

Story sequencing and stereotyping

A case study from talk about the crowded buses of China

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Over the last decade, sometimes violent conflicts have erupted between generations in China over who should have a seat on a crowded bus. Through a small story approach to an extended sequence of Chinese bus stories, this study examines how elder-blaming comes to be instantiated in talk-in-interaction. The analysis elaborates Deppermann's finding that cooperative in-group bonding is not the sole reason that out-group stereotypes are instantiated: competition among interactants as they "top" one another's stories also plays an important part. We nuance this, first, by pointing to actions that are simultaneously cooperative and competitive. Second, we foreground how the interactional troubles of our storytellers fundamentally revolve around issues of epistemic accountability and, in turn, are assuaged by cooperative epistemic acts, in which stereotyping and story "topping" entwine.

Keywords: small stories, narrative analysis, story topping, epistemics, social memory, identity, stereotyping, ageism, Chinese buses

Introduction

Perhaps in keeping with both Confucian and collectivist values, relations among the riders of China's buses have generally been respectful. However, in 2003, occasional murmurs of dissatisfaction about riders' discourtesies began to appear in print (Peng & Zhou, 2003). Nowadays, riders are reported to be resorting to physical violence: in one recent instance, one rider died of a heart attack after he slapped another rider who had refused to cede a seat (Fauna, 2014). Bus seat conflicts have garnered public interest, serving as the inciting incident of *Caught in the Web* (Chen & Chen, 2012), the film that was China's nominee for a 2013 Academy Award, as the subject of national award-winning photographs (Wang, 2004; Zhang, 2005),

and as a topic of China's widely-viewed Lunar New Year Gala (Kaixinmahua, Yan, & Peng, 2014). In Western countries, the analogous phenomenon of "air rage" is popularly associated with celebrity or privilege (Johanson, 2011). In China, as our earlier work has shown (Gao & Bischooping, 2015), bus seat conflicts have come to be discursively constructed as pitting demanding elders against their selfish juniors.

Our earlier analysis employed a macro-level lens to understand how such a discourse could have flourished, especially when most younger Chinese continue to give up seats to their elders, who are, for the most part, thankful. In a nutshell, we saw bus seats becoming increasingly scarce in a country whose infrastructure has not kept pace with rapid urbanization. We saw a population whose moral panic (Cohen, 2002) about bus seats conflicts was conditioned by rapid social change and crises such as environmental degradation, unsafe food, and officials' corruption (Ci, 2014). We saw a government adept at stereotyping social groups and positioning them as the causes of social problems, the very dynamic that Cohen (2002) discerns in moral panics in general. In this context, extreme formulations of younger Chinese as Western-influenced individualists and pampered "Little Emperors" (Hesketh & Zhu, 1997) and of older Chinese as violent connivers who had fomented the Cultural Revolution (Commentators, 2014; Qin, 2013), become potent discursive resources when media account for fissures in the moral fabric (Roberts & Indermaur, 2005). Constructed as real, such stereotypes become "real in their consequences" (Thomas & Thomas, 1928) and self-perpetuating. Social psychologists have long maintained that by derogating an out-group, members of an in-group affirm their social identity and enhance their self-esteem (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

The missing links in this analysis, as in much discourse analysis focused only on macro-level social forces, are agentic individuals and their interactional contexts. In the present paper, we use micro-level analytic tools to understand what it is that individuals may accomplish in talk-in-interaction by instantiating stereotyping discourses. In particular, we propose to expand on Deppermann's (2007) inquiry into "using the other for oneself" (p. 273), which discovered that male youth employ stereotypes of various out-groups in talk that not only enhances group affiliation, as social psychologists would expect, but also allows individual narrators to compete to distinguish themselves. Our project's first contribution is to further complicate and nuance the relationship between cooperation and competition. We do so via a case study of the talk-in-interaction among three speakers of diverse life stages, connected by diasporic, familial, and friendship ties.

That the talk-in-interaction that we study is comprised of an extended sequence of "small stories" (Bamberg, 2004) informs our second, methodological contribution. Several analysts have been attentive to the phenomenon of the "second story" (Sacks, 1995), i.e., to how and to what effect interactants establish the link of one

story to the next. However, Deppermann (2007) is the lone scholar in the tradition of narrative inquiry to have closely examined how successive stories can “top” those that have preceded them, a phenomenon also evident in our data. His analysis has revealed how speakers can accomplish “topping” by escalations in the *content* of their stories, i.e., by depicting out-group members in increasingly extreme norm violations and positioning these violations as increasingly telling about the out-group in its entirety. Our insight is that story “topping” is also entwined with and occasioned by how interactants manage emergent issues of “everyday epistemics”, i.e., of rights, responsibilities, and accountability concerning the social distribution of knowledge (Stivers, Mondada, & Steensig, 2011).

Methods

Data

Our data are an excerpt from one of a series of unstructured interviews that co-author Zhipeng Gao conducted in January 2014 in Toronto, Canada, for a research project asking how Chinese identity is experienced in Canada. The project was approved by the Human Participants Review Board of York University. Participants’ names have been replaced by pseudonyms.

In the interview excerpt studied here, Zhipeng, a man who was then 27 years old, is speaking with two participants: Lindsay, then 41 years old, and her niece, Sylvia, then age 18. All three originally hail from China, from cities outside Beijing, a point that will become germane as the analysis proceeds. Lindsay had emigrated from China to Canada ten years earlier and has become a Canadian citizen, an act that required her to give up her Chinese citizenship. Sylvia and Zhipeng are newer arrivals, in Canada on student visas. Zhipeng had been close friends with Lindsay for three years and Sylvia for one. The over ten hours of interviews were conducted in settings such as the stairs where Lindsay did her daily stretches, and the kitchen, where Zhipeng helped Lindsay cook.

Because our data come from an interview, one might ask whether findings would generalize to more ordinary conversation. Drawing upon De Fina and Perrino (2011), we would respond that it is more productive to ask what can be observed about the identities salient to the interactants in the communicative event under study. Perhaps aided by the informal setting, friendship-based, age-based, and geopolitical identities will be shown to loom large in this event. Interviewer and respondent identities do not. For instance, in our analyses, Zhipeng will be seen to tell a small story, express epistemic doubts about one participant, overtly agree with another participant, and laugh at a stereotype. None of these acts perform

the neutrality in orientation to future data analysis that is typical of research interviewers (Mazeland & Ten Have, 1996). Similarly, that Lindsay and Sylvia will not wait for Zhipeng to initiate topics shows that they are not orienting to a respondent identity (Koven, 2011).

Because the talk that we analyze was in Mandarin, the transcripts give three versions of each line. The first version uses the Jefferson (2004) transcription conventions and is in a modified form of Pinyin, the standard system of transliterating spoken Chinese languages into written English. Following from Wu (2004, p. xiii), we remove the Pinyin tone markers, which become redundant when a translation is at hand. The second version of each line supplies word-for-word glosses of the Mandarin into English, using Wu's (2004) abbreviations for parts of speech that do not lend themselves to faithful translation. For instance, the Mandarin third person singular pronoun "ta", which encompasses the English pronouns "he", "she", "it", "him", and "her", is abbreviated as "3sg". The third version of each line restores the CA annotations insofar as possible to a transparent translation of the Mandarin into English.

Analytic approach

We analyze the data in its chronological sequence, examining what the speakers are accomplishing in their talk, specifically in the course of referencing age and instantiating an ageist stereotype, alongside demonstrating how it is that their stories successively "top" one another. Our analysis employs concepts and principles that will be familiar to scholars using a "small story" approach. First introduced by Bamberg (2004), this approach is a counterpoint to Labov's (Labov, 1997; Labov & Waletzky, 1967) model of the story. While Labov envisioned "stories" as the rigorously-structured monologues of narrators who reflect upon their pasts, implicitly striving to achieve a more orderly, authentic self, analysts of the small story conceive of "story telling" as emergent and possibly messy, as situated in interaction rather than in the minds of narrators, and as performative, acting in relation to both those co-present and the larger social world (Bamberg, 2004, 2006; Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008; Georgakopoulou, 2007). A small story approach is therefore well suited to exploring sense-making and action related to stereotyping and to various forms of identity and belonging. Further, that one of the most telling excerpts we will examine consists of only three utterances is consistent with what Bamberg and Georgakopoulou (2008) refer to as an "aesthetic" (p. 381) of this approach, in which fleeting passages of talk, such as oblique references to past experience, are valued rather than discarded.

Understanding stories as threads in the fabric of emergent, performative talk-in-interaction, we, like other small stories researchers, use eclectic conceptual tools, including ones drawn from conversation analysis (CA) and discursive psychology (DP). Although we must underscore that we are not conversation analysts, from CA, we draw on specific insights into “second stories” and into how speakers accomplish a sense that one story is topically connected to another (e.g., Arminen, 2004; Sacks, 1995). In CA we also find a conceptual vocabulary for naming how story-telling interactants orient to norms about everyday epistemology, “attend[ing] not only to who knows what, but also to who has a *right* to know what, who knows *more* about what, and who is *responsible* for knowing what” (Stivers, Mondada, & Steensig, 2011, p. 18).¹ Most importantly, we rely on CA’s foundational insight that it is through talk-in-interaction that speakers unknowingly work to sustain their sense that a shared intersubjectivity is possible (Sacks, 1995). Although conversation analysts eschew speculation about social actors’ motivations and indeed about any context other than that to which speakers demonstrably orient, Hammersley (2003) points out that the social world that CA discerns, with its accountability mechanisms and sanctions against distrust, tends to be a cooperative one. CA, therefore, is well-suited to helping us to appreciate that which is cooperative about story “topping”.

However, story “topping” also has a conflictual element (Corrigan, 1993; Deppermann, 2007), something that Sacks’s (1995) CA of second stories does not explain (Corrigan, 1993). We augment CA concepts with ones from DP in part because the latter provides a conceptual vocabulary amenable to observing competition. As Hammersley puts it, “*Homo rhetoricus* is primarily concerned with formulating accounts that are as persuasive as possible, to serve his or her interests” (2003, p. 763). Further, because DP takes a broader view of context than CA does, it permits us to consider the ageist discourse we identified in our earlier work (Gao & Bischooping, 2015), as well as other discourses circulating in contemporary China, to be rhetorical resources upon which interactants may draw.² Finally, DP offers a helpful perspective on the acts of remembering and forgetting involved as our participants tell stories about their experiences. According to DP’s founding insight,

1. Although we sometimes use the CA concepts of epistemic access, primacy, and responsibility in highlighting conflict among our interactants, CA emphasizes how speakers who are acting disaffiliatively can nonetheless cooperate in orienting to epistemic norms (Stivers, Mondada, & Steensig, 2011, p. 24).

2. Although an extended discussion of context is beyond the scope of this paper (see Duranti & Goodwin, 1992), we note that other analysts of talk in interaction, such as De Fina (2008), Moerman (1988), and critical discourse analysts (see Haworth, 2006), also advocate for broader definitions of it.

so-called psychological phenomena, such as memory, are not essences that fixedly reside in individuals (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Rather, they are malleable resources, produced in response to situational contingencies and present-day relevances (Middleton & Edwards, 1990b).

Analyses

The identity work of talk about crowded buses

During the excerpts of talk being analyzed, the trio of speakers is sitting around the dining table of Lindsay's home. In Excerpt 1, Lindsay is just finishing the story of a university classmate who had experienced a long wait for expensive medical care. Abetted by Zhipeng, she presents a resolution to this story. It begins with her realization that "this place is Very huge" (line 4), and then introduces the issue of crowded buses, using the consequences of giving up one's seat to an elderly person as an example (lines 31–40). Lindsay's use of the second-person pronoun in "if you [...] see an elder" (lines 27–28) attributes a common young identity to her listeners and herself, or at least, her younger, undergraduate self. This identity is depicted positively, as potentially observant of and kind toward elders (lines 28–29), even at a cost of "one or two hours" (lines 32, 38) of intolerable discomfort. Importantly, at this juncture, elders are neither depicted stereotypically nor presented as the prime cause of discomfort. Rather, Lindsay gives diffuse causes, including the hugeness of "this place" (line 4), the extent of traffic congestion (line 16), the crowding of transit (line 25), the kind heart of the seat-giver (line 28), and public reluctance to offer a seat to someone implicitly not an elder (39–40).

Excerpt 1. This place is very huge

L = Lindsay

Z = Zhipeng

S = Sylvia

- 1 L: en. (0.7) ↑Zhong ri youhao yiyuan.↓
 PRT China Japan friendship hospital.
 yeah. (0.7) the ↑China-Japan Friendship Hospital.↓
 (2.0)
- 2
- 3 um:: houlai um:: aiya wo jiu jue de
 um then um EXC I so feel PRT
 um:: then um:: aw so I felt that
- 4 zhe difang (0.9) um zhe difang tebie da
 this place um this place very huge
 this place (0.9) um this place is very huge
- 5 ni zhidao ma= (.) =qu na dou=
 you know Q go where ever
 you know= (.) =wherever one goes=

- 6 Z: =>en en<= =dui
 uh huh uh huh ((agrees)) right
 =>uh huh uh huh ((agrees))<= =right
- 7 L: na Chao[*yang*] qu dao [*Fengtai*] qu
 such as Chaoyang District to Fengtai District
 like from Chao[*yang*] District to [Fengtai] District
- 8 Z: [*dou*] (0.6) [*hen yuan*]
 all very far
 [all] (0.6) [very far]
- 9 L: <na[> *dou*] *tai*::= =↑*tai*↓ *yuan le*.
 that all too too far ADV
<that[> is all] *too*::= =↑*too*↓ far away.
- 10 Z: [°*dou hen yuan*°] =dui=
 all very far right
 [°all very far°] =right=
- 11 (1.2)
- 12 L: *hmm*= =(1.5) *ni yaoshi shuo*-
 hmm you if say
 hmm= =(1.5) say if you-
- 13 Z: =>°*danshi*°<--
 but
 =>°but°<--
- 14 (1.0)
- 15 L: *meiyou* na *ge*(0.7) *meiyou*, *meiyou* *che*:
 don't have that c don't have don't have car
 don't have that (0.7) don't have, don't have a car:
- 16 ↑*na*↓ *shihou* [>*dangran*<] *jiaotong* *hai, hai, hai hao*,
 that time of course traffic still still still ok
 at ↑*that*↓ time [°of course<] the traffic was still, still, still ok,
- 17 Z: [>*en en*<]
 hm hm ((I hear you))
 [>*hm hm*<] ((I hear you))
- 18 L: *yinwei* = =(.)*bijing* *qiche* *yongyou*
 because after all automobile ownership
 because = =(.)after all people possessing cars
- 19 Z: =>en en en<=
 uh huh uh huh uh huh ((agrees))
 =>uh huh uh huh uh huh< ((agrees))=
- 20 L: *liang* *de ren* *bushi* name [*duo*
 number of people N that many
 weren't that [many
- 21 Z: [*dui, dui*
 right, right
 [*right, right*
- 22 L: *ai: ni yaoshi shuo jiu zhiwang zhe*:
 gee you if say just count on PRT
gee: say if you were just counting on:
- 23 *zuo* *public transit de hua* >°*na*°< <*zhen*>*de yuan*=
 take public transit if that really far
 taking public transit >°that°< was<rea>llly far=
- 24 Z: =en
 uh huh ((agrees))
 =uh huh ((agrees))

- 25 L: *oh ren ji ya:=*
gee people crowded EXC
gee it was so crowded:=
- 26 Z: =*en en*
uh huh uh huh ((agrees))
=uh huh uh huh ((agrees))
- 27 L: *shangqu yihou ni shuo (1.0) ni >°jiu °< shuo*
boarding after you say you just say
after boarding say you (1.0) >°just°< say you
- 28 *kanjian laorenjia ni haoxin*
see elder(s) ((respectful pronoun)) you kindhearted
see an elder ((respectful pronoun)) and out of your
kindheartedness
- 29 *ni xiang gei ta (0.5) rang ge weizhi=*
you wish to 3sg give up c seat
you wish to (0.5) give up the seat for him/her=
- 30 Z: =>*dui ya<*
right EXC
=>right<
- 31 L: *danshi ni ziji yi zhan ne jiu zhan*
but you self once stand ASSC will stand
but once you stand up that means standing
- 32 *ji, yi liang ge xiaoshi*
a few one two c hour
for a few, one or two hours
- 33 *ni ye shou bu liao a=*
you either bear N PRT EXC
you cannot bear it either oh=
- 34 Z: =*dui*
right
=right
- 35 L: *keshi mingming (de)- wenti jiu shi shuo (dang)-*
but apparently (PRT) problem just is say when
but apparently ()- the problem is just that (when)-
- 36 *ruguo ni, ni rang le zhege weizhi (.)*
once you you give up CRS this seat
once you, you give up this seat (.)
- 37 Z: *en en*
hm hm ((I hear you))
hm hm ((I hear you))
- 38 L: *ni jiu (.) >mm< zhan naer yi liang ge xiaoshi*
you have to stand there one two c hour
you have to (.) >mm< stand there for one or two hours
- 39 *jiu jiu hh: hh (.) meiyou meiyou banfa*
just just hh hh N N way
just just hh: hh (.) there's no no way
- 40 *mei ren hui rang gei ni de=*
N people would give up to you PAR
anybody would give up their seat to you=

Being young is one identity that this talk about Chinese buses works to ascribe to Lindsay, Zhipeng, and Sylvia. We now delineate others, for as the group continues to talk, these will become unsettled, with talk of age resolving the interactional trouble.

The first such identity claim is derived from the fact that, in this excerpt, Lindsay never names “this place”. Although Zhipeng could have inferred the answer from Lindsay’s references to studies in Beijing in their earlier interview sessions, Sylvia had not attended these sessions. That Lindsay does not explain and Sylvia does not ask what “this place” means, permits us to infer that the two are displaying what Stivers, Mondada, and Steensig (2011) refer to as “epistemic access congruence” (p. 10), i.e., a shared understanding of one another’s relevant knowledge base. This would have its basis in their shared background, which derives in turn from their familial identities as aunt and niece.

Moreover, this excerpt works to assert that China, or at least Beijing, remains knowable to Lindsay, Zhipeng, and Sylvia from afar, that their diasporic Chinese identity is grounded in some materiality. Following the mode of reasoning that De Fina (2008) developed in studying the stories that Italian Americans tell about Italy, Lindsay and Zhipeng’s criticisms of Beijing transit could reflect a pattern in the larger body of our interview data, in which participants alternated between expressing homesickness and deploring China’s government, infrastructure, and political conditions. Focusing on transit issues could be part of justifying an emigration decision, and a consequent diasporic identity, that are fraught with ambivalence. That Beijing in particular attracts Lindsay’s criticism may have further identity implications. Chinese who are not formally registered as Beijing residents are accorded lesser social service entitlements (S. Wu & Wu, 2013), and often consider Beijing natives to be unwelcoming (Mu, 2000). In turn, Chinese sometimes call Beijing the “emperor’s city”, a term that mocks its purported claim to superiority. Through its resonance with this discourse, Lindsay’s story may invite Zhipeng and Sylvia to identify alongside her as insightful outsiders, capable of perceiving Beijing to have its share of flaws.

Within the group, Lindsay has a distinctive identity, that of the person who has spent several years in Beijing, and who therefore may position herself as possessing epistemic primacy regarding this domain. Her authoritativeness is also likely to be heightened by the rhetorical devices that she employs. Lindsay uses extreme case formulations (Pomerantz, 1986) in utterances such as “wherever one goes” (line 5), the emphatic “you cannot bear it” (line 33), and “there’s no no way anybody would give up their seat to you” (lines 39–40). She uses second-person pronouns “you” and “your” twelve times in lines 12 to 40, continuously casting her listeners into the setting she describes, and implying that they would experience it just as she had (Myers & Lampropoulou, 2012). Lindsay also augments the factuality of her claims when making if-then or similarly deterministic claims in statements such as “if you were just counting on: taking public transit, >^othat^o< was <rea>lly far” (lines 22–23) and the again emphatic “once you stand up, that means standing for a few, one or two hours” (lines 31–32) (Edwards & Potter, 1992).

When what is being narrated is a complaint, the expectation for others to join in is especially strong; although complaining may seem indicative of negativity and conflict, Liinamaa (2009) posits that it expresses a quest for shared values to be affirmed. As we see, Zhipeng tends to fulfill this expectation throughout Excerpt 1, eight times saying “uh huh”, a continuer that supports Lindsay’s story-telling. He also frequently makes utterances such as “yeah” and “right”, which can be interpreted as performing multiple simultaneous acts. By using such utterances rather than “oh!”, Zhipeng projects that he already possesses epistemic access to what Lindsay is describing, that their experiences are shared. That Lindsay orients to these utterances, too, as continuers indicates that Zhipeng and her interactional objective is not to transfer facts about “this place”. Instead, their objective may be to affirm the meanings expressed by Lindsay’s characterizations of “this place”, its buses, and the act of giving up one’s seat to an elder.

Two aspects of Excerpt 1, however, suggest something contrary to the spirit of shared values, identities, and experiences that our analysis has thus far emphasized. Sylvia’s silence runs counter to the norm of joining in with complaints talk. (We defer analysis of this till Excerpt 3, when she finally does speak.) Moreover, in Zhipeng’s “yeahs” and “rights”, we can also read a trace of competition. These utterances assert that, despite Lindsay’s more extensive Beijing experience, it is he who possesses epistemic primacy over the story’s domain, and is therefore qualified to assess Lindsay’s depictions (Heritage & Raymond, 2005; Stivers et al., 2011).

Identity challenges and disruptions

Excerpt 2. What’s more

- 41 Z: =erqie zhan zhan haoxiang dou shi
 what’s more stand stand possibly even is
 =what’s more even standing standing was possibly
- 42 zhan bu shuang de na zhong de
 stand N comfortable PAR that state PAR
 one could not stand comfortably like that
- 43 [jiu shi] ren [tebie djuo:
 namely is people very many
 [that is] there are [too ma]:ny people
- 44 L: [en dui ya] [ji de]
 uh huh ((agrees)) right EXC crowded PAR
 [uh huh ((agrees)) that’s right] [so crowded]
- 45 Z: youde shihou yi zhi jiao zhan
 some time one c foot stand
 sometimes one has to stand on one foot
- 46 L: mm
 mm ((confirms))
mm ((confirms))

In Excerpt 2, we see the first of our instances of “topping”. It begins with Zhipeng’s “what’s more” (line 41), an expression that indicates that what is to come will develop a theme that Lindsay has put forward, one that implicitly merits pursuing. As Bromberg (2012) has discussed, the telling of a second story is an act of reciprocity. However, “what’s more” can also be seen as a move by Zhipeng to challenge Lindsay’s identity as the group’s prime knower of the domain of Beijing buses, in that it suggests that Lindsay’s narration has omitted a more tellable point, that of the buses’ intense crowding (lines 41–43, 45). Zhipeng’s contribution here could also rhetorically “top” Lindsay’s because it plays on her “stand there for one or two hours” (line 38) with a sensorily-engaging culminating image of having to stand on one of what are implicitly two feet. As Corrigan (1993) has shown, competing to outdo another storyteller can involve exactly this kind of cooperative borrowing from, and endorsement of, elements of the story that has just been told.

But, what of Sylvia? In Excerpt 3, when she breaks her silence, it is in a way that poses greater challenges to the group’s identity work. With “could this even be?” (line 47), she marks her receipt of information, and expresses that the bus crowding is indeed reportable. But, this utterance is not simply the equivalent of a “wow!” Sylvia’s use of “even” expresses that Zhipeng’s story – as well as Lindsay’s lines 44 and 46 responses to it – seem so reportable as to be implausible, in what Labov (1997) has called the “paradox of reportability”. Following from Stivers, Mondada, and Steensig (2011), we can interpret Sylvia’s utterance to be making a moral claim that Zhipeng and Lindsay have misrepresented the domain of Beijing’s bus crowding.

Excerpt 3. Could this even be?

- 47 S: >hh hh hh ((laughs))< hai you zhe qingkuang
 hh hh hh even exist this situation
 >hh hh hh ((laughs))< could this even be?
- 48 Z: [ni mei ni mei-
 you N you N
 [haven’t you, haven’t you?–
- 49 L: [wo you yi ci (.) um::
 I have one c um
 [I once (.) um::

For his part, Zhipeng seems taken aback, responding to Sylvia’s question with a question of his own, “haven’t you, haven’t you?” (line 48). This question shows that Zhipeng had understood Sylvia to share Lindsay and his epistemic access to the bus crowding domain, underscoring how, for him, the function of the storytelling had not been to transfer facts about this domain. When familiar stories are retold, Georgakopoulou (2007) has found, they permit reflection, bolster shared identities and values, and solidify individual roles within a group. Zhipeng’s line 48 utterance is also making a moral claim, namely that Sylvia has failed to take epistemic

responsibility for knowing what he had assumed to be the group's common ground (Clark, 1992) of knowledge (Stivers, Mondada, & Steensig, 2011). These mutual doubts threaten the group's assumptions that a shared intersubjectivity is possible, and that China and Beijing remain knowable from afar. In contrast to the talk in Excerpt 2, with its cooperative-competitive jostling for epistemic primacy, that of Excerpt 3 jars almost all of the identity work that we have posited these interactants to be doing.

Topping the earlier story, renewing group identity work

At the end of Excerpt 3, we see that Lindsay had been as quick as Zhipeng to address Sylvia's question (line 49), doing so by beginning a new story (Excerpt 4) that can be understood, first, to act in refutation of Sylvia's moral claim. In it, Lindsay narrates about the buses in the first-person, staking a more explicit claim to her veracity in representing this domain than her earlier third- and second-person narratives had done (Moita-Lopes, 2006, p. 301). That Lindsay orients us to the character of "one old man" (line 51) anchors the story to a singular incident, also making this narrative more difficult to contest than Zhipeng and her earlier generic characterizations of Beijing bus crowding (Lumme-Sandt & Virtanen, 2002, p. 293–294). In addition, Lindsay's new story is constructed as more faithful to past events because she supplies more details than she had in Excerpt 1, including her stomachache (lines 57, 67), the specific words she attributes to the old man, and many features of his speech (lines 61–65) (Ross & Buehler, 1994). That such ventriloquizing is rarely accurate, and tends to be inflected with the perspective of the person doing the recounting (Tannen, 2007) will soon become pertinent.

Excerpt 4. There was one old man

- 50 L: *jiu shi (1.0) you yi- you yi ge: >mm<*
 namely is there was one there was one c
 that is (1.0) there was one- was one: >mm<
- 51 *you yi ge laotouzi jiu shi*
 there was one c old-man ((neutral pronoun)) just was
 was one old man ((neutral pronoun)) who just was
- 52 *shang le che jiu rang wo rang zuo=*
 board CRS bus once ask me give up seat
 asking me to give up my seat right after boarding=
- 53 Z: *=en en*
 hm hm ((I hear you))
 =hm hm ((I hear you))
- 54 L: *wo jiu bu gei ta rang=*
 I just N for 3sg give up
 and I just didn't give it up for him=

- 55 Z: =en en
hm hm ((I hear you))
=hm hm ((I hear you))
- 56 L: yinwei dangshi wo
because then my
because at that time my
- 57 du teng de hen lihai=
stomach pain CRS very severe
stomach hurt very badly=
- 58 Z: =ou
hm ((I hear you))
=hm ((I hear you))
- 59 L: ranhou (0.5) ((deep breaths)) ta jiu Beijing ren
then 3SG as Beijing person
and then (0.5) ((deep breaths)) he as a Beijing local
- 60 jiu mamalielie: shuo
just curse-curse-babble-babble say
just kept cursing and babbling: he said
- 61 (h) >zhe yi ↑KAN jiu:
this one glance must
(h) >with a single ↑GLANCE it's obvious this person:
- 62 wai di ren
outside place person
isn't from this place
- 63 nian qing qing de
age young young PAR
being so young
- 64 yi dian limao dou (.) limao dou
one c courtesy even courtesy even
lacking even the slightest courtesy (.)
- 65 >jiu<((slip)) bu jiang<
just N uphold
>just ((slip)) no sense of courtesy<
- 66 wo dangshi jiu shi mm:
I then just was mm:
I just was mm:
- 67 duzi tebie teng
stomach very pain
my stomach ached very badly
- 68 na jiu chenmo jiu [>mm]
so just silent so mm
so I just kept silent so [>mm<
- 69 Z: [en
mm ((sympathetic))
[mm ((sympathetic))
- 70 L: niu niu guo tou jiu bu li ta=
turn turn ASP head just N regard 3SG
I just turned turned my head away and disregarded him=
- 71 Z: =dui
right
=right
- 72 L: ta mamalielie de zou kai le=
3SG curse-curse-babble-babble PAR walk away CRS
cursing and babbling he walked away=

73 Z: =*[ow:*
 uh huh ((I hear you))
 =*[uh huh: ((I hear you))*

74 S: =*[sousuo*
 search
 =*[Caught in the Web*

75 (0.8)

76 L: °*mm*°
 mm
 °*mm*°

77 Z: *wow*
 wow
 wow

When we compare Lindsay's Excerpt 4 story to those of Excerpts 1 and 2, we also observe that she has "topped" them, producing a story that is more dramatic. This is in part because rather than stemming from multiple, diffuse, situational causes, the obstacle in this new story is primarily the work of a single, concrete antagonist, the "cursing and babbling" (lines 60, 72) bus rider. Moreover, this story should more strongly appeal to its audience because it makes salient identities of the antagonist that differs from theirs, and proposes that these differences are the basis of his antagonism. The trio are young, while the antagonist is implied to ask for Lindsay's seat because he is elderly; the trio are from outside Beijing, while the antagonist complains and curses specifically "as a Beijing local" (line 59). Although a listener could now disapprove of Lindsay for stereotyping, she preempts criticism by what she recounts to be the antagonist's speech, in which he arguably stereotyped her first, labeling her after a single glance (line 61) as someone who "isn't from this place" (line 62), employing an idiomatic expression to attribute lack of courtesy to Lindsay's youth (63–65), and using plosion, consonant hardening, and rapid speech in a way that, in this context and to a listener fluent in Mandarin, would communicate snapping or exploding irritation. This precisely matches Deppermann's (2007) finding that stereotyping stories claim that the out-group is not only guilty of behaving badly, but also of derogating the in-group.

Finally, this story is more compelling than the earlier ones because of the layered struggle that it develops between individuals as representatives of demographic groups, *and* as bearers of competing definitions of morality (McKee, 1997, pp. 118–120). The elderly person in Excerpt 4 is depicted to claim that norms of courtesy morally *require* a younger person to cede a seat (lines 63–65), while Lindsay's Excerpt 1 and 4 stories maintain that a young person could *opt* to do so depending on individual characteristics such as a kind heart (line 28) or an aching stomach (lines 54–57, 66–68). While in Excerpt 1, a young person who did not give up a bus seat seemed to face a consequence no greater than feeling unkind, the consequence in Excerpt 4 is momentous. The stakes have been raised: the group has now been

presented with a dilemma in which young people on Beijing buses must choose between one or two hours of intolerable discomfort if they do give seats to their elders, and the risk of silently suffering public criticism if they don't.

From Zhipeng's "wow" (line 77), which is a stronger response than his "uh huh"s and "right"s of Excerpt 1, we see a confirmation that Lindsay's new story has indeed had a greater impact on him. But, again, what of Sylvia?

The peak of both plotting and stereotyping

In line 74, and then as Excerpt 5 commences, we see that Sylvia is initiating a story that acts to defend herself against Zhipeng's (line 48) charge of epistemic irresponsibility, carries out other "topping" and stereotyping actions parallel to Lindsay's, and furthermore does what Arminen (2004) has found second stories of a shared trouble to accomplish, namely, to not only show understanding of a problem but also to offer a new solution to it. However, for Sylvia to produce such a "second story" seems as though it would pose twin challenges. The first challenge is for Sylvia to show herself to share in bus troubles at the same time as she sustains her claim to lack epistemic access to certain first-hand experiences on Beijing buses. The second is the intractability of the problem that the earlier stories had depicted.

Excerpt 5. There's a movie, Caught in the Web

- 78 S: *you yi dianying sousuo*
 there is one movie search
 there's a movie Caught in the Web
- 79 *jiu shi zhe zhong gushi=*
 just is this kind story
 that's just this kind of story=
- 80 L: =°en°:
 hm ((I hear you))
 =°hm°: ((I hear you))
- 81 S: *na nvde. en:*
 that woman um ((finding words))
 that woman. um: ((finding words))
- 82 *hen zhiye nvxing hen limao.*
 very professional female very polite
 was a very professional female very polite.
- 83 *ranhou ta [huan le aizheng le*
 then 3SG get CRS cancer CRS
 then she [got cancer
- 84 L: [↑oh: wo ↑kan guo wo kan guo, na ge=
 aha I watch PRT I watch PRT that c
 [↑aha I ↑watched it I watched↓ that one=
- 85 S: =du/i (.)
 right
 =righ[t (.)

move toward Lindsay, whose suffering and character are implicitly elevated by the comparison.

Once Lindsay and Sylvia have established that they share epistemic access to “that one” [that film] (lines 84, 86, 87), they begin to jointly recall the names of its actors and director, in talk that acts to sustain a diasporic identity in which maintaining knowledge about China matters. These several lines of talk are initially propelled by questions of Lindsay’s (lines 88, 91). Per Goodwin (1987), Lindsay’s forgetfulness can be understood as interactionally effective: it serves to affiliate with Sylvia by continuing to topicalize the film that she has mentioned, and warrants inviting Sylvia to display her expertise. Of further note are lines 97–98, in which Lindsay refrains from agreeing with Sylvia’s (lines 94, 96) recollection that Zhao Youting had been among the cast. Since Lindsay accounts for this in terms of what she can and cannot remember, she can be understood as continuing to respond to Sylvia’s line 47 charge, asserting herself to be a narrator who aims to remember faithfully.

In Excerpt 6, Zhipeng enters the exchange by asking about Sylvia’s line 87 utterance “sit on my lap”, marking himself as a person unfamiliar with *Caught in the Web*. Sylvia and Lindsay now begin to co-narrate a key incident in the film’s plot, one that line 87 already had sketched in a way that could be intelligible only to another person familiar with the film. Now, as Sylvia and Lindsay invoke the stereotypical figure of an incessantly complaining elder (lines 102, 103), they will together meet the second of the challenges mentioned earlier, that of revealing a new solution to young bus riders’ dilemma.

Excerpt 6. Sit on my lap

- 100 Z: zenme ge zuo tui shang fa
 how c sit lap on like
 what’s this about sit on my lap
- 101 S: ta dangshi-
 3sg at that time
 that person at that time-
- 102 nei lao yeye jiu zai na
 that old grandpa just at there
 there that old grandpa just
- 103 yizhi shuo yizhi shuo=
 keep complain keep complain
 kept complaining kept complaining=
- 104 Z: =>en en<=
 hm hm ((I hear you))
 =>hm hm<=((I hear you))
- 105 S: =renjia benlai [jiu de aizheng le ma
 3sg((favorable)) in the first place already get cancer CRS PRT
 =in the first place that lady [already got cancer

- 106 L: [jiu ma ta ma
just curse 3SG PRT
[was just cursing her
- 107 Z: dui ya (.) ow
right PRT aha
right oh (.) aha
- 108 S: xinqing bu hao
mood N good
her mood was bad
- 109 [ranhou ta shuo (.)
then 3SG say
[and then she said (.)
- 110 Z: [>en en en<
hm hm hm ((I hear you))
[>hm hm hm<((I hear you))
- 111 S: mei zuo le. (.) zuo tui shang ba
N seat CRS sit lap on BA
there's no more seats.(.) sit on my lap
- 112 ta jiu shuo ↑zuo zhe↓
3SG just say sit here
she just said ↑sit here↓
- 113 ta jiu pai ((pats her lap)) le pai tui.=
3SG just pat CRS pat lap
and she just patted ((pats her lap)) her lap.=
- 114 Z: =>en en<
hm hm ((I hear you))
=>hm hm<((I hear you))
- 115 S: ranhou yi che ren dou huaran le.
then one bus people all hubbub CRS
and everybody on the bus was in a hubbub.
- 116 Z: ha ha ha ha
ha ha ha ha
ha ha ha ha
- 117 (0.6)
- 118 L: °hmm°
hmm
°hmm°
- 119 (0.5)
- 120 Z: ai
(sigh)
((sigh))
- 121 L: ta gang qu wan (.) mm: yiyuan
3SG just go already mm hospital
she had just gone to (.) um: the hospital
- 122 (1.6)
- 123 Z: [en
hm ((I hear you))
[hm ((I hear you))
- 124 L: [yisheng gang gao°su° ta de le aizhe[ng le
doctor just tell 3SG suffer CRS cancer CRS
[the doctor had just tol°d° her she's sick with can[er
- 125 Z: [>en en en<
hm hm hm
[>hm hm hm<

- 126 (0.8)
 127 L: *suoyi ya*
 so PRT
 that's why
 128 (0.8)
 129 Z: *dui*
 right
 right
 130 (1.2)
 131 L: *Beijing ren jiu shi na zhong (0.9) baqi*
 Beijing people just are that way arrogant
 Beijing people are just like that (0.9) arrogant
 132 (0.6)
 133 Z: °en°
 hm
 °hm°
 134 L: *bu jiangli*
 N reasonable
 unreasonable

Rather than standing painfully or silently enduring the elder's castigation, the film's protagonist is described by Sylvia in recounted speech as saying, "there's no more seats. (.) sit on my lap!" (line 111), a retort then paraphrased in line 112–113. In Mandarin, this retort is sexually suggestive and thus especially transgresses norms of politeness toward one's elders. Yet, the trio exonerates the film's protagonist. Lindsay preemptively warrants the retort by upgrading the elder's complaining to "cursing" (line 106): once again, it is the elder character who is depicted as the initiator of conflict. Sylvia warrants it with, "in the first place, that lady already got cancer" (line 105), an utterance that adds being "ladylike" to the professionalism and niceness already attributed to the protagonist. Sylvia attributes the protagonist's retort to her bad mood (line 108), i.e., to a temporary, situational factor and not an enduring character trait. Lindsay furthers this by explaining that the cancer diagnosis had been recent (lines 121, 124). After Lindsay says even more explicitly that it had caused the protagonist's action (line 127), Zhipeng shifts from replying with the neutral "hms" of line 125 to an affiliating "right" (line 129). Of further note is that although the other passengers on the bus are unaware of the protagonist's diagnosis and generally good character, they seem to excuse her too. They are described as in "a hubbub" (line 115), a term that takes on context-specific meanings of being exhilarated or dissatisfied. Here, Zhipeng's laughter and Lindsay's approving "hmn" (lines 116, 118) support the notion that they picture other bus riders to be in a lively, entertained state, rather than an appalled or irate one.

The constructive nature of memory contributes to this, for in actuality, *Caught in the Web's* bus scene does not show a busload of passengers in an entertained hubbub. Almost all of the passengers ignore the dispute, and the few who do react criticize the protagonist, exclaiming, for example, "Do you talk to your grandpa

like this?” (Chen & Chen, 2012). Moreover, considered in its entirety, the film does not emphasize a theme of bold youth prevailing against the elderly. Ruthless young characters number among the film’s antagonists, and the young protagonist ultimately commits suicide. In our data, as in Middleton and Edwards’s (1990a) analysis of how research participants jointly remembered the film *ET*, we see a partial renarration focused on “the good bits” (p. 31). A factual renarration of *Caught in the Web* as a whole would not so effectively entertain Lindsay, Sylvia, and Zhipeng, smooth over their epistemic authority issues, and produce a creative, wish-fulfilling solution to the dilemma of young bus riders. Of final note is that Lindsay’s coda, “Beijing people are just like that [...] arrogant [...] unreasonable” (lines 131, 133), shows how an ageist stereotype, once thoroughly endorsed, can become a resource for prosecuting a stereotype of Beijing locals.³

Conclusion

Our project had sought to understand why agentic individuals engaged in talk-in-interaction would instantiate a stereotyping discourse. As Deppermann (2007) and social psychologists following from Tajfel and Turner (1979) would predict, individuals cooperate in using stereotypes to support collective identity work. Specifically, our participants worked together to recruit ageist and regional stereotypes in ways that sustained shared identities based on friendship and family bonds, and conflicted diasporic ties to China. However, as Deppermann underscored, in-group members do not put stereotypes solely to cooperative, collective ends. Stereotypes are also employed in a spirit of competition, whether in “topping” one another’s stories or in jostling for epistemic primacy. Further, our analysis illustrates that distinguishing competition from cooperation is not entirely straightforward: utterances can enact both at once, Lindsay can cooperate with Sylvia to “top” her own story, and differing approaches to talk-in-interaction draw analytic attention to different aspects of human nature and sociality.

Our case study especially advances Deppermann’s work by foregrounding matters of everyday epistemics. Among our participants, it is interactional troubles of

3. Although this utterance could be interpreted as a criticism of the most recently-mentioned character, the protagonist, we do not read it in this way. The old man and protagonist might both qualify for the adjective “arrogant”, but only the protagonist’s act has been defended by Sylvia and Lindsay as stemming from multiple reasons. She is therefore not a strong candidate for Lindsay to be calling “unreasonable”. Further, a 1.2 second pause, during which participants may have pondered, separates talk about the protagonist from lines 131 and 133. Thus, these lines may be read as a coda in which Lindsay reflects on the entire story or the extended story sequence.

epistemic accountability, visible at the interstices of small story telling and receipt, that puts group members' senses of shared histories and identities at risk. This, in turn, occasions epistemic acts, such as forgetting, correcting, and jointly remembering, that assuage these troubles. In these acts, it is possible and convenient to dramatically impugn an absent Other, one who cannot hold interactants to epistemic account. In addition, as De Fina, Schiffrin, and Bamberg (2006) point out, stories are powerful vehicles for stereotyping because they permit evaluations to be communicated without being directly asserted. It is with remarkable speed that Sylvia and Zhipeng's discomfiting charges in Excerpt 3 occasion the progression of evaluations of the elderly Other from the beneficiary of a kind gesture to an irascible babbling and then to a laughingstock. This final image especially matters because views that are believed to be shared are more openly expressed (Koriat, Adiv, & Schwarz, 2015). A story positioning a busload of passengers as entertained by an elder's comeuppance is arguably conducive to the further dissemination of ageist stereotypes.

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