

A Conversation Analysis of a Cantonese Radio Show Opening

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Conversation analysis (CA) studies have shown that broadcast talk is situated ‘between’ the private and the public, as it concurrently displays features of both private talk and public talk (Hutchby 2005: 449). Given its paradoxical nature, it is intriguing to examine the organisation of broadcast talk.

This study looks at the sequence organisation of a somewhat unusual radio show opening and the exchanges between the two participants through CA. The source material was from Zero O’Clock (零点冲动), a popular midnight radio show by Guangzhou FM96.2 from 1996 to 2013. The genre of the programme is the ‘advice-giving’ broadcast (Hutchby 2006). Through phone-in sessions, it provides advice and support to people having relationship problems or emotional difficulties. Audio clips of this conversation were drawn from the Corpus of Spoken Guangzhou Cantonese with Audio (广州话口语有声语料库), a project by Shan (2015) at South China University of Technology.

Zero O’clock normally has only one host, Ziu. On that particular night, Ziu was feeling unwell, so he invited Leoi to be his co-host. Leoi was the host of a morning finance programme and it was the second time he came to the rescue of the show. The conversation between Ziu and Leoi took place at the beginning of the show, before the audience phone-in session. Hence, instead of the usual monologic, mundane opening by Ziu, this talk-in-interaction is a rather rare opening for the show. At the same time, Leoi is not only a temporary co-host sharing the workload of the main host, but also akin to a guest of the show. Due to the special status of Leoi, this opening also differs from that of normal radio shows with two hosts.

This study focuses on the adjacency pairs of greeting-greeting, compliment-response and question-answer. The special circumstance of the night and the special status of Leoi play a key role in the sequence organisation of the conversation. The organisation is also influenced by the two hosts’ collaborative communicative work to build trust and rapport with the listeners. Through the study of structural phenomenon of adjacency pairs, one can see how the collaborative, interactional effort of the participants led to the achievement of the goal, which is to connect with the listeners. The empirical, fine-grained approach under CA may yield insights for meaning creation; and it reflects the fact that language is a flexible, dynamic communicative behaviour.

References

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