

Self-Praising Through Reporting: Strategic Use of Two Reporting Practices in Mandarin Conversation

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Drawing on a corpus of 35 hours of videotaped face-to-face conversations collected in Beijing and Hebei, China, this conversation analytic study examines self-praising behavior of Mandarin speakers in everyday social interaction. Focusing on two reporting practices—reporting another’s words and reporting “just the facts”—the investigation explores how these practices are used strategically by the speakers in the course of reporting some past event to tacitly achieve a positive presentation of themselves in the current interaction. Analysis of a collection of instances shows several key features shared by these two practices that enable such an interactional task. A discussion of the fit between the practices and the designed action, as well as a possible account for this interconnection, is offered at the end.

INTRODUCTION

Self-promoting behavior in interaction, such as bragging or self-praise,¹ has long been considered as a potentially problematic social action (e.g., Brown & Levinson, 1987; Leech, 1983; Pomerantz, 1978a). Brown and Levinson (1987), for example, claimed that “just as to raise the other is to imply a lowering of

¹In this article, I use the terms “self-praise” and “self-praising,” relieved by the occasional use of “self-promotion,” “showing off,” and other such expressions for variety. No distinction is intended to be made among these terms.

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the self, so a raising of the self may imply a lowering of the other” (p. 39). Self-praise, accordingly, is treated in their framework as a face-threatening act damaging the addressee’s positive face. Pomerantz (1978a), in her discussion of compliment responses in English, also identified a system of constraints governing how participants in conversation credit or praise themselves. She further showed how the violation of the constraints against self-praise can be interactionally consequential, with the violation publicly registered or the constraints subsequently enforced by the coparticipant. Furthermore, in his account of polite behavior, Leech (1983) proposed the Modesty Maxim, which consists of the principles of minimizing praise of self and maximizing dispraise of self. He claimed that although self-dispraise can be considered as interactionally quite benign, breaking the Modesty Maxim can be seen as “committing the social transgression of boasting” (p. 136).

In Chinese culture, as well, modesty has long been upheld as one of the most important social values.² Scholars exploring Chinese politeness phenomena have generally agreed that modesty and humility are highly cherished in Chinese society, in large part because of the long-instilled belief that these virtues can help maintain and enhance positive self-image and social relationships (e.g., Bond, 1991; Bond et al., 1982; Chen, 1993; Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998; Gu, 1990). Many scholars have also pointed out that compared with English-speaking societies, the principle of humility appears to be a greater force in Chinese society. Chinese are said to not only have a higher tendency to lower themselves and elevate others but also to be more inclined to engage in self-effacing, rather than self-enhancing, talk (e.g., Chen, 1993; Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998; Gu, 1990; Ye, 1995).

Over the past decades, although the concept of modesty and the role it plays in different cultures and societies have received a good amount of attention in the literature, much of the existing research on the subject has focused on theorizing about the overarching models of politeness phenomena. In the few discourse-based empirical studies exploring or touching on this topic, the main analytic focus has been on *self-praise avoidance*, for example, how participants in conversation display an orientation to the constraints against self-praise in formulating their compliment responses (e.g., Chen, 1993; Gu, 1990; Leech, 1983; Pomerantz, 1978a; Ye, 1995; Yuan, 2002) or how participants use self-denigrating jokes to present positive self-images (e.g., Boxer & Cortés-Conde, 1997; Norrick, 1993; Tannen, 1994). Little attention has been given to the other side of the coin: namely, how self-praising behavior figures in social interaction.

Wu (2011) and Speer (2012) are among the very few studies demonstrating that self-praise as a social action merits a systematic investigation in its own

²For a historical survey of this topic, see Gu (1990).

right. Wu (2011) focused on three practices that are observed to be used in the service of self-praising in Mandarin conversation, that is, “the designedly bipartite [self-praise plus modification] turn format,” “disclaiming an extreme case situation,” and “treating the matter ostensibly as complainable” (p. 3152). Her findings suggest that whether or not to engage in self-praise in interaction is far more complex than a yes/no dichotomous choice. She shows, for example, that although the design of these three practices similarly helps alleviate the accountability for doing self-praise, they nonetheless exhibit different sequential implicativeness. Likewise, Speer (2012) reported on a study of self-praise in English and demonstrated an interactional preference for the use of “third-party compliments” over direct self-praise. She suggested that this preference may be due in part to the epistemic distance created between the speaker and the praise by the embedded character of the praise within a third-party attribution. She stressed, however, that reporting third-party compliments is not (necessarily) used as a “back-door” strategy for doing self-praise in her data but is rather generally deployed as a “subsidiary” action designed with a view to “evidencing and objectifying features of [the speaker’s] identity that are bound up with more primary or focal tasks associated with the larger action context of the talk” (p. 73).

The study reported in this article is part of a larger effort to continue to investigate, and extend our understanding of, this hitherto underexplored subject, that is, the design and interactional contingencies of self-praise in everyday social interaction. Specifically, in this article we are concerned with two practices associated with the reporting of a past event that are observed to be commonly used as self-praising strategies in Mandarin conversation: reporting another’s words and reporting “just the facts.” In particular, we address the issues of how an otherwise seemingly innocent report of a past event is interactionally motivated (by the speaker) and recognized (by the recipient) to accomplish the action of self-praise and what suits these two practices that may set them apart from the other resources for doing self-praise.

This article is conversation analytic (CA) in orientation. The data for this article are drawn from a corpus of approximately 35 hours of audio- and videotaped face-to-face conversations collected in Beijing and Hebei, China, during 2001–2002 and 2006–2010.³ All participants spoke what is considered the standard variety of spoken Mandarin, *Putonghua*, although they were not all from Beijing or Hebei originally. Some participants were from Dongbei, Shandong, Shanghai, Sichuan, Tianjin, and Yunan, among other provinces. Most participants came

³The data fragments marked with “CMC” are from a corpus of approximately 7 hours of face-to-face conversations collected in Beijing, China by Monica Turk and her assistants during the 9 months (October 2001 to June 2002) of her Fulbright stay there. My thanks to Monica for allowing me access to this data set.

from middle-class backgrounds, and their ages ranged from early twenties to late sixties. Participants in each conversation were family members, friends, and acquaintances who were recorded during activities such as lunches, dinners, visits to relatives, and mahjong games or simple get-togethers for chitchat. One hundred instances of implicit or explicit self-praise are identified in a subset of the present data. Only the excerpts of conversation containing self-praise among status equals (e.g., friend to friend, acquaintance to acquaintance, or relative to relative of the same generation) are included for analysis in this article.⁴

In what follows, I first show how self-praise appears to still remain a socially censured action among Mandarin speakers in everyday social interaction. I then demonstrate how through the vehicle of the aforementioned two practices, Mandarin speakers are able to tacitly achieve a positive presentation of themselves while at the same time freeing themselves from its accountability. Analysis of a collection of instances shows several key features shared by these two practices that enable such an interactional task. A discussion of the fit between the practices and the designed action, as well as a possible account for this interconnection, is offered at the end.

SPEAKERS' AND COPARTICIPANTS' DISPLAYED ORIENTATION TO OUTRIGHT SELF-PRAISING BEHAVIOR IN MANDARIN CONVERSATION

It may be helpful to point out at the outset that the constraints against outright self-praise appear to be still closely observed among Mandarin speakers in everyday interaction. As my data suggest, straightforwardly praising or giving a favorable evaluation of oneself in everyday interaction is uncommon, and when it does occur it is often moderated by the speaker him- or herself or gets censured by coparticipants. Example (1), from a conversation among four middle-aged female friends who have known each other since their teenage years and who have kept in occasional contact, illustrates how the self-praise constraints can be collaboratively oriented to by the speaker and the recipient.

⁴For the protection of the participants' privacy, their names have all been changed in the transcript excerpts presented in this article. It should be noted that the participants with the same abbreviated name (i.e., "W," "M," "R"), unless from the same conversation, are not always the same person. No participants were provided with any topic to talk about in the conversation. Additionally, Mandarin is a lingua franca in which there is wide variation in usage due to the influence of various dialects. For this reason I make no claim that the findings of this study describe the whole of Mandarin conversation, although I do believe that the premise and the major findings of this study—that the two reporting practices are usable as resources for doing self-praise—are robust.

(1) (Cao_6_26_06_C7; video1 49:40:00)

1C: *wo- wo nei ge-*
 I I that C⁵
 'I- My-'

2C: *wo xiansheng ye shanghai ren.*
 I husband also Shanghainese
 'My husband is also a Shanghainese.'

3R: *ou::.*
 PRT
 'Oh::.'

4C: *dou xue bu hui.*
 all learn N master
 '(I) just can't learn it.'

5: (0.5)

6R: *wo xue de [hai keyi.*
 I learn CSC still OK
 'I learned it [OK.'

7C: *[zhe zhong-*
 this kind
 ['This kind-'

8C: *shi ba. [ou::=*
 be PRT PRT
 'Yeah? [Oh::.'

9R: *[um.=*
 PRT
 ['Uh.'=

10C: → =*[na ni keneng cong[ming hhh*
 then you probably smart (laugh)
 =['Then you must be s[mart. hhh.'

11R: → =*[<bu shi. (.) [nei ge-*
 N be that C
 =['<'No. (.)' ['that uh-'

12C: *[[(...) hhh*
 (laugh)
 [[('(...) hhh.'

13R: *[[bu shi. bu shi. [nei yisi ha*
 N be N be that mean PRT
 [[['No. No. I didn't mean [that.'

14: ((participants laugh))

15C: (describes how her Shanghainese gets criticized by her husband)

⁵Please refer to the Appendix for the abbreviations.

In this instance, R's positive assessment of her aptitude for learning a dialect (line 6), albeit somewhat mitigated (with the selection of *hai keyi* "OK"), can be heard as doubly problematic when juxtaposed with C's just proffered critical evaluation of herself in the same regard (lines 1–2, 4). Here, R's remark is not only hearably a piece of self-praise, violating the widely presumed social norm of modesty, but is also recognizably produced on the heels of a self-denigration by the recipient, creating a sense of a further raising of self and lowering of the other.

In response, C initially produces newsmarks (*shi ba. Ou* "Yeah? Oh"; line 8) but then immediately follows them with a compliment for R (*na ni keneng congming* "then you must be smart"; line 10). Here, in part through its sequential position (i.e., as part of a turn following R's self-praise) and perhaps mostly through the slight laugh following the compliment, C's compliment about R's language learning aptitude can be heard as tongue-in-cheek. Interestingly, in overlap with this compliment by C, R herself appears to pick up the possible problematic implication of her earlier remark (lines 9, 11) and proceeds to emphatically deny it (line 13). Here, whether or not R's remark in line 6 was indeed meant as self-praise, the recipient's and R's subsequent reactions both orient to this possible hearing, with R further treating it as interactionally problematic and in need of repair. Example (1) thus gives us a glimpse of how participants orient to and operate under the effects of the self-praise constraints.⁶

As Example (1) and several other similar instances in my data suggest,⁷ the social norm of avoiding outright self-praise and appearing humble seems still well honored by Mandarin speakers in everyday social encounters among equals. Violation of this social norm can be oriented to as an interactionally notable event—whether by the speaker, the co-participant, or both.

REPORTING AS A SELF-PRAISING STRATEGY

If self-praise is a socially censured action, how then does a Mandarin speaker achieve the presentation of a positive assessment of him- or herself, truthfully or motivated by the contingencies of the sequential moment? Or, to put it another way, how is immodesty done in a social environment that disapproves of it? In this section, we examine two recurrent practices strategically used

⁶One reviewer questioned whether one should attribute the agency to the social norm, which somewhat controls the behavior of the participants, or should place the agency in the hands of the participants themselves (cf. Kitzinger, 2005). I believe this issue is too involved to be resolved in this article and hence make no attempt to support or refute either view.

⁷See Wu (2011) for further examples.

to resolve such a dilemma: reporting another's words and reporting "just the facts."

Reporting Another's Words

The use of reported speech⁸ (i.e., verbal manifestations of another's prior talk in a current interaction) has long received analytic attention from scholars in different fields (e.g., Clark & Gerrig, 1990; Clift, 2007; Drew, 1998; Galatolo, 2007; Golato, 2000, 2002; Holt, 1996, 2000; Holt & Clift, 2007; Jespersen, 1924; Li, 1986; Lucy, 1993; Mayes, 1990; Sidnell, 2006; Tannen, 1989; Wooffitt, 2001, *inter alia*; see also Clift & Holt [2007] for a review on this topic). Although the number is still relatively few, studies of reported speech have begun to base their analyses on naturally occurring data and have also generated interesting information on the use of reported speech as an effective discursive and interactional resource. Holt (1996, 2000) and Drew (1998), for example, showed how direct reported speech can be used to perform a wide range of actions in current interactions, such as making a complaint, conveying the subtle nuances of a conversation, introducing the climax of an amusing story, and making an assessment of the reported speaker. Along similar lines, Galatolo (2007) demonstrated how direct reported speech can serve as a useful means in legal testimonies by witnesses to provide evidence for their assertions. Both Clift (2007) and Couper-Kuhlen (2007) examined reported speech in non-narrative contexts. Although Clift demonstrates how its use in the environment of competitive assessments can serve to claim epistemic authority, Couper-Kuhlen showed how this practice can be used to strengthen a prior assessing action or to account for and justify a prior disaffiliative move. Finally, several scholars, such as Golato (2000), Holt (2007), and Sidnell (2006), explored the interrelationship between reported speech and embodied action, examining the coordination of talk and nonverbal conduct in the production of enactment or reenactment in conversation.

In my data, reported speech is observed to serve as a resource for accomplishing tacit self-praise.⁹ Consider the following example, which occurred approximately 1 minute after Example (1). At this point in talk, R, who has been picked on earlier for a hearable self-praising move, appears to gingerly pick up the topic of her experience of learning Shanghainese.

⁸In linguistics, a distinction has been made between direct reported speech and indirect reported speech. Direct reported speech refers to instances in which the current speaker "gives, or purports to give, the exact words" of what someone else says or has said, whereas indirect reported speech is used when the current speaker "adapts the words according to the circumstances in which they are now quoted" (Jespersen, 1924, p. 290).

⁹No discernable difference between the use of direct reported speech and indirect reported speech in this regard is observed in this data set.

- (2) (Cao_6/26/06 audio 51:00; video 51:25:19-51:40:21)
- 1R: *tamen zai nar [yi- yi chulai shuo-*
they at there one one come:out speak
'As soon as they [came- came out, they'd speak-'
- 2C: *[(jiliguala...)]*
(onomatopoeic sound)
- 3M: *hh[hh]*
(laugh)
- 4R: *[shuo shanghaihua,*
speak Shanghainese
['speak Shanghainese.'
- 5R: *wo jiu gen tamen yikuai shuo*
I then with they together speak
'I'd then speak with them.'
- 6C: *uh:*
PRT
'Yeah:.'
- 7R:→ *ta shuo- .hhh na-*
3sg say then
'She said- .hhh "Then-''
- 8R:→ *%(nong a sanghaining a)%¹⁰* (in Shanghainese)
you PRT Shanghainese PRT
%““You are a Shanghainese?””%
- 9: (participants laugh)
- 10C: *ni hai xue ting [xiang de a* (smile voice)
you still learn quite similar NOM PRT
'You sound just [like- '
- 11L: *[(wo ...)]* (to C, pointing to R)
I
['(I...)]
- 12C: *ah, jiu shi=*
PRT just be
'Yeah, that's right.'=
- 13L: *=yuyan- [mofang nengli bijiao qiang*
language imitate ability relatively strong
='Language- [learning ability is stronger.'
- 14C: *[dui, yuyan nengli qiang*
right language ability strong
['Yeah, language ability is strong.'

¹⁰Items enclosed within a pair of percentage symbols (%) are code-switched utterances.

- 15C: [*ah. dui dui. (.) dui*
 PRT right right right
 ['Yeah. Right. Right. (.) Right.']
- 16R: [*nei ge shihou xue, xianzai bu xing le*
 that C time learn now N work CRS
 ['(I could) learn then. Not anymore now.']

Here, R is reminiscing about how she often ran into a group of Shanghainese women at a public laundry place while serving in the military. In telling the story she describes how she came to acquire the dialect through frequent exposure to their conversation and through chatting with them (lines 1, 4, 5). The climax of the story is reached when R describes how one of the women mistook her for a real Shanghainese after talking with her on one occasion (*ta shuo- .hhh na- %nong a sanghaining a%* 'She said- .hhh "Then- %You are a Shanghainese?%"'; lines 7–8). Note here that R not only casts this woman's inquiry in a direct quotation but in fact *reenacts* it in Shanghainese.

Although not explicitly a positive assessment, R's use of direct reported speech here arguably serves to accomplish tacit self-praise in two ways. First, by claiming to reproduce what this Shanghainese woman inquired about, R indirectly offers a native speaker's assessment of her Shanghainese proficiency, which indicates that she could speak well enough to fool a native speaker. Additionally, by reenacting this utterance in Shanghainese, R enables her recipients to directly assess and witness her ability to speak this dialect.

Note, then, that in the next turns the recipients display an orientation to the upshot of R's story (i.e., R's being mistaken for a native Shanghainese) as evidence for her language learning ability: In line 10, C, whose husband is a Shanghainese, offers a positive assessment of R's reenactment, "You sound just like-". In turn, another coparticipant, L, compliments R's language learning ability (line 13), with which C subsequently collaborates (lines 14–15). It is interesting to note that in line 16, R partially confirms L's and C's positive assessment of her while at the same time qualifying it. Here, ironically, this assessment of R is then left as something that the coparticipants have done and that R has modestly tried to deny—even though the assessment has arguably been planted by R herself (see also Schegloff, 1996).¹¹

Thus, like the use of reported speech in the other sequential environments reported in the literature (e.g., making a complaint, conveying subtle nuances of a conversation), the use of reported speech in this instance enables the recipients to see the matter for themselves while simultaneously allowing the report speaker to remain as a claimedly "neutral conduit" of the message (cf. Tannen, 1989).

¹¹As one reviewer points out, given that R was somewhat bounced into repairing out of her previous boast (see Example (1)), she is probably returning to a justification of it.

That is to say, rather than positively assessing herself, the speaker manages to have it done through others' voices.

A similar pattern of the three-part sequence (i.e., report-compliment-rejection) in which a report of praise effectively elicits a compliment from a recipient, which the speaker then rejects, is also observed in the following excerpt. This excerpt is taken from the end of a conversation between a young man (A) and his two female friends (B, C), all three college classmates in their early twenties. As this excerpt begins, the participants are talking about how the topic in conversation often varies depending on the participants. In line 1, A underscores that the choice of the current topics was due to the participation of B and C and that if it were a talk between A and his male friend, Xiaogang, they would probably chat about basketball (lines 2–3, 6–8, and 10). Although in her next turn, B goes along with A and furnishes an example of the opposite situation (of all woman talk), describing how she and C would focus their talk on fashion instead (lines 11–17), A interrupts B's talk in progress and abruptly offers an assessment of himself (lines 18–20). As it turns out, what A is about to project appears to be a commendation of himself on a related matter (i.e., his ability and flexibility to talk to different people about different topics) that arguably contrasts with what was implied in the immediately prior talk (i.e., the common restriction of certain topics to certain people).¹² Our focus in this excerpt is on A's subsequent telling of an incident (lines 25–67) and, in particular, the designed completion of the tale with a direct quotation of another's words (lines 66–67).¹³

(3) (JX_6_5_07_A11_video 59: 08; audio 58: 50)

- 1A: *nimen zai zher liao, keneng liao zhe=*
 you at here chat maybe chat this
 'With you guys here, (we) might chat about these.' =
- 2A: *=yao women- wo he xiaogang (wo...)=*
 if we I and (name) I
 = 'If we- Xiaogang and I (...)' =
- 3A: *=women liang jiu liao- liao- liao lanqiu le*
 we two just chat chat chat basketball CRS
 = 'We two would just chat- chat-chat about basketball.'
- 4: (.)
- 5: (participants laugh)
- 6A: **liao- liao (...)*
 chat chat
 'Chat- chat about (...)'

¹²Note A's use of *qishi* "actually" to mark the contrast here (line 18).

¹³In this excerpt, there appears to be a convergence of the use of the two self-praising practices discussed in this article—"reporting another's words" and reporting "just the facts." The latter is explicated in more detail in the next section.

- 7A: *ma- maci he (qishi dui shei) na guanjun*
 (team) and (team) team who get champion
 ‘whether the Spurs or the Cavs is going to win the championship.’
- 8A: *shi ba*
 be PRT
 ‘Right?’
- 9: (participants laugh)
- 10A: *jiu liao liao zhe ge huati le*
 just chat chat this C topic CRS
 ‘Would just chat about this topic.’
- 11B: *>dui a dui a*< keshi women jiu keneng-*
 right PRT right PRT but we just maybe
 >‘Yeah. Yeah. <But we might just-’
- 12: (* to * B laughs)
- 13: [(pointing at C)]
- 14B: *yinwei [women yao liao keneng hui (xian) liao]*
 because we ASP chat perhaps would first chat
 ‘because if we were to chat, (we’d) perhaps first chat-’
- 15B: *ei yao chuan na tiao qunzi bijiao haokan*
 PRT ASP wear which C skirt relatively pretty
 ‘like- which skirt to wear would be better-looking’
- 16B: *ranhou (jintian) yao mai=*
 then today ASP buy
 ‘and then (today) what (I’d) buy’=
- 17B: =[‘(...)’]
- 18A: =[*wo shuo qishi wo zhe ge ren ting shenme de=*
 I say actually I this C person pretty what NOM
 =‘I think actually I’m quite- what should I say?’=
- 19A: =[*ting: (0.8) er::: (y-) bu tai::: (rang ren-)*
 pretty PRT N too let person
 =‘quite: (0.8) uh:: (y-) don’t (cause others) too-’
- 20A: *suibian de=*
 casual ASSC
 ‘Casual.’=
- 21B: =*dui, ting suiyuan=*
 right pretty easygoing
 =‘Right, quite easygoing.’=
- 22B: =[‘()’ (turn to C)]
- 23A: =[*ting suiyuan > wo liao- liao shenme dou keyi liao*
 pretty easygoing I chat chat what all can chat
 =[‘Quite easygoing. >I chat- can chat about anything.’

- 24C: =[(..... *shenme dou xing*) (to B)
 what all OK
 =['(...everything is OK.)']
- 25A: *ranhou na tian:*
 then that day
 'And then that day:'
- 26A: *na tian da bianlun sai de:shihou=*
 that day fight debate contest when
 'that day when we had the debate contest,'=
- 27A: =*tamen shuo*
 they say
 ='they said,'
- 28: (0.5)
- 29A: *zai liao shenme ia*
 ASP chat what PRT
 'What were (they/we) chatting about?'
- 30: (.)
- 31A: *fanzheng kaishi liao=*
 anyways start chat
 'Anyways (we) started to chat,'=
- 32A: =*liao zhe liao zhe*
 chat ASP chat ASP
 ='and we were chatting and chatting.'
- 33A: *yidadui ren dou zai liao=*
 a:lot person all ASP chat
 'A lot of people were chatting.'=
- 34A: =*a- ou, liao yueyu*
 PRT PRT chat (TV series)
 ='Ah- oh, chatting about "Prison Break."'
- 35: (.)
- 36B: [*ah:: yueyu, ah*
 PRT (TV series) PRT
 ['Ah:: "Prison Break" ah.']
- 37A: [(...) *liao- liao yueyu* (...)
 chat chat (TV series)
 ['(...) chatting- chatting about "Prison Break" (...)]
- 38A: *dou zai liao=*
 all ASP chat
 'were all chatting.'=

- 39A: =*ranhou- na ge-*
 then that C
 =‘Then- the uh-’
- 40A: *laopan he laosu b- bu- mei kan guo=*
 (person) and (person) N N watch ASP
 ‘Laopan and Laosu d- didn’t- hadn’t watched (it).’=
- 41B: =*en*
 PRT
 =‘Yeah.’
- 42A: *tamen liang jiu bu liao*
 they two just N chat
 ‘They two then wouldn’t chat (about it).’
- 43A: *.hh ranhou tamen liang lai- lai yi ju*
 then they two come come one clause
 ‘.hh Then they two were lik- like.’
- 44: (.)
- 45A: *na: zanmen liao yi liao, na ge:*
 then we chat ASP chat that C
 ‘Then: let’s chat about the uh:.’
- 46A: *cangzhou-*
 (place)
 ‘Cangzhou-’
- 47A: *cangzhou tie shizi de- huati ba=*
 (place) iron lion ASSC topic PRT
 ‘the topic about- the Iron Lion of Cangzhou.’
- 48B: =*hhh*
 (laugh)
 =‘hhh’
- 49A: *tamen liang- tamen liang cangzhou de ma=*
 they two they two (place) NOM PRT
 ‘They two- they two are from Cangzhou, y’know.’=
- 50B: *[ou*
 PRT
 [‘Oh.’
- 51A: =*[nimen liang bu zhidao cangzhou tie shizi a* (to B, C)
 you two N know (place) iron lion PRT
 =‘You two don’t know the Iron Lion of Cangzhou, huh?’
- 52C: *[(... zhidao)*
 know
 [‘(...know.)’
- 53B: [(lateral headshakes)

- 54A: *ai. cang-*
PRT (place)
'Yeah. Cang-'
- 55A: *wo shuo, ↑xing! wo ye keyi liao*
I say OK I also can chat
'I said, "↑OK! I can also chat about (that)!"'
- 56A: *cangan tie shizi jiu nei ge- e:*
(place) iron lion just that C PRT
'"The Iron Lion of Cangzhou is the uh: e:"'
- 57A: *youming de lüyou sheng-*
famous ASSC travel popular
'"a well-known popular scenic-"'
- 58A: *lüyou - lüyou sheng di. ranhou=*
travel travel popular place then
'"scenic- popular scenic spot, and"'=
- 59A: *=ranhou dangnian shi zhen shui yong de*
then years:ago be calm seas use ASSC
'"was built years ago to calm the sea spirits."'
- 60A: *xianzai kuai- (.)*
now soon
'"Now (it) almost-" (.)'
- 61A: *diao de yijing: (.)*
fall CSC already
'"has deteriorated to the point that:" (.)'
- 62A: *kuai sheng tie pi le*
soon remain iron skin CRS
'"there's almost only the iron skin left."'
- 63: (.)
- 64B: *hehe*
(laugh)
'hhh'
- 65A: *shi ba, shi zhe dagai de yisi ba=*
be PRT be this approximate ASSC meaning PRT
'"Right? That's roughly what it's about, right?"'=
- 66A:→ *=ranhou, ↑ei,*
then PRT
'=And then, "↑Hey,"'
- 67A:→ *[ni bi wo zhidao (de) hai duo a*
you compare I know ASSC still more PRT
['"you know more than I do?!"'
- 68: [(participants laugh)

- 69B: *zhe shuoming ni ne:* (smile voice)
 this explain you PRT
 ‘This shows that you:.’
- 70B: *shi: bijiao heng de, [hengguang]*
 be relative wide ASSC knowledgeable
 ‘have: wider, [wider knowledge.]’
- 71C: *[dui, (heng ...)]*
 right wide
 [‘Yeah, (wide...)’]
- 72A: *[wo meiyou hengguang]*
 I N knowledgeable
 [‘I don’t have wider knowledge.’]
- 73B: *[gen shemeyang ren dou keyi ronghe zai yiqi=]*
 with what:kind person all can mix at together
 [‘(You) can mingle well with all kinds of people.’=]
- 74B: *=zhen shi rang zanmen xuexi de=*
 really be let us learn NOM
 =‘Really is a role model for us.’=

Here, we can note that to proceed with the interactionally delicate agenda of highlighting his conversation/people skills, A appears to start in a rather indirect manner. In lines 18 and 19 he first exhibits difficulties in formulating an assessment of himself. When he finally comes up with a descriptor after much disfluency, he offers a descriptor *suibian* ‘casual’ (line 20), which is relatively neutral and even sounds a bit self-denigrating and which is subsequently revised by B into a sense-retaining, though more positive-sounding, descriptor, *suiyuan* ‘easygoing’ (line 21).

Without going into too much detail in the sequence here, suffice it to note, first, that there is arguably evidence that the story that A gets to tell a bit later in the sequence (lines 25–67) appears to be what he has designed to project from the outset. The evidence includes, for example, the several efforts by A to rush to get to the storytelling (e.g., (i) latching his talk onto the ongoing talk by B [indicated by the equal sign “=” at line 23], (ii) rushing to produce the story preface [indicated by the “>” at line 23], and (iii) sustaining the overlapping talk with B to advance his agenda [cf. lines 22 and 23]). Furthermore, his use of *ranhou* ‘and then’ to begin the story proper (line 25) can also be seen to indicate that what comes after is a planned continuation of what he said or did before.

Note additionally that the storytelling that follows appears to serve to implicitly promote the speaker. In this story, for example, A describes how a group of fellow students were chatting about a popular TV series (*Yueyu* ‘Prison Break’) (lines 25–34, 37–38). Two students who had not watched this TV

series, however, reportedly refused to join the conversation (lines 39–40, 42), proposing instead another topic of conversation (lines 43–47)—the Iron Lion of Cangzhou—to which they apparently had advantageous access (line 49) (cf. Raymond & Heritage, 2006). Although not loaded with explicit assessment or fault-finding, A's construction of this incident is hearably built to provide for an analysis of these two fellow students as being somewhat narrow-minded and self-serving—most obviously by the accounts he offers for why they refused to participate in the ongoing conversation (i.e., that they hadn't watched the TV series in question; line 40) and why they picked the alternative topic (*tamen liang cangzhou de ma* “they two are from Cangzhou, y'know”; line 49).

Most relevant to our discussion here is that in recounting what transpired in the conversation after this proposal, A adopts the strategy of reported speech in describing how he had responded to the two fellow students (lines 55–62, 65) and the response he had received in return (lines 66–67). Here, A first reports himself to have taken a no-problem stance toward this alternative, yet apparently challenging,¹⁴ proposal (line 55). He then reports, verbatim, the detailed historical overview he gave of the Iron Lion of Cangzhou (lines 56–62) and the recipient's reaction to and assessment of the overview he provided (↑*ei, ni bi wo zhidao (de) hai duo a* “↑hey, you know more than I do?!”; lines 66–67). Note here that even though A himself offers no assessment of the incident or the parties involved, through the reported assessment of him by the recipient at the end of the tale, he manages to indirectly provide a third-party—and presumably more “objective”—view to back up his earlier claim of his knowledgeability (line 23).

The possibility that A's storytelling and his verbatim reproduction of the fellow student's assessment of him are designed with a view to underscoring a positive attribute of himself can be reinforced by the story recipient's subsequent comments. In line 69, following a round of laughter, one of the recipients, B, proceeds to make explicit the upshot of A's story—the upshot being that the story and/or the fellow student's reported assessment serve to “show” (*shuoming*) that A not only has wider knowledge (line 70) but can also mingle well with all kinds of people (line 73).

However, despite his perceivable efforts to build up the implications of his unusual qualities and despite the success of these efforts in obtaining the recipient's recognition of the unsaid upshot, A moves at this point to reject

¹⁴Here, the fact that the knowledge about the proposed alternative topic apparently is not equally shared by all participants can, in part, be evidenced by A's negatively formulated confirmation question directed at the other two recipients (*nimen liang bu zhidao cangzhou tie shizi a* “you two don't know the Iron Lion of Cangzhou, huh?”; line 51) and the reported reaction to A's displayed knowledge by the two fellow students who had proposed the topic (lines 66–67). Both arguably display a negative expectation of the recipient knowledge of the place in question.

the compliment. Here, as with Example (2), after the recipient brings into the open the praiseworthy aspect conveyed by the story of the storyteller, the latter proceeds to deny it (*wo meiyou hengguang* ‘I don’t have wider knowledge’; line 72). Here again, through the use of another’s voice and by subsequently rejecting the compliment from the recipient, the speaker can be seen to achieve tacit self-praise while at the same time maintaining a modest posture.

Despite the usefulness of reporting another’s words in accomplishing self-praise, this strategy does not always allow one to breeze to a complete interactional victory. Consider the following example, from a conversation among four women in their fifties who have known each other for more than 20 years. The conversation was recorded at the house of one of the participants. Before this excerpt, the conversation has been focused on the recent housing boom in China. Two participants (R and M) in particular had shown great interest in comparing how much the value of their and some other friends’ houses had increased. Following a few remarks by the participants that it is literally impossible for most people to buy at current prices, the following excerpt ensues.

(4) (Cao_6/11/06 regular a396; video 32:41:10-33:07:20)

- 1R: *hai, yiban ren dou mei na yi:shi a*
 PRT general person all N that sense PRT
 ‘Ah, regular people didn’t have that sen:se.’
- 2: (0.2)
- 3R: *er ling ling ling nian na hui*
 two zero zero zero year that while
 ‘Around 2000.’
- 4: (0.4)
- 5R: *jiu zhe qian ji nian=*
 just this prior several year
 ‘Just several years ago,’=
- 6R: *=mei nei yi:shi mai fang(zi)=*
 N that sense buy house
 =‘(people) didn’t have the sen:se to buy houses.’=
- 7C: *=mm*
 PRT
 =‘Yeah.’
- 8R: *renjia bu yiding=*
 others N must
 ‘They didn’t necessarily’=
- 9R: *=[xu]yao*
 need
 =['have the need.’

- 10M: [*danshi ye you bu shao ren mai fang*]=
but also have N few person buy house
[‘But quite a few people bought houses too.’]=
- 11M: =*mai fang ren hai shi ting duo de*
buy house person still be pretty many NOM
=‘There were still quite a lot of people buying houses.’
- 12R: *dui. mai fang ren*=
right buy house person
‘Right. People buying houses.’=
- 13R: =[(*dan ren dou bu zhidao shenme mudi*]=
but person all N know what purpose
=[‘But not all (of them) knew why they did it.’]=
- 14M: [‘(...)’]
- 15R: =*bu yiyang*=
N same
=‘(It’s) not the same.’=
- 16R: =*renjia nei tian hai caifang*-
others that day still interview
=‘The other day someone interviewed-’
- 17R: [(*w- wo*)]=
I
[‘(m- me.)’]=
- 18M: [(*laobaixing*-)
common:people
[‘(The general public-)’]
- 19R:→ =*ta shuo*=
3sg say
=‘He said,’=
- 20R:→ =*ni weishenme yao mai fang name zao*=
you why want buy house that early
=‘“Why did you decide to buy a house so early?”’=
- 21R:→ =*ta shuo ni zenme*=
3sg say you how:come
=‘He said, “How come”’=
- 22R:→ =*name zao jiu you nei ge yishi mai fang*=
that early then have that C sense buy house
=‘“you got the sense to buy a house so early?”’=
- 23: [(phone rings in the background.)]
- 24R: =[(*name wen wo*]
that:way ask I
=[‘Asked me (like that).’]

640 WU

- 25M: *[[hhh*
(laugh)
- 26C: *[[ah, zhende hhhhh*
PRT really (laugh)
[[‘Oh, really. hhh’
- 27R: *(ah), wen wo lai le hhhh*
PRT ask I come CRS (laugh)
‘(Yeah), (he) asked me. hhh’
- 28R: *jiu shi nei ge fangdichan shang*
just be that C real:estate business
‘I mean the real estate agent.’
- 29C: *[ah zhende*
PRT really
[‘Oh, really.’
- 30R: *[ting dou de*
pretty funny NOM
[‘Quite funny.’
- 31R: *jiu yingying tamen nei ge=*
just (person) they that C
‘Just Yingying’s (real estate agent).’
- 32R: *=[jiu %CBD% nei kuair*
just (place) that area
=‘In the area of %CBD%.’
- 33: [(phone rings again.)

In line 1, R attributes the phenomenon previously discussed—the inability of most people to afford buying a house now—to their failure to foresee the forthcoming upward housing market trend (*yiban ren dou mei na yi:shi* ‘regular people didn’t have that sen:se’). As suggested and evidenced by her subsequent moves, this utterance by R appears to serve not (merely) to offer an account of the current social problem but as a preface to praise of her own keen financial insight (i.e., that she is not one of those ‘regular people’).

Before the possible projection is brought to fruition,¹⁵ however, one of the recipients, M, chimes in with disagreements. In lines 10 and 11 M disagrees with R’s remark that most people were not alert to the climate change in the

¹⁵The possibility that the projected action by R is designed to launch the episode of the reported event can be evidenced by the manner in which she produces her subsequent utterances. In line 12, after quickly responding to M’s disagreement, R rushes to produce her next utterances (as indicated by the equal signs in lines 12–13, 15–17, 19–22, 24), arguably trying to sustain her talk over M’s to project the reported event.

housing market. To this, R first agrees with M (line 12) but then adds the remarks that “not all of them knew why they did it” (line 13) and that “it’s not the same” (line 15). Although R does not make explicit the referent with which her utterance in line 15 was constructed to be compared (i.e., “not the same as who/what?”), her move to immediately follow this utterance with a story and the nature of the story, as it subsequently reveals, suggest its allusion to R herself (i.e., “not the same as R’s case”).

To further explicate this, we can note that in the story R launches (lines 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22, 24), she reports an interview she had a few days earlier. In this story, the interviewer is reported to have inquired twice (lines 19–20, 21–22) about what had motivated R to buy a house several years before. If we compare these two consecutive inquiries, we can quickly note that whereas the first inquiry (*ni weishenme yao mai fang name zao* “Why did you decide to buy a house so early”; lines 19–20) appears to be a relatively neutral question soliciting an account, the second one (*ni zenme name zao jiu you nei ge yishi mai fang* “how come you got the sense to buy a house so early”; lines 21–22) is designed differently. Note, for example, in the second question there is the use of the adverbial marker *jiu*, which, as many Chinese linguists (e.g., Biq, 1988; Liu, 1993) have proposed, serves to signal “an extremely short interval” between the temporal reference and the event in question (Liu, 1993, p. 86), emphasizing that the temporal frame for the referenced event is sooner/earlier than expected. Additionally, the lexical selection of *yishi*, roughly translated as “sense” or “awareness” in English, further indicates that R’s house buying was perceived as based on her sound discernment rather than a random decision. In effect, with the way it is constructed, the second question can be heard to make explicit the difference previously alluded to by R (line 15) between herself and “other people.” The difference is that unlike most people who either were too slow to act (line 1) or didn’t purchase their houses with a clear financial interest in mind (line 13), R’s decision to buy houses was based on her (unusual) good judgment on the housing market trend. Here, the fact that the second question was produced immediately after the first gives a sense that this is a repair-implicated move—in this instance, perhaps to revise the question into one embellished with just this hint of admiration. Whether or not this reported interviewer actually repaired his questions this way or expressed himself in these terms, clearly one of R’s practices for highlighting her keen financial insight and judgment is through another’s words.

It should be pointed out, however, that, as demonstrated in this excerpt, despite the perceivable use of the reported speech in the service of self-praise by the speaker, the recipient does not always fully align with this interactional import nor openly register an understanding of it. In this excerpt, for example, unlike Examples (2) and (3), R’s effort to use reported speech for promoting

herself is met only with relatively lukewarm recipient responses—newsmark (*ah, zhende* “oh, really”; lines 26, 29) and laughter (lines 25–26).¹⁶

What we’ve seen so far, then, is how the practice of reporting another’s words is usable as a means through which a Mandarin speaker can achieve tacit self-praise. As we have also seen, the recipient may choose to align with the speaker by turning otherwise implicit self-praise into an explicit, loud compliment by another (e.g., Examples (2) and (3)) or may opt for a more lukewarm, neutral way to respond to the implicit self-praise (e.g., Example (4)).

Reporting “Just the Facts”

In addition to embedding self-praise in the talk of another in a reported story, Mandarin speakers are also observed to attempt to praise themselves through a careful report of the story itself. Here, they adopt the approach of what has been referred to as reporting “just the facts” in the CA literature (e.g., Drew, 1984; Pomerantz, 1978b, 1980, 1984; Schegloff, 1996). As the name suggests, in describing a state of affairs the speaker simply lays out the facts or gives evidence for it without explicitly providing the upshot regarding the state of affairs. With this strategy, even though the telling is arguably designed to have implications for an interactional plan or a stance display, such implications are not openly articulated by the speaker in the telling but are only left for the recipient to infer, understand, and/or register.¹⁷ In the CA literature, reporting “just the facts” has been shown to accomplish interactionally delicate actions, such as complaining, criticizing, pursuing a response, or initiating or declining a proposal—many of which involve situations where “a speaker is concerned with being held accountable” (Pomerantz, 1984, p. 163). This quality of alleviating accountability is clearly relevant when reporting “just the facts,” as observed in the present data, serves the purpose of self-praise.

¹⁶In fact, laughter/smile and newsmark are common responses to self-praise (cf., also, Speer [2012] for English data). The interrelationship between laughter/smile/newsmark and self-praise will be explored by the author in another paper.

¹⁷It appears that in the CA literature, what characterizes a report as reporting “just the facts” remains somewhat inconsistent. For example, whereas Pomerantz (1984) appears to take a more stringent approach and differentiates presenting “just the facts” from presenting the facts plus “a sense or interpretation” of the facts (p. 163), others include the latter as examples of reporting “just the facts.” In this study, reporting “just the facts” is used in a relatively looser way than Pomerantz’s (1984) distinction. My collection is limited to instances in which the speaker reports the factual details without, however, *explicitly providing the upshot him- or herself*. Sometimes, this may mean that to build up the implications designed for the recipient to understand, the speaker may assess some aspects of the factual details with evaluative terms (e.g., the quality of the jade in (6)). Still, in such instances the implications are left for the recipient to comprehend and/or acknowledge. Throughout the telling, the speaker refrains from explicitly providing the upshot of the reported matter.

Consider the following excerpt, from the same conversation as Example (2) among a group of long-time friends in their fifties. This excerpt is part of a long sequence in which M and L, both retired chairpersons of local committees at their respective former workplaces, talk about the grim challenges they had endured while in this position.

(5) (Cao_6/26/06: video 44:47:02_44:56:10; digital audio 44:21)

- 1M:→ *wan le wo dang na (zhuwei)
finish CRS I serve that chairperson
'And then when I worked as (the chair),'
- 2M:→ nong dao houlai=
do until later
'(I did it) to the extent that near the end,'=
- 3M:→ =wo zou le yihou,=
I leave ASP after
='after I left,'=
- 4M:→ =ba wo gongzuo=
BA I work
='(they) divided my workload' =
- 5M:→ =fen cheng san si ceng *
divide into three four level
='into three or four jobs. hhh'
- 6: (* to * infiltrated with M's laughter)
- 7M: [hhh
(laugh)
- 8L: [*dui, suoyi tamen nei ge-
right so they that C
['Yeah, so they- that-']
- 9L: (nei ge lingdao xianzai) shuo shenme ne*
that C head now say what PRT
'Guess what (the head) says (now)?'
- 10: (* to * L smiles.)
- 11: (.)
- 12L: jiu xiaoliu gan de:shihou [zui:hao.=
just (person) work when best
'“When L worked here, it was really [the best time.”'
- 13M: [hhh
(laugh)

In this instance, L uses the practice described in the previous section—praising oneself through another's words. In lines 8–10 and 12, she reports a favorable

evaluation of her by her former supervisor (*jiu xiaoliu gan de shihou zui hao* “when L worked here, it was really the best time”) and in effect praises herself while attributing the praise to a third party. By contrast, M takes the tack of reporting “just the facts”: She simply reports what happened after she left her position without offering any assessment of the matter by other people or of her own (lines 1–6). However, despite the lack of overt assessment in the storytelling, an implication of M’s high competence at work is clearly in the air when M reports that a task force of three to four offices was needed for the workload she had handled alone before her departure.

It may be relevant to note here that even though both reports, as discussed, are arguably designed with a view to promoting their respective speakers, the recipients only register each other’s report with a minimal response (*dui* “yeah” in line 8 and laughter in line 13), in effect refraining from embracing it with a more affiliative stance display, such as by acknowledging the conveyed merit of the other speaker (cf. Example (2)). It is arguable, then, that L and M, albeit delicately, appear to be engaged in a round of competitive self-praise in this sequence.¹⁸

Whereas Example (5) offers a relatively “clean” case of reporting “just the facts,” in most instances in the data the factual information presented is not completely devoid of any evaluative terms. Here, the speaker sometimes describes certain particulars in the telling with evaluative information, apparently as part of a turn design to build up the intended implication or upshot and to facilitate such a hearing. But still, whatever implication or upshot the speaker has in mind, he or she does not explicitly provide it in the telling but rather simply leaves it to the recipient to infer or acknowledge. The following example offers one such instance. This excerpt is taken from a lunch conversation among six friends in their mid-twenties who were high school classmates and who have since graduated from college. One of the participants, H, has just come home for a visit after being away for a year or so, during which time the other participants—G and Z in particular—appear to have kept in frequent contact. Before this excerpt, the talk has been focused on jade, with G playing the role of the primary speaker sharing his expertise and knowledge in this area. In line 1, G initiates a telling of his purchase of jade jewelry for his mom.

¹⁸In fact, a similar pattern of competitive self-praise is also evident prior to and following this excerpt: The two speakers, while only minimally registering the other’s story, continue to juxtapose each other’s story with a “second story” (Sacks, 1992, pp. 764–771) designed apparently to promote themselves. As with this excerpt, such stories are frequently infiltrated with laughter and/or receipted with laughter. Because the current space does not allow a detailed explication, the interaction of laughter in such self-praise sequences will have to wait for another occasion.

(6) (HR_1_27_09 Hot Pot video 55: 36)

1G: (*na ci*) *gei wo ma mai feicui de zhuozi*
 that time for I mom buy jadeite ASSC bangle
 '(Last time I) bought a jadeite bangle for my mom.'

2: (.)

3G: *jiu shi shuo-*
 that be say
 'That is-'

4G: *jiu dai name yi kuai shenlü*
 just bring that one C dark:green
 'There's a dark green piece in it.'

5H: [^oum^o
 PRT
 [^o'Yeah.'^o

6G: [*ranhou zhe bian:*
 then this side
 ['And then this side:']

7G: *jiu suan bijiao ganjin de na zhong=*
 just count relative clean ASSC that kind
 'has relatively good clarity.'=

8G: =*ranhou- ye bu shi shuo te tou=*
 then also N be say especially opaque
 ='And- it's not like particularly opaque.'=

9C: =*[huoshi ye- kending yue dai=*
 or also definitely more wear
 =['Or- for sure the more (you) wear (it),']=

10H: [*um:*
 PRT
 ['Yeah:']

11G: =*yue tou*
 more opaque
 ='the more opaque (it) will be.'

12: (.)

13G: *dagai yi qian duo kuai*
 about one thousand more dollar
 'A little over one thousand dollars or so.'

14H: (*zheme duo*)
 this much
 '(So expensive.)'

- 15G: *wo gei wo ma mai le liang ge zhuozi*
I for I mom buy ASP two C bangle
'I bought two bangles for my mom.'
- 16H: °*um*°
yeah
°'Yeah'°
- 17Z: >*jiu yinwei zhiqian mai le ge* = (to H)
just because before buy ASP C
>'(It's) just because previously (he bought)' =
- 18Z: =*ji shi kuaiqian*¹⁹ *de*
several ten dollar NOM
= 'one which was less than a hundred dollars,'
- 19: (.)
- 20Z: *xin li bu laoren le*
heart inside N unbearable CRS
'and felt bad (about it).'
- 21H: ↑*ou*::[:
PRT
↑ 'Oh: [:'
- 22G: [*bu*: *shi, bu shi, bu shi*
N be N be N be
['No., no, no.'
- 23G: *wo gei wo ma xian mai ge zhuozi*=
I for I mom first buy C bangle
'I first bought a bangle for my mom.'
- 24G: =*houlai- mai- you- kan le yi ge*
later buy further look ASP one C
= 'Later- (I) bought- saw another- one-'
- 25G: >*jiu shi shuo*
just be say
>'I mean,'
- 26G: *gen na chabuduo*=
with that about:the same
'about the same as that one,' =
- 27G: =*danshi bi na kuai yao hao: dian*
but compare that C still good a:little
= 'but was a little better than that one.'

¹⁹ *Ji shi kuaiqian* literally means "tens of dollars" in English. As this is not a natural expression in colloquial English, "less than a hundred dollars" is used here instead.

- 28H: *ou*
PRT
'Oh.'
- 29G: *jiage hai yiyang*=
price still same
'And the price was the same.'=
- 30G: =*jiu-* (.)
then
='So- (.).'
- 31G: *ni youshihou jiu ren:buzhu:*
you sometimes just cannot:bear
'Sometimes you just couldn't resist.'
- 32G: *jiu xiang mai (ni zhidao)*=
just want buy you know
'Just wanted to buy it, (y' know.)'=
- 33G: =*mai wan zhihou*
buy finish after
='After (I) bought it,'
- 34: (.)
- 35G: [*wo ma*
I mom
['my mom-']
- 36H: [*na bu shi yu benshen de shir le*
that N be jade itself ASSC problem CRS
['That's not an issue about the jade itself then.']
- 37H: *jiu shi- ni kan le haokan*
just be you watch ASP good:looking
'(It's) just that- (it) looks good to you.'
- 38: (0.3)
- 39G: >*bu shi. ni yao xihuan*
N be you need like
>'No. You need to like (it).'
- 40G: (*yaoburan*) *ni kan le zhende shi:*
otherwise you look ASP really be
'(Otherwise) when you look, (it'd) really be:'
- 41H: *dui*=
right
'Right.'=
- 42H: = [*bu shi- bu shi weile mai yu le*
N be N be for:the:sake buy jade CRS
=['Not- not for the sake of buying jade.']

- 43G: *[juede youdianr-*
feel a:little
[‘Feel a little bit.’
- 44G: *you nei zhong ganjue=*
have that kind feeling
‘Have that kind of feeling.’=
- 45G: *=ranhou- wo- wo ma, (.) aiyou, te mei*
then I I mom PRT particular pretty
=‘Then- my- my mom, (.) “Wow, so pretty!”’
- 46G: **tch! °yi kan°ai:yaya °ting hao°*
one look PRT pretty good
‘“tch!” °(She) looked,° “Wow! °Pretty good.°”’
- 47G: *sss aiya tch!*=*
PRT PRT
‘“Ao! Gee! Tch!”’=
- 48G: *=wo bozi shang hai que dian (°dongxi°)* hhh*
I neck on still lack little stuff (laugh)
=‘“My neck is still lacking (°something.°)” hh’
- 49: (* to * G reenacts the conduct of his mom.)
- 50H: ***er!=*
PRT
‘Arh!’=
- 51G: *=ranhou hai::*
then still
=‘And then also::’
- 52H: *za ma dao zhen bu ke::qi hh***
our mom really really N polite (laugh)
‘Mom really isn’t shy about a:sking!’
- 53: (** to ** participants laugh.)
- 54G: *ranhou wo gei wo ma you mai le=*
then I for I mom also buy ASP
‘Then I also bought my mom’=
- 55G: *=yi kuai zheme da de budaide na zhong:: fou*
one C this big ASSC bag that C Buddha
=‘this big Buddha-shaped:: (pendant).’
- 56G: *nei shi:: (.) mei se=*
that be N color
‘That is:: (.) transparent in color.’=
- 57G: *=danshi ting tou erqie- te ganjin=*
but pretty opaque in: addition particular clean
=‘but pretty opaque and also has very good clarity.’=

- 58H: *[um*
PRT
[‘Yeah.’
- 59G: =*[na ge- yu zhi hao*
that C jade quality good
=[‘That- is good quality jade.’
- 60H: *ao*
PRT
‘Oh.’
- 61G: *ranhou na ge shi ba bai*
then N C be eight hundred
‘And that one was eight hundred dollars.’
- 62H: (nods)
- 63Z:→ *ting: chulai le ma* (to H)
hear out CRS Q
‘Did you get it?’
- 64H: (nods)
- 65Z:→ *ta bu shi zai gei ni puji yu de zhishi*
3sg N be ASP for you spread jade ASSC knowledge
‘He wasn’t passing along to you his knowledge of jade.’
- 66Z:→ *ta shi gaosu ni ta you duo xiaoshun=*
3sg be tell you 3sg has how filial
‘He was telling you what a good son he is.’=
- 67H: =*ting chulai le*
hear out CRS
=‘I get it.’
- 68H: ↑*mei yong ia=*
N use PRT
↑‘It’s pointless.’=
- 69H: =*gen wo shuo you shenme yong ia=*
with I say have what use PRT
=‘What’s the point of telling me that?’=
- 70G: =*[ni zhidao- ni zhidao wo song Zou na kuai ma*
you know you know I give (person) that C Q
=[‘You know- did you know the piece (of jade) I gave Z?’

In broad strokes, G’s initial telling of his purchase of a jadeite bangle for his mom (lines 1–13) is elaborated by himself after his report of its price (line 13) is met with a display of surprise by H (*zheme duo* “so expensive”; line 14). Here, G proffers the information that he didn’t just buy one, but rather two, bangles for his mom (line 15). At this point, Z chimes in with an account for

the motivation behind G's additional purchase, namely that he felt bad about not having given his mom a better quality bangle (lines 17–20). In turn, G emphatically rejects its validity (line 22) and proceeds to offer his own account (i.e., that he purchased the second bangle because he simply couldn't pass up a good deal; lines 23–32). As this account comes to a possible completion and just when G apparently attempts to start launching a related story (*mai wan zhihou* (.) *wo ma* “after (I) bought it, (.) my mom”; lines 33–35), H offers a few commentary remarks, generating a round of exchanges with G regarding jade purchases (lines 36–44). It is only after these exchanges that G finally gets to pick up the previously aborted story (line 45).²⁰ Here, he reports how his mom reacts after receiving the (second) bangle (lines 45–49), as well as his subsequent purchase of a Buddha-shaped jade pendant for his mom (lines 54–61).

If we track the trajectory of the interaction and examine in more detail the ways in which G designs his telling of the various episodes here, there appear to be two intertwining aspects involved that get highlighted through the telling: G's knowledge in the domain of jade and the several purchases of jade jewelry he made for his mom.

With regard to the former, note, for example, G's efforts to make his expertise in this domain visible in the details of his talk. Throughout the telling, G uses subject-specific language and jargon to assess each piece of the jade jewelry of interest and describes it by reference to the texture (*feicui* “jadeite,” line 1), the intensity of its color (*dai name yi kuai shenlü* “there's a dark green piece in it,” line 4; *mei se* “transparent in color,” line 56), its clarity and transparency (*jiu suan bijiao ganjin de na zhong* “has relatively good clarity,” line 7; *ting tou erqie te ganjin* “pretty opaque and also has very good clarity,” line 57), the size (*zheme da de* “this big,” line 55), or its craftsmanship (*budaide na zhong fou* “Buddha-shaped,” line 55). That is, he demonstrates his expertise in this subject matter by invoking his knowledge of crucial factors determining the value of jade²¹ and talking like a pro.

On the other hand, in going through the various episodes involving his jade purchases, although G does not offer any upshot of these episodes or his own take on these events, the audience is arguably made aware of not only his passion for jade but his generosity toward his mom as well. In part, this may be conveyed by the storyline itself—namely, that G has made a succession of expensive jade purchases to please his mom. Additionally, a number of designed features of

²⁰Here, that G is picking up the previously aborted story is suggested by his use of *ranhou* “and then,” showing that what comes next is a continuation of what he had said before, as well as his re-use (line 45) of the word, *wo ma* “my mom,” from his earlier-aborted story (line 35).

²¹Information provided by the International Colored Gemstone Association (cf. http://www.gemstone.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=121:jade&catid=1:gem-by-gem&Itemid=69).

the telling, such as the designed completion of each episode with a report of the expense associated with the purchase (lines 13, 29, 61) and G's reenactment of the conduct of his mom making an indirect request for additional jewelry items (lines 46–49), can be heard to contribute to the image of a filial son attempting to satisfy a demanding mother with no complaint.

Note, then, that as G's telling of a third purchase comes to a possible completion point, Z turns to H, (half-jokingly)²² alerting her to the unsaid upshot of the previous telling (line 63). Here, she suggests the possibility of G's use of the prior telling as a way to highlight his good deeds as a son (*ta bu shi zai gei ni puji yu de zhishi. ta shi gaosu ni ta you duo xiaoshun* "He wasn't passing along to you his knowledge of jade. He was telling you what a good son he is"; lines 65–66), even though her remarks indicate both of the possible implications explicated above.

In the ensuing talk, G's moves never make clear whether his prior telling was in fact built to achieve either of the implications.²³ And indeed, much like what he has done throughout the telling, G appears to refrain from explicitly stating the implication himself. However, regardless of whether Z is correct in her interpretation of the upshot of G's storytelling, her take and the recipient's responses (lines 64, 67–69) nonetheless show us their understanding that one use of storytelling in interaction—albeit seemingly done matter-of-factly—is as a practice for doing self-praise.

In sum, the practice of reporting "just the facts," like the use of reported speech, can serve as a useful means through which the speaker can tacitly praise him- or herself. As Examples (5) and (6) demonstrated, by reporting the particulars of a matter without explicitly expressing an opinion or advocating a position of his or her own, the speaker brings in the relevance of the assessed aspects of the matter for the recipient to see for him- or herself. Although not undone, self-praise remains officially unsaid by the speaker through this practice (cf. Pomerantz, 1980).

FIT BETWEEN THE PRACTICES AND THE DESIGNED ACTIONS: A POSSIBLE ACCOUNT

In the previous sections, we examined how the two reporting practices under discussion—reporting another's words and reporting "just the facts"—are used

²²Here, in delivering these remarks, G appears to shift footing by delivering these remarks with an exaggerated (and almost theatrical) serious tone of voice, thereby hearably casting her utterances in a different light—here, perhaps, that these remarks are meant as a tease (cf. Drew, 1987).

²³Subsequent to Z's explication of the upshot of the telling, G appears to try to jokingly "get even" with her by reporting on a piece of jade that he had given her (line 70)—information that Z clearly shows reluctance to reveal (data not shown).

by Mandarin speakers of different genders and age groups as a means to achieve tacit self-praise in everyday interaction. However, as mentioned in the Introduction, these two practices are not the only resources that can be used to this end (cf. Wu, 2011). The question then arises of what qualities are inherent in these two practices that enable the action of self-praise while simultaneously setting them apart from the other resources. That is, what is the fit between these two practices and the action?

Although not intending to suggest a strictly one-to-one practice/action pairing (cf. Schegloff, 1997),²⁴ it can be noted that one common feature of the collection of these two practices in my data pertains to the sequential environments that prompt their use: That is, whereas these practices may occur in contexts in which the report speaker is engaged in doing nothing but self-praising,²⁵ most instances in my collection are observed to figure in contexts in which the self-praise so implemented can be understood as a “double-barreled” action (Schegloff, 2007), initiated with an additional goal to address an incongruity in stance between the speaker and his or her interlocutor.

One such incongruity occurs in the context of competitive self-praise where the participants, rather than providing an aligning response to a self-praising move by another, counter it by promoting themselves. This was seen earlier in Example (5), in which the two report speakers are implicitly yet competitively involved in presenting positive assessments of their respective performances at work.

Additionally, the double-barreled nature of these two practices is clearly evident in the context in which a speaker moves to delicately reintroduce previously problematic self-praise. For instance, as may be recalled in Example (2), the speaker returns to underscore her language aptitude again after her previous effort in this regard had been beaten back (see Example (1)). Here, in contrast to her first self-praise, which notably is cast in an explicit and “on-record” (Brown and Levinson, 1987) manner (*wo xue de hai keyi* “I learned it OK,” line 6 in (1)), the speaker resorts to the strategy of reporting another’s words in her renewed effort.

Finally, a context primed for the use of these two practices is disagreement or misalignment of sorts. In this context, the initiation of a report or telling that ultimately leads to praise of the speaker is arguably initially done to tentatively counter some information provided in a prior turn (or turns). Cases in point are the previously examined (3), the Iron Lion example, and (4), about the heating up of China’s real estate market. As may be recalled, in each instance the speaker moves to make remarks (lines 18–20, 23 in (3) and lines 12–13, 15 in (4)) that somehow contradict or compromise what has just been said or

²⁴See Schegloff (1997) for his view of one-to-one practice/action pairing.

²⁵One such instance may be Example (6).

implied—respectively, in (3) the common constraints on the selection of certain prototypical topics with different groups of people (lines 1–16) and in (4) the contestation that quite a few people had already made a house purchase before the real estate boom (lines 10–11). In each instance, the speaker first marks a contrastive stance (e.g., with *qishi* “actually” [line 18] in (3) and with *dan* “but” [line 13] and *bu yiyang* “not the same” [line 15] in (4)) and then follows it with a relevant telling or report that culminates in apparent self-praise (i.e., for the speaker’s ability to handle different topics [lines 25–67] in (3) and for the unusual insights into the housing market [lines 16–17, 19–22] in (4)). Through the telling or report, the speaker indirectly shows him- or herself, with the reported unusual qualities, to be an exception to the prior generalized information or situation, thereby providing the basis for challenging its validity.

A possible account for the association of these two reporting practices and the aforementioned sequential contexts, I suggest, pertains to a nice fit between the unique features of these practices and some common sequential demands generated by such contexts. That is, whether the sequential contexts pertain to competitive self-praise, a renewed effort by the speaker to introduce a previously problematic self-praising task, or disagreement, they all involve what I call the problem of epistemic misalignment concerning the speaker, broadly defined as an incongruity pertaining to the understanding of a state of affairs concerning the speaker or how the state of affairs should be understood from the speaker’s perspective.²⁶

This is self-evident in the context of disagreement, in which the participants display different understandings with respect to some matter that turns out to be crucial in establishing the basis for the proposed exceptional quality of the speaker. This speaker-relevant epistemic misalignment is also visible when there is an incongruity in understanding concerning, for example, which of the participants is the one that deserves praise, namely in the context of competitive self-praise, or how a prior action should have been understood, such as when the speaker subsequently reinstitutes a praiseworthy matter which (from the speaker’s perspective) was not properly understood or registered by the recipient in the first attempt.

What is at issue in implementing a successful responding action in such contexts, then, is that the action needs to be perceived not only as performed in a socially proper manner (as it concerns promoting oneself) but also as carrying credible information (as it involves misalignment). As it happens, the practice of doing self-praise through reporting allows the speaker to meet both demands at once. On the one hand, by quoting another’s words or presenting the “facts,” both practices allow the speaker to give evidence and “an air of objectivity”

²⁶For the ever-growing body of CA research on the topic of “epistemics,” see, for example, Heritage (2012), Heritage and Raymond (2005), and Stivers et al. (2011).

to what he or she is telling or reporting (cf. Holt, 1996, p. 230). Nonetheless, by attributing the praise to a third party or by designedly reporting the event in a seemingly matter-of-fact manner, the speaker disengages him- or herself from the reported message, creating an impression that he or she is simply a neutral conduit of the message. With these two combined features, then, the two reporting practices can “kill two birds with one stone”—a capacity that makes them well-suited resources for doing double-duty self-praise in a socially marked context. They allow the speaker to address the potential problems of alignment and evidentiality inherent in the aforementioned sequential contexts while at the same time alleviating the accountability for going beyond the social bounds of modesty.

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

An increasing number of studies of language and social interaction have begun to explore the phenomenon that parties to talk-in-interaction do not always speak their minds in a straightforward manner. Rather, for various interactional reasons, participants in conversation may just hint at, or allude to, the action they intend to accomplish in and through various linguistic resources (e.g., Clayman, 1992; Drew, 1984; Holt, 1996; Pomerantz, 1978b, 1980, 1984; Schegloff, 1996, 1998; Wu, 2005, 2011, *inter alia*). In this article, I examined how the use of two reporting practices—reporting another’s words and reporting “just the facts”—figures in an interactionally delicate business—that is, doing self-praise.

The analysis presented here has implications for the longstanding research on reported speech. In particular, I have shown that the use of the two reporting practices are commonly found in contexts such as competitive self-praise, a renewed effort to introduce a previously not entirely successful self-praising task, and disagreement/misalignment. I have suggested that a common thread across these seemingly diverse sequential contexts is that the self-praise accomplished in these contexts can be understood as a “double-barreled action” (Schegloff, 2007), with the dual goal to accomplish self-praise while simultaneously addressing an apparent speaker-interlocutor epistemic misalignment. These findings seem intricately related to the prior research on reported speech in that the intended interactional project is enabled in part by a commonly recognized capacity of reported speech to convey a sense of objectivity (e.g., Holt & Clift, 2007). The current research, however, expands our knowledge in this area by investigating a previously underexplored linkage between this practice and self-praise and by showing additionally the sequential characteristics involved in the production and receipt of self-praising through reporting in the context of everyday Mandarin conversation.

On a more general level, the interactional use of the two reporting practices discussed in this article bears the hallmarks of the shift of “footing” (cf. Goffman, 1981).²⁷ In his work on broadcast interviews, for example, Clayman (1992) discussed how news interviewers commonly shift footings at specific junctures in the interviews by attributing what they say to a third party. He argued that such footing shifts allow the interviewers to voice controversial points of view without revealing their own take on such views and hence help them put up a neutralistic professional front. In similar yet distinctive ways, the present study has shown that Mandarin speakers can also shift footings by use of reported speech or by telling an event in matter-of-fact tones. Here, though, the footing shift serves to disengage the speaker not so much from a controversial viewpoint as from a controversial social action. The two Mandarin practices under discussion, then, could be understood as a context-specific type of the generic practice of footing that is specifically adapted to the work of self-praise.

Additionally, the analysis of the two “covert” practices of self-praise in Mandarin can feed nicely into the pragmatic/sociolinguistic discussion regarding issues such as “indirectness” or “off-recordness” in language use (e.g., Brown & Levinson, 1987). According to Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 211), off-record utterances are “essentially indirect uses of language.” They can provide the speakers an “out” by virtue of the fact that the intended interpretations of such utterances are solely left to the recipients to recover, and hence the speakers can avoid the liability for such interpretations. The present study has offered data-driven evidence in Mandarin to support this account and has shown that the two reporting practices under discussion bear a strong resemblance to such off-record strategies in that they allow the speaker to alleviate, if not completely avoid, the responsibility and liability for committing the face-threatening act of raising and boasting about self.

The present analysis also provides insight into research on the phenomenon of politeness in general and its manifestation in Mandarin conversation in particular. As noted at the beginning of this article, most prior studies in this area have focused either on theorizing about the overarching models of the phenomenon of politeness or on the principle and practices of self-praise avoidance. The current study has gone a step further and explored how self-praise is done and responded to in everyday social encounters among equals. Our analysis has shown that

²⁷“Footing” was first introduced by Goffman to explore how the speaker takes up him- or herself vis-à-vis those who are present in relation to an event. According to Goffman, speakers in social interaction may achieve particular footings by designing their utterances in accordance with particular formats of speaker roles (what Goffman calls the “animator,” “author,” and “principal” of an utterance). A change in footing often involves the ways in which the speaker takes up, and/or alternates between, these roles in the course of speaking. Footing shifts in interaction may imply shifts in the speaker-hearer alignment. For a summary of Goffman’s notion of footing, see, for example, Clayman (1992).

despite the apparent constraints against it in Mandarin culture, self-praise is still observed to happen in social interaction from time to time, although this action is almost always mitigated or camouflaged by use of linguistic resources, such as the two practices examined in this article. These findings suggest that rather than simply treated as a social taboo, self-praise may be better understood as an intricately organized, socially coordinated, and interactionally negotiable communication activity; it is worthy of more analytic attention than has been so far given in the literature. On a more language-specific note, if the analysis of this article is on target, it offers us evidence that exhibiting humility in Mandarin conversation is not a pre-set rule as has previously been widely presumed; often, it is rather a delicately designed and locally achieved interactional outcome.

Finally, it seems relevant to note that over the years, the predominant approach to the study of Chinese politeness phenomena, like the notion of Chinese modesty, has relied heavily on analysts' judgment and common folk wisdom as expressed in well-known Chinese sayings. However, the orderliness exhibited in these phenomena, such as the linkage observed between the accomplishment of self-praise and the interactional use of the two reporting practices in question, is not always readily accessible to native speaker intuitions. As many researchers have noted (e.g., Ochs, Schegloff, & Thompson, 1996; Schegloff, 1996), discoveries of this kind are often grounded in close examination of recurrent patterns emerging from the routine communication activity in which the action and practice are situated. It seems cogent to remark, then, that if politeness phenomena, self-praising behavior included, are part of a broader range of systems that underlie the organization of social life and human conduct, then a comprehensive analysis of the phenomena should be situated in the social/interactional matrix and should take into account how such phenomena figure in the evolving actions in talk-in-interaction.

Before concluding this article, it may be worth mentioning that although the two practices reported here are recurrently observed to accomplish self-praise in Mandarin conversation, such uses (and hence the implications) may not be particular or limited in scope to the Mandarin speech community (cf. Speer, 2012). Clearly, the work presented here is just the tip of the iceberg. We look forward to more research on conversation in Mandarin as well as across languages to uncover the ways in which politeness phenomena are substantiated on the micro-level of everyday interactions and the ways in which linguistic resources and interactional patterns work together to facilitate this process.

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APPENDIX: ABBREVIATIONS

ASSC	associative (- <i>de</i>)
ASP	aspectual marker
BA	the <i>ba</i> marker in the <i>ba</i> construction
CRS	currently relevant state (<i>le</i>)
CSC	complex stative construction
C	classifier
N	negator
NOM	nominalizer (<i>de</i>)
PRT	particle
Q	question marker
3sg	third person singular pronoun