains silent for 2 s (line 5), then turns to face another guest Hsiao, calling out his name in full. Host Kevin uses the 2 s silence to miss his turn and transfers the pressure to guest Hsiao. These 2 s of silence before Host Kevin calls out to guest Hsiao to answer is a dramatic performance as he brings more intensity to the embarrassing question.

(10)

Background:		
Host :		
徐熙娣 (熙) Dee Hsu (Dee)		
蔡康永 (康) Kevin Tsai (Kevin)		
Guest:		
萧闳仁 (萧) Hsiao Hung Jen (Hsiao)		
黄美珍 (黄) Jane Huang (Jane)		
赖铭伟 (赖) Yuming Lai (Lai)		
In this episode, the two hosts are comparing and arguing about the performances of two guest singers.		
1	康	怎么样? 你要给黄美珍对不对?
	Host Kevin	zenmeyang ni yao gei huang meizhen dui bu dui
		How you wang give huang meizhen yes not yes
		"So? Are you voting for Jane?"
2	熙	所以是我瞎了还是怎样?
	Host Dee	suoyi shi wo xia le haishi zenyang
		So be I blind ASP or what
		"Well, am I blind or what?"
3	全体	((全场笑。黄微笑着看着主持人, 赖转身笑))
	All	((Everyone is laughing. Jane faces the host smiling while Lai turns away laughing))
4	熙	你,你讲真的,你是不是跟我想的一样? ((对着康))
	Host Dee	ni ni jiang zhen de ni shi bu shi gen wo xiang de yiyang
		You you speak true POS you yes not yes with I think POS same
		"Tell me the truth, do you feel the same way?" ((facing Kevin))
5	→ 康	... (2.0) ((看着熙, 无法回答, 转身看嘉宾萧))
	Host Kevin	((Looking at Dee with no answer then turns to face Hsiao))
6		萧闳仁! ((其他人笑))
		Xiao hongren
		"Hsiao Hungjen!" ((others laugh))
7	萧	有! 怎么了?
	Guest Hsiao	you zenme le
		Have what ASP
		"Yes, what's up?"
8	康	那两个, 刚刚那两位的话,
	Host Kevin	na liang ge ganggang na liang wei de hua
		That two CL just that two CL POS say
		"Let's say that between those two (who sang) earlier,"
9		谁会是你评分比较高的?
		shei hui shi ni pingfen bijiao gao de
		Who will be you grade more high POS
		"Who would you give the higher grade?"
《康熙来了·素人变明星》(KX29th Aug 2008)		

## 5.2. Guests in KX

Generally, all the guests who go on TV talk shows do so in order to promote their music, shows or products, by way of promoting themselves. Therefore, it is important that they project a positive image whether or not the host is polite or rude to them. We will find then that the guests in the two shows use silence for politeness rather than impoliteness. We will also observe nonverbal communication (Burgoon et al., 1996; Anderson, 2008; Richmond et al., 2008) and gestures (Bull, 1987; Axtell, 1991) from the guests when they want to avoid answering questions or wish to terminate the topic.

### 5.2.1. Guests use silence as 'Don't do the FTA strategy'

In KX, all the guests know that the hosts are out to embarrass them so in a way they are prepared for the worst. Most of the guests will use silence as a 'Don't do the FTA strategy' to the host when the hosts are rude to them. By remaining silent, the guests avoid being rude to the hosts in front of the studio audience and the home viewing audience. In excerpt (9), the guests are the famous and beautiful female lead Lin Chi Ling and internationally-renowned director John Woo, who had just made the movie *Red Cliff*. In this episode, the host Dee tries to convince John Woo to choose herself as the female lead in his next film, as John Woo's films are internationally well-known. She asks John Woo whether he will let her be in his movie if she pesters him. Faced with such an awkward question, the director has two choices: One is to reply negatively (which will immediately damage the host's face); Two, to reply positively (which will be a false promise). To get out of this sticky situation and to not do the FTA, the director remains silent for two seconds. Dee then asks him why he is taking so long to answer the question.

(11)

<b>Background:</b>		
Host :		
徐熙娣 (熙) Dee Hsu (Dee)		
Guest :		
吴宇森 (吴) John Woo (John)		
In this episode, the hostess Dee jokes to convince Guest John to choose herself as the next female lead in his movie.		
1	熙	导演, 如果我一直纠缠你,
	Host Dee	daoyan ruguo wo yizhi jiuchan ni
		Director if I always pester you
		"Director, if I keep pestering you, "
2		你会愿意让我演你的电影吗?
		ni hui yuanyi rang wo yan ni de dianying ma
		You will willing let me act your POS movie QN
		"Will you let me be in your movie?"
3	吴	欸 ... (2.0)
	Guest John	ai
		"Eh..."
4	熙	你干嘛想这么久吗!
	Host Dee	ni ganma xiang zheme jiu ma
		You why think this long QN
		"Why do you have to sit on this for so long?!"
《康熙来了·赤壁》(KX 14 <sup>th</sup> Jul 2007)		



### 5.2.2. Guests use silence as 'off-record' strategy

The episode in excerpt (12) invites the cast and director of the upcoming drama serial *Black and White*. The male lead, Vic Chou, was formerly romantically involved with host Dee's elder sister, Barbie Dee, after meeting her on the set of the serial. Their breakup hits the headlines a few months before this talk show episode was filmed. In this excerpt, the host Kevin is asking the director why he did not cast Barbie Dee as the female lead in *Black and White*, since Barbie and Vic were the leads of the last two shows he had helmed. By asking the director such a question, Kevin is obviously trying to create an embarrassing moment for director Tsun. Tsun remains silent for 1.5 s (line 4), using his hand to cover his mouth, showing that he does not want to answer the question. By putting his hand on his mouth, Tsun is using silence and this funny gesture to entertain the audience. Then the other host Dee, to add further FTAs, says she is also curious to know why her sister is not chosen for the role. This is followed by Tsun's silence again (line 6), this time, covering his mouth with both hands. The director Tsun, clearly does not want to answer this FTA question and is using silence as an 'off record' politeness strategy. After Tsun remains silent again, Dee persists to ask "Why?" (line 7). This time her question is directed towards the male lead Vic.

In this excerpt we have a taste of how the hosts in *KX* enjoy embarrassing the guests again and again. No matter how the hosts embarrass the guests, the guests will find strategies to avoid being rude to the host and to save their own face. More often than not, silence is used as an 'off-record' strategy.

(12)

<b>Background:</b>			
Host :			
徐熙娣 (熙) Dee Hsu (Dee)			
蔡康永 (康) Kevin Tsai (Kevin)			
Guest :			
周渝民 (周) Vic Chou (Vic)			
蔡岳勋 (蔡) Tsai Yueh Tsun (Tsun)			
In this episode, the hosts are teasing Guest Vic by asking a question which involves his former rumored girlfriend.			
1		康	...(3.0) 导演, 痞子英雄女主角为什么不用大 S ?
		Host Kevin	daoyan pizi yingxiong nv zhujue weishenme bu yong da S Director Black And White female lead actress why not use big S
			"Director, why didn't you cast Barbie in the lead female role for the movie <i>Black and White</i> ?"
2	→	蔡	... (1.5) ((用手半盖着脸, 望着主持人))
		Guest Tsun	((uses one hand to cover his face, staring at the host))
3		熙	我也很好奇耶
		Host Dee	wo ye hen haoqi ye I also very curious DM "I'm curious about that too."
4	→	蔡	...(1.0) ((继续用手半盖着脸, 望着主持人))
		Guest Tsun	((continues to cover face with both hands, staring at the host))

5		熙	为什么?
		Host Dee	weishenme Why “Why?”
6		康	我们这是专业问题吧!
		Host Kevin	women zheshi zhuan ye wenti ba We this is professional problem DM “Is this an issue with professionalism?”
7		蔡	<L2 OK, OK. L2> 因为她 .. 她不像。
		Guest Tsun	yinwei ta ta bu xiang Because she she not like “Because she... is not like..”
8		康	仔仔 ((周渝民的昵称)) 为什么?
		Host Kevin	zaizai weishenme “Vic (Vic’s nickname), why?”
9	→	周	... (2.0) 咳、咳、咳。
		Guest Vic	((全场笑, 周拿自己的名字牌, 封住自己的嘴巴, 然后用手势比了一个大叉, 手指指向导演)) “ke ke ke” ((pretends to cough)) ((everyone laughing, Vic takes his own name tag to cover his mouth, then crosses his hands, pointing at the director))
			《康熙来了·痞子英雄》(KX 31st Mar 2009)

This episode in excerpt (13) has as the guests popular singer-artist Jay Chou and 3 of his close friends (Jaycee Chan, Jeffery Huang, and Darren). In this episode, the host Dee tries to ask for tickets to Jay Chou's concert on behalf of her friends and relatives because the concert tickets were sold out within hours in Taiwan. Jay is obviously not going to give them the tickets, so he remains silent. Jay uses silence as an 'off record' strategy because he does not know how to respond verbally to the FTA posed by the host Dee.

(13)

Background:		
Host :		
	徐熙娣 (熙)	Dee Hsu (Dee)
	蔡康永 (康)	Kevin Tsai (Kevin)
Guest :		
	周杰伦 (周)	Jay Chou (Jay)
	黄立成 (黄)	Jeffery Huang (Jeffery)
	房祖名 (房)	Jaycee Chan (Jaycee)
In this episode, the hosts are asking Guest Jay for tickets to his concert.		
1	康	周 杰 伦 演 唱 会 的 票 , 票 卖 得 好 到 不 行 。
	Host Kevin	zhou jielun yanchanghui de piao piao mai de hao dao buxing
		Jay concert POS ticket ticket sell ASP good till impossible
		"The ticket sales for Jay's concert are incredible. "
2		听 说 就 是 很 多 人 [ 想 买 ], 都 买 不 到 了 。
		tingshuo jiushi henduo ren xiang mai dou mai bu dao le
		Hear say that many people think buy all buy not reach ASP
		"I've heard that many wanted to get tickets, but were unable to."
3	熙	[ 一 张 不 剩 ]
	Host Dee	Yi zhang bu sheng
		One CL not left
		"Not even one ticket left."
4	黄	我 也 拿 不 到 。
	Guest Jeffery	wo ye nab u dao
		I also take not reach
		"I don't have any either."
5	房	对 啊 。
	Guest Jaycee	dui a
		Right DM
		"Right."
6	康	你 也 [ 没 有 ] ?
	Host Kevin	ni ye meiyou
		You too not have
		"You neither?"

7	周	[你不用] 票啦, 你奇怪 ((用手推了黄一下))
	Guest Jay	ni bu yong piao la ni qiguai ((pushing Jane)) You not use ticket DM you strange “How strange, you don’t need tickets.”
8	黄	我当然也有朋友想要去看啊
	Guest Jeffery	wo dangran ye you pengyou xiang yao qu kan a I of course also have friend think want go see DM “Of course, I have friends who want to go too.”
9	熙	[其实我有], 我有 很多 亲戚 跟 朋友
	Host Dee	qishi wo you wo you henduo qinqi gen pengyou “Actually, I have many relatives and friends”
10		叫我去跟你要哎。
		jiao wo qu gen ni yao ai call me go with you want DM “asking me to get (tickets) from you.”
11		可是他们都是说已经一张票都没有了。
		keshi tamen doushi shuo yijing yi zhang piao dou meiyou le But they all say already one CL ticket all none ASP “But they said there were none left.”
12	房	[超多人的]
	Guest Jaycee	chao duo ren de Over many people POS “An extremely big crowd.”
13	→ 周	... (1.0) ((眨眼睛微笑着, 若无其事地看着主持人))
	Guest Jay	((blinking eyes with a smile, looking at the host as if nothing had happened.))
《康熙来了·周杰伦》 (KX6 <sup>th</sup> Jun 2010)		

### 5.3. Summary

In *KX*, the frame is to be as exploitative as possible. As such, the hosts in *KX* use silence but non-verbal actions to do the FTA to the guests. At the same time, the hosts are also seen transferring the FTA to other guests. The guests in the talk show respond to the hosts' embarrassing questions by using silence as a 'Don't do FTA' strategy and also as an 'off-record' strategy. The guests in *KX* often take the harassment from the hosts with a smile. At the same time, they are well aware that they are on TV talk shows and so will refrain from being rude to the hosts often using silence as a strategy.

## 6. Discussion

This paper argues that the frame of the talk show determines the tone of the show and therefore the silence that occurs in the shows as well. Although the two Chinese TV talk shows—*LY* and *KX* are both Chinese TV talk shows, they are totally different in nature. *LY* is the most-watched TV talk show in China, and has the fixed format of one host interviewing celebrities. The aim of the show is to provide the guests with an avenue to discuss their journeys to fame. We have found that given this frame, the host is not supposed to embarrass nor exploit the guests. However, Lu Yu is seen to be in the habit of putting the guests on the spot by asking inappropriate questions. Instead of rescuing them from the awkward situations she has created, she would sometimes remain silent but gesture to the audience to apply more pressure on the guests, thereby doing an indirect FTA through the audience on the guest. She is also seen to use silence to save her own face when unsure of the guest's implications. In the USA, even when embarrassing questions are posed to the guest, the host will

**Table 1**  
Silence and politeness in Host of *LY* and *KX*.

	HOST	
	<i>LY</i>	<i>KX</i>
Indirect FTAs	3	1
Save own face	3	
Do FTAs to guest		8

**Table 2**  
Guests using Silence for Face-work in *LY* and *KX*.

	GUEST	
	<i>LY</i>	<i>KX</i>
Don't do FTAs	2	1
Off-record	6	9

often quickly 'rescue' the guest by moving on to the next topic. Also, in the USA, the hosts are also more likely to poke fun at themselves, instead of actively saving their own face.

In contrast, *KX* is the most-watched talk show in Taiwan. Its popularity lies in the exploitative nature of the talk show. The more embarrassing it is for the guest, the more entertaining it is for the audience. Given this frame, the hosts will do all they can to use FTA to embarrass the guests. We have seen how the hosts would remain silent, but stare rudely at the guests, or let a moment of irony sink in so as to embarrass the guests. Compared to *LY*, *KX* has many more instances of using silence to do the FTA to the guests. At least in *KX*, the guests are not exactly caught by any surprise, given the frame of the show.

Table 1 below summarizes the silences used by the host/s in the two TV talk shows. In the 10 episodes of *LY*, there are three instances when the host uses silence to transfer the FTA to the audience and three when the host saves her own face. In the 10 episodes of *KX*, there is only one occasion when the hosts use silence to transfer the FTA to another guest compared to eight occasions when the hosts do FTAs to the guest directly. It is obvious that the frame of the show determines how the host uses silence. In *LY*, silence has not been used as direct FTA to guests compared to *KX*.

As for the guests, both *LY* and *KX*, they are on national TV to promote themselves. As such, their primary concern will be to project the best image they can to the audience no matter what the hosts do to them. In *LY*, the guests are supposed to be given the platform to tell the audience how they have arrived at their success, or the difficulties they have overcome thus far. The guests on this show do not expect to be put on the spot. However, we have seen that Lu Yu not only touches on issues that may be deemed too personal, she sometimes tests their patience with unreasonable suggestions. Faced with these questions and suggestions, the guests will use silence as a 'Don't do the FTA strategy' and avoid being rude to the host, or use silence as an off-record strategy to avoid answering the question. In face-to-face communication, when the guest is not on TV, he/she may challenge the hosts.

In *KX*, given the nature of the show, all guests who appear on this show have to be well prepared for a time of extreme gleeful embarrassment. When the guests are forced to a corner, they will often choose to remain silent so as to not do the FTA to the host or use silence as an off-record strategy to avoid answering an embarrassing question. Since the guests are prepared to be embarrassed in this program, they usually end up smiling while remaining silent.

Table 2 shows that the guests of the two talk shows behave similarly even though the frames of both shows are very different. In *KX*, when there are more FTAs from the hosts, there are also more instances of off-record strategies from the guests to avoid answering the exploitative and embarrassing questions. In general, guests in both programs try their best to not do FTAs to the host even when they are being challenged knowing full well that they need to keep a good image as they are on national TV.

In *KX*, when the frame of the show is one that exploits the guests for laughs, then even though the host may do extreme things to embarrass the guests, the guests will use the off-record strategy to avoid answering or terminate the subject. However, they are usually smiling and not doing so in an uncomfortable manner. In other words, they are culturally prepared for the onslaught. Again, the frame plays a big part in how the guests respond to the FTA from the hosts. Here, Culpeper's view may not apply in the sense that there seems to be a much higher ability to tolerate the mock impoliteness given the frame of absolute rudeness in *KX*. Both the hosts and the guests will all be having fun amidst the embarrassing questions. Although there may be instances in which the guests are uncomfortable compared to others, the point here is that compared to *LY*, there is much more tolerance when the frame is understood.

While talk shows hosts such as Jay Leno, Ellen DeGeneres and Conan O'Brien aim to entertain the audience, often bringing in humor and sometimes asking embarrassing questions of the guests, they almost never stop at the embarrassing question, instead 'rescuing' the guest by making fun of themselves, effectively letting them off the hook. As such, there is almost no instance of silence in these shows compared to the Chinese TV talk shows discussed in this paper. In *LY*, it is rather interesting to see Lu Yu posing questions that may not seem appropriate to the guests as she is supposed to bring out the best of her guests. This also shows that the techniques of asking questions, how they deal with embarrassing questions are different in the East and the USA. Moreover, from the data we collected, we have not seen the hosts in either *LY* or *KX* ever making fun of themselves to entertain the guests. This also shows another difference between the culture of hosts in the East and the US.

Quite beyond the scope of this paper is the question of why in China, the most popular TV talk show is one that celebrates success in a more standoffish talk show while in Taiwan, even President Ma Yingjiu is a guest embarrassed in *KX*. Further research is needed to understand the cultural ideology of the different Chinese societies that make them enjoy TV talk shows in totally different ways.

## 7. Conclusion

This paper has examined how silences are used in two popular Chinese TV talk shows. It shows that silence is not only an inevitable part of the Chinese TV talk shows but that both the hosts and guests consciously or unconsciously use silence as politeness and impoliteness strategies. In these Chinese TV talk shows, silences are important features in TV talk shows involving FTA and face-saving acts. Much research has centered on inter-cultural silences and how they may lead to miscommunications and misunderstandings. This paper shows that given the specificities of TV talk shows, both hosts and guests are mindful of the audiences. The frames of the two Chinese TV talk shows determine how silence is used in the show. *LY* is a more standoffish talk show interviewing famous celebrities. Given the more serious nature, *LY* is seen using silences to save her own face and to transfer FTA to the audience. On the other hand, *KX* is an entertainment talk show that thrives on damaging and exploiting the guests' face. As such, the hosts in *KX* uses silence to do direct FTAs to the guests. The guests of *LY* are more surprised when put on the spot and use silence to as a 'Don't do the FTA strategy' so as not to be rude to the host and 'off record' strategy to avoid answering questions. The guests of *KX* are more prepared for onslaughts of embarrassment and use the same strategies as well.

This research shows that one cannot assume that 'Chinese' talk shows are all similar—the popular talk shows in China and Taiwan are clearly very different in nature, as has been explored in this paper. This study also shows that the hosts in the TV talk shows in the USA seem more sensitive to the guests. In *LY*, the host is seen to be putting some pressure on the guests in a way that makes the guests seem rather uncomfortable. In *KX*, the guests expect to be embarrassed at every moment. There is also the interesting question of why Chinese TV talk show hosts almost never seem self-deprecating the way the hosts in the US do very often. More research on Chinese TV talk shows is clearly required to answer these questions more adequately.

## Appendix. Transcription conventions and abbreviations

QN	Question marker
DM	Discourse marker
POS	Possessive marker
ASP	Aspect marker
=	Lengthening
...	Short pause
...	Medium pause
...(N)	Long pause (with timing)
<b>Bold</b>	Emphasis
@	Laughter
[ . . . . ]	Overlap
( / . . . . / )	Phonetic representation
(( . . . . ))	What is happening then (researcher's notes)
< MRC . . . . MRC >	Marcato: each word distinct and emphasized
< P . . . . P >	Piano: soft
< L2 . . . . L2 >	Code switching
	Unfinished word or phrase

## Appendix B. Supporting information

Supplementary data associated with this article can be found in the online version at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.dcm.2013.01.002>.

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