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Communicative constructions of space in epistemic asymmetry: The case of German-Chinese university placement interviews

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Abstract: Placement interviews have become an important discourse genre at universities as they decide about access to social, monetary, or cultural resources. Despite their importance, hardly any linguistic studies deal with this particular discourse genre in academic communication. Using a conversation-analytic approach, we analyze a corpus of placement interviews in which representatives of a German university interview Chinese students applying for a study year at the German university. We examine how Chinese applicants present their second-hand knowledge about Germany and German universities in a conversation with university representatives who have first-hand knowledge about these spaces, i.e., we investigate how interviewers and interviewees deal with epistemic asymmetry when they construct and talk about academic spaces in China and Germany. While some aspects of German academia are situated in imagined spaces of which Chinese students cannot have direct knowledge, students are expected to know about other aspects of German academia that are situated in knowable spaces. Moreover, applicants and interviewers take varying evaluative and affective stances toward the different academic spaces and thus construct cultural difference. Interviewers treat German academia as a different or a foreign space. As part of a “hidden academic agenda” of university placement interviews, students construct German academia as a desired space with many opportunities and they present Chinese academia as an unsatisfying space they would like to leave behind. The paper contributes to recent studies of interactional sociolinguistics, intercultural communication, and epistemics in interaction by expanding their scope to the practices of affective and epistemic stance taking in intercultural communication.

Keywords: epistemic stance, placement interview, intercultural communication, impression management

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1 Introduction

In academia, placement interviews have become a common tool and a well-known discourse genre for selecting the most qualified students from a larger group of applicants. Students might be interviewed for scholarships, internships, or admission to a particular program. Placement interviews not only play a vital role as part of the universities’ institutional communication but also constitute gatekeeping situations (Erickson and Shultz 1982), as they decide about access to social, monetary, or cultural resources. Their far-reaching consequences extend well beyond the scope of this single conversation. Despite their importance, hardly any linguistic studies deal with this particular discourse genre in academic communication.

The communicative tasks of students in placement interviews are quite diverse, sometimes even conflicting. Interviewees have to present their academic achievements, research interests, and communication skills (making placement interviews comparable to job interviews, Lipovsky 2006), yet they should not give the impression of being too self-confident (Birkner 2004). Moreover, placement interviews are essentially asymmetric institutional conversations (Drew and Heritage 1992; Glenn 2013; Lipovsky 2006): The interviewers organize turn taking, set relevant topics for conversation, and have the institutional power to choose from the group of applicants by standards defined by the institutions (Hudson 2016).

The communicative challenges in intercultural placement interviews can be considered even higher (Auer 1998; Chen 2003; Kotthoff 2009; Molinsky 2005): Students might be asked to converse in a foreign language (Molinsky 2005). They might not be acquainted with culture-specific interactional conventions or with the discourse genre as such (Günthner 2014; Günthner and Luckmann 2001). They also face the challenge of presenting knowledge about the university and the study program for which they are applying without having direct or first-hand knowledge. As the interviewers are representatives of the university, they can claim professional and first-hand knowledge about the university and the study conditions. Discourse in placement interviews is therefore characterized by a particular epistemic asymmetry (Glenn and Curtis 2011).

Using a conversation-analytic approach that takes the cultural dimensions of communicative genres into account (Günthner 2014; Günthner and Luckmann 2001), we analyze a corpus of placement interviews in which representatives of a German university interview Chinese students applying for a study year at the German university. We examine how Chinese applicants who had never been to Germany present their second-hand knowledge about Germany and German universities in a conversation with university representatives who have first-hand
knowledge about these spaces, i.e., we want to find out how interviewers and interviewees deal with epistemic asymmetry in intercultural university placement interviews (Glenn and Curtis 2011). This paper contributes to recent studies about interactional sociolinguistics, intercultural communication (Di Luzio and Günthner 2001; Gumperz 1982), and epistemics in interaction (Heritage 2011; Raymond and Heritage 2006) by expanding their scope to the practices of affective and epistemic stance taking in intercultural communication.

2 Dimensions of space in linguistics

In recent years, there has been growing interest in the study of language and space in disciplines such as areal linguistics, cognitive linguistics, sociolinguistics, linguistic anthropology, conversations analysis, and interactional linguistics. These studies differ in the linguistic levels they investigate and in the conceptualization of space (Auer et al. 2013; Wenz 2009): Although they are not mutually exclusive, the following three core areas of linguistic research on space can be made out: First, from a primarily sociolinguistic point of view studies deal with geographic boundaries, the spatial distribution of linguistic forms (Auer 2004), and the influence of language ideologies on the perception of linguistic and geographical boundaries (Niedzielski 1999; Preston 2010). Other studies investigate spaces in which social actors use particular styles and repertoires (e.g., spaces for multilingual practices; see Blommaert et al. 2005; Jacquemet 2010; König et al. 2015; Maehlum 2010). Recent studies have set out to describe the visibility and situatedness of texts such as street signs or commercial signs in specific places (Domke 2013; Landry and Bourhis 1997; Gorter 2006; Jaworski and Thurlow 2010). Second, cognitive-linguistic studies focus on how different ways of representing space produce differences in the expression of spatial relations (Brown 2006; Levinson 2003). Third, applying a conversation-analytic framework, studies address the construction of interactional spaces (Hausendorf 2013; Mondada 2013), i.e., they investigate how interlocutors establish and co-construct shared spaces for social interaction, in which particular participation roles are assumed and assigned. Also of interest here is the use of spatial deixis in interaction (Schegloff 1972; Stukenbrock 2014). While these approaches might differ in the linguistic phenomena they investigate, they all start from the notion that space is not an objective given, not an a priori entity, but something that has to be constructed and interpreted by social actors (Christmann 2016).

Taking on this basic assumption, our concept of space is based on recent work on the moment-to-moment construction of space as an object of spoken
discourse (Liebscher and Dailey-O’Cain. 2013; Miller 2012). Our focus is on how interlocutors construct and frame spaces in their conversations, i.e., we look for “discourse strategies of constructing certain views of space and spatiality” (Hausendorf 2013: 282). This approach does not only look at how interlocutors describe and refer to geographical locations but also at the multiple ways by which places are connected to specific social and/or linguistic practices (Dailey-O’Cain and Liebscher 2011; Miller 2012). Drawing on the spatial metaphor of “territories of knowledge” (Heritage 2011) used in conversation-analytic studies of epistemics in interaction, we want to argue that the construction of specific academic spaces in university placement interviews is pervaded by claims of access to knowledge (Heritage 2011). We will show how speakers take on different epistemic stances (Kärkkäinen 2003) when they talk about academic spaces in Germany and in China. Moreover, as they have to demonstrate their motivation for their study year abroad, the interviewees might also communicate specific affective stances towards these spaces (Du Bois 2007; Goodwin et al. 2012). Thus, this paper pursues a line of thinking that relates epistemic and affective stances to the communicative construction of space. Before we analyze the practices with which interviewers and interviewees construct and frame academic spaces (Section 5), we characterize placement interviews on the basis of previous studies of selection interviews (Section 3) and then give an overview of the corpus and our research questions (Section 4). Finally, we discuss our findings in a larger framework of epistemics in intercultural encounters.

3 Interactional asymmetries in intercultural placement interviews

Although placement interviews have become an important selection tool at universities, there is hardly any linguistic research about this discourse genre (Beckmann 2012). As placement interviews share decisive functional, contextual, and interactional features with the comparatively well-studied discourse genre of job interviews, we will mainly draw on research in this field of study to characterize the general interactional framework of placement interviews.¹ In the

¹ There are, however, many more types of selection interviews or gatekeeping interactions. See for instance Baptiste and Seig (2007) for a study on naturalization interviews, Tranekjær (2015) for internship interviews, Ross (2007) for research about oral proficiency interviews for access to jobs or Holmes’ (2007) paper for an analysis of intra-institutional gatekeeping encounters.
latter part of this section, we will discuss placement interviews in the context of recent research on academic communication.

3.1 Job interviews and placement interviews

Placement interviews, like job interviews, can be characterized as institutional conversations. According to Drew and Heritage (1992) institutional talk is shaped by the participants’ general goal orientation, the particular constraints the setting puts on possible contributions of the interlocutors in their respective roles, and a distinct inferential framework. Institutional communication, the authors claim, is inherently asymmetrical; this interactional asymmetry, also characteristic of job interviews, is observable on different levels. Interviewer and interviewee actively take on different interactional roles: It is predominantly the interviewer who introduces new topics of conversation and who defines the length of the interviewee’s turns (Adelswärd 1988; Roberts 2011; Komter 1991). That participants orient themselves routinely to these complementary roles can also be seen in the interviewer’s “rights” to initiate laughter, which is regularly followed by interviewee laughter. If interviewees laugh first, however, interviewers normally do not treat this as an invitation to laugh along (Glenn 2013). Moreover, the levels of discourse competence or routinization might not be equally distributed: While interviewers are generally familiar with this discourse genre and conduct interviews routinely, applicants might not be accustomed with this type of interaction (Birkner 2004).

Besides turn taking and topic control, differences in knowledge also characterize job interviews. While interviewers as representatives of their institution know all relevant details about the post, applicants often only have a rather diffuse idea about what is required for the job but are experts on their professional biographies (Glenn and Curtis 2011; Lipovsky 2006). Knowledge asymmetries are of particular importance in placement interviews at universities – institutions where knowledge is the main objective (Hyland 1998; Sucharowski 2001). By claiming access and rights to specific knowledge, interlocutors can establish an asymmetry in participant roles. Glenn and LeBaron (2011) show that interviewers can take different epistemic stances in the questions they ask in job interviews: While they do not claim primary access to knowledge of the curricula vitae of the applicants, they do claim primary access when it comes to summarizing and assessing what they have gathered from the files already handed in by the applicants. They thus position themselves as experts and as gatekeepers (Erickson and Shultz 1982; Kerekes 2006) who will eventually decide which applicant is successful, which applicant will be able to enter the “desired spaces” (Trinch 2007: 1895).
Whereas lack of direct appraisal for the applicants is the normal situation, in some contexts, e.g., when there are only few applicants for a post, it might also be the interviewers who have to make a good impression. They do so by complimenting the interviewees and by praising the company (Lipovsky 2008). In general, however, it is the applicants who have to express interest in the company and who have to promote their qualifications (Kerekes 2006; Lipovsky 2006): “Impression management and positive self-presentation are the applicant’s main goals in a job interview” (Birkner and Kern 2000: 257). And it is the interviewers who guide them through the interaction.

Applying for a job or a study program in intercultural contexts may aggravate this general interactional asymmetry (Auer 1998; Roberts and Sarangi 1995; Sarangi 1994). Here, challenges may lie in the fact that applicants potentially have to present themselves in a foreign language (Molinsky 2005). This is of particular importance in placement interviews at universities in which academic jargon might be used. However, asymmetries in intercultural encounters can be found on more than just the linguistic level (Günthner and Luckmann 2001; Rosenberg 2012): Even if applicants manage to get across the relevant information and details about their qualifications, their contributions still might not be treated as adequate (Gumperz 1992; Roberts and Campbell 2006; Roberts 2011). Applicants from different backgrounds may lack the cultural knowledge they need for making the interview successful: They might not be accustomed to the discourse genre at all, i.e., job interviews or placement interviews might not be part of their communicative repertoire. Auer (1998: 8) calls job interviews a “Western speech genre,” which is characterized by “unspoken rules of the interview game” (Roberts and Sarangi 1995: 380). In intercultural encounters, there can even be “hegemonic struggles” over who “knows” and “defines” how this type of conversation should work (Birkner 2004). Or even if applicants are accustomed to job interviews, the same genre can be organized differently across cultures (Chen 2003 for a contrastive study about German and Taiwanese job interviews). Thus, interviewees might inadequately transfer interactional conventions like addressing someone on a first name basis where a more formal register would be appropriate (Rosenberg 2012). Interviewees might not be able to understand the “hidden agenda” of some interview questions (Birkner 2004). On the surface job interviews are about an exchange of information; on a deeper level the whole interview, from the small talk at the beginning to the small talk at the end, is about the applicant’s self-presentation. Even though they might be conducted in an egalitarian style, selection interviews are basically hierarchical and sometimes even “hegemonic” (Auer 1998; Birkner 2004; Birkner and Kern 2000).
3.2 Talk in academia

In recent years, there has been a growing research interest not only in written but also in spoken discourse genres of academic discourse. This field of study, “talk in academia,” comprises scholarly communication on the one hand and organizational communication on the other. Works on scholarly communication are mainly about communicating (i.e., presenting, teaching, examining, etc.) scientific findings, theories, and methodologies. There is research about conference talks (Günthner and Zhu 2014; Shalom 2002; Ventola 2002), introductions to conference talks (Zhu 2015 for a German-Chinese contrastive study) and the discussions following them (Konzett 2012), seminars, oral presentations (Guckelsberger 2006), and oral examinations (Meer 1998). While most studies about talk in academia focus on these communicative genres, there are also studies that mainly deal with organizational discourse in academic institutions, such as office hour consultations (Günthner 1993; König 2016; Limberg 2010; Meer 2000), counseling (Erickson and Shultz 1982), and planning meetings (Jandok 2010). Although the main goal of these interactions often lies in managing organizational processes and tasks (such as determining course work, handing out or signing forms, or discussing curricula, Limberg 2010), scientific talk may also be made relevant in these interactions (e.g., if students discuss the content of their seminar papers with lecturers in their office hours). Thus, the academic setting of these interactions can still constitute an underlying agenda. This is also true for our corpus of placement interviews. Although they were not framed as oral exams in which students are graded for their academic competences, interviewers tried to focus on students’ research interests or even “test” the students’ knowledge about differences between academic spaces in the home and the host country. It is this general “hidden academic agenda” that sets off placement interviews from job interviews and other types of selection interviews.

Just as students may experience difficulties in understanding the general affordances of the interview process in intercultural situations (Birkner 2004), they might also not be accustomed to the academic culture of the university they are applying for. In a study about letters of application that were sent to a German scholarship agency Kotthoff (2009) argues that Eastern European applicants often lack appropriate knowledge about academic traditions at German universities. Many students give the impression that they appeal for development aid or they praise Germany and its culture in an unduly manner. Whether

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2 In the following, we mainly focus on oral interactions in academic contexts. For an analysis of written discourse genres in academia see Hyland (1998) for research articles or Kiesendahl (2013) for e-mail communication at German universities.
comparable positioning strategies can also be found in intercultural placement interviews has not yet been studied. Thus, by analyzing interviewees’ different stances toward German and Chinese academic spaces this paper opens up the study of cultural dimensions of oral application procedures at universities.

4 Corpus and research questions

Impression management, we can now summarize, is one of the main communicative tasks of interviewees in placement interviews. Moreover, applicants need to be able to give an informed account of the university and the study program they are applying for and the academic culture in the host country, i.e., they have to construct academic spaces even if they do not have first-hand knowledge about these spaces. It is this discursive construction of spaces in epistemic asymmetry that we focus on in this paper.

Our corpus consists of 22 face-to-face placement interviews recorded from 2014 to 2016. In the data Chinese master students of German philology at a Chinese foreign language university (in this paper referred to as “Shaanxi University”) were interviewed by three German interviewers, two of whom are representatives of the German university at which these students want to spend a study year (referred to as “Dortmund University”). It can be argued that the German interviewers, who are responsible for choosing which students will be placed at the target university, have a comparatively high epistemic status as they have first-hand knowledge about the German university and its study program: All of them have studied at German universities and are acquainted with the general academic culture in these institutions. Our corpus includes interviews both with students who had been to Germany before (N = 5) and with students who had no first-hand knowledge about the country or German universities (N = 17). For this study, we concentrate on the latter group of interviews in which none of the interviewees had direct access to knowledge about Germany, Dortmund University or the study program they are applying for. This epistemic asymmetry is further characterized by the interviewers’ mother tongue competence of German, which is the language of interaction in the placement

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3 As only 6 of these interviews were video recorded, we chose to concentrate on the analysis of the oral modality. Future research will have to deal with the question of multimodal constructions of space in placement interviews.

4 The interviews recorded in 2014 were conducted either by interviewer 1 and interviewer 2 or by interviewer 2 alone. The interviews recorded in 2015 and 2016 were conducted by interviewer 3. While interviewer 1 has been the students’ language teacher for at least two semesters (which is also reflected in his use of the second person singular pronoun du, see Excerpt 2), interviewers 2 and 3 have only taught as guest lecturers at Shaanxi University.
interview. Most of the Chinese applicants had only started learning German at university; in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages their competence level can be rated as C1.

All conversations were transcribed according to the GAT transcription system (Selting et al. 2009). The interviews vary in duration, ranging from five to twenty minutes. Although there was no predetermined set of questions, the topics covered in the interviews are comparable: The interviewers asked about the students’ academic achievements, their personal interests, and their motivation for a study year in Germany. Questions concerning the students’ ideas about seminars at German universities and communicative practices in this context were also often included. Based on this corpus, the article addresses the following research questions:

- How do the German interviewers elicit the Chinese applicants’ knowledge about the host country and the host university? How do the Chinese students refer to academic spaces of which they do not have first-hand knowledge? How do these asymmetries in epistemic status manifest in the placement interviews?
- How do the interviewers react to the constructions of spaces by the Chinese students? Do they make asymmetries in epistemic status discernible interactively?
- Are there differences in how the Chinese students talk about German academic spaces, on the one hand, and Chinese academic spaces, on the other? How are cultural differences constructed by interviewers and/or applicants when they talk about academic spaces in both countries?

5 Practices for constructing space in placement interviews

For our sequential analysis of the epistemic and affective stances taken by the interlocutors in placement interviews regarding different academic spaces we

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5 All place and name references have been anonymized. Below the German transcript, we give a rough translation that tries to capture as many linguistic and interactive features as possible. However, we are aware of the fact that a direct transfer of features like stress, pauses or hesitation markers from German to English utterances is not always possible.

6 The students might have outlined some of these aspects in letters of motivation that they had to hand in before the placement interview. In some interviews, the interviewers explicitly refer to these documents (see, e.g., Excerpt 2, Glenn and Curtis 2011).
focus on sequences from the main parts of the interviews, i.e., we look at those phases where the general frame of a placement interview and the interactional roles of interviewer and applicant have already been established. First, we will analyze how the interviewers relate to the epistemic asymmetry concerning knowledge about Germany in general and Dortmund University in particular (Section 5.1). Second, we will illustrate the practices the applicants use to display their epistemic and affective stances towards the academic spaces (Section 5.2). Each excerpt illustrates the prototypical practices of all the interviewers and most of the students who were recorded for our study.

5.1 Interviewers’ interactional practices

In this section, we analyze interviewers’ practices when asking Chinese students to describe German academia. In particular, we focus on how interviewers communicate their own epistemic stance and attribute epistemic status to the students. We will illustrate how these practices shape the construction of different kinds of academic spaces.

One of the main communicative tasks of the interviewers in the placement interviews was to inquire about the applicants’ expectations and plans for their study year abroad. In Excerpt 1 the interviewer asks the applicant to reflect on these demands, a typical practice among all the interviewers.

Excerpt 1 #2016_2 [04:43] “imagine Germany“

001 INT3 und haben sie sich schon ein: (. ) bisschen über (. ) das leben in dEutschland inforMIERT?
and you have already read up a little bit on life in Germany?

002 wie stellen sie sich das ↑!VOR!, (. )
how do you imagine it to be?

003 in: deutschland zu stu!DIE!ren- (. )
to study in Germany

004 [und (. )] ihren ALLtag- (-)

005 STU14 <<lachend>[ja JA;>]
<<laughing> yeah yeah>

006 INT3 zu (-) beSTREIten.
to manage it

7 See Beckmann (2012) for a study of how the interactional frame of the placement interview is established interactionally.
The interviewer asks the student to compare her life in China to life in Germany.\(^8\) The interviewer actively brings about epistemic asymmetry by using specific linguistic means to communicate her primary epistemic access. She uses different devices to downgrade the type of knowledge the student may potentially have. The mental verbs glauben (‘believe’/’think’, “what do you think,” 009) and vorsellen (‘imagine’, “how do you imagine it to be,” 002) frame the applicant’s knowledge as epistemically unsecured (Kärkkäinen 2003). This epistemic downgrade is also reflected in the way the first question is put: Asking whether someone has read up on something (001)

\(^8\) A typical interviewer strategy illustrated in this excerpt is the construction of a sequence of multiple questions, starting with a rather general question and then proceeding to more concrete inquiries (also see Kasper and Ross (2007). This pattern emerges from the particular interactional context in which the interviewer produces a number of transition-relevant places at which the applicant does not take over. Moreover, by posing multiple questions in a row the interviewer makes a rather detailed and elaborated response relevant – in contrast to “machine gun questions” (Tannen 1981) which make relevant a rather short answer-format.
implies that the person does not have primary access to this information. In addition, the interviewer downgrades this knowledge by reducing the range of information the applicant may have potentially gathered so far (“have you read up a little bit on life in Germany,” 001).9 Thus, the interviewer positions the applicant as someone who does not have first-hand knowledge about the peculiarities of daily life and student life in Germany and as someone who has a comparatively low epistemic status. The space she asks for is constructed as an imagined space: the interviewer prompts the student to engage in a discursive construction of a space that is not contextualized as an account of first-hand knowledge but as a mental activity of the imagination.10 Thus, it is constructed as a space that is only “envisionable,” one that cannot be referred to in an epistemically unmarked way.

Also interesting to note is the fact that the interviewer actively constructs cultural differences by explicitly asking about the peculiarities of student life in Germany (“what is different from here,” 010). One nationally-located space (student life in China) is contrasted with another nationally-located space (student life in Germany). The German academic space is hence constructed and presented as a foreign space for the Chinese applicants.

Excerpt 2 illustrates other typical formulations of interviewers. Rather than asking straightforward questions about the students’ personal motivation interviewers often formulate questions to test students’ knowledge about the university they are applying for.

**Excerpt 2: #750 [08:50] “What do you know about it?”**

001 INT1  ahh darf ich schon mal zurückkommen auf DAS- =  
        *may I return to*
002  = was du eben SAGtest.  
        *what you just said*
003  du SAGtest-  
        *you said*
004  ahh also dlch interessiert schon (.) geSPRÄCHSanalyse.  
        *you are interested in conversation analysis*
005  STU02  [JA;]  
006 INT1  hast du] auch in dem [motivatons]schreiben erWÄHNT,  
        *you have also mentioned that in your motivation letter*

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9 The student, however, does not treat the interviewer’s inquiry as a question about knowledge but rather as a question about her motivation to go to Germany (see also Excerpt 6 for another example of a negative evaluation of Chinese academic spaces).

10 See Stukenbrock (2014) for an analysis of interactional practices of imagination-oriented deixis based on Bühler’s (2011) account of the deictic field.
STU02
ja JA;

INT2
hm_hm;

INT1
äh kannst du dir denn VORstellen-
= can you imagine
that in Dortmun d - (-)
dass das in Dortmun d: (-)
this is offered?
ANgeboten wird,
KANN man das in dortmund studIeren?
can you study this in Dortmund?

STU02
ähm: JA.

INT1
JA?

STU02
JA.

INT1
was weiß WEISST du was darÜber?
what do you know about it?
(-)

STU02
ich äh du MEINST das studium in ();
you mean the course of study in
DORTmund.

STU02
in [DORTmund?]

INT2
geNAU.
exactly

INT1
ja geNAU;
yes exactly

also wenn dich (. ) gesprächsanalyse interesseIERT;
that is to say if you are interested in conversation analysis

STU02
ja.

INT1
ist dortmund dann ein GÜter ort,
is Dortmund a good place then
[oder ein SCHLECHter.]
or a bad one?

STU02
[ja naTÜRlich.]
yes of course

INT1
waRUM; =
why

= waRUM;
why
der wichtigste Grund ist, (.)

the most important reason is

ähm: dass es in (.) in uni DORTmund,

that at university of Dortmund

at the German department

zentrum em[pi]rische linguistik [gibt.]

there is center for empirical linguistics

ICH glaube Zeli ist sehr geeignet für die studenZen;

I believe that Zeli (abbreviation for Zentrum Empirische Linguistik mentioned in Segment 034) is very suitable for students

die [gesprächsanaLYse-]

conversation analysis

was MAchen die denn da;

what do they do there?

what do they do at the Zeli?

Zeli ist eine [RICHtung,]

Zeli is a direction

zeli ist eine einRICHtung.

Zeli is an institution

zur erFORschung der der äh: TÄGlichen-

to study the the daily

ähm der äh des täglichen geBRAUCH,

ehm the daily use

ähm des geBRAUchen, (.)

the use

der täg der der SPRAche;

the dai’ of the the language

ich MEIne man-

I mean one
In this excerpt, interviewer 1 tests the student's knowledge about the German department she is applying for by taking on a reduced epistemic stance: First, he asks whether conversation analysis can be studied at Dortmund University (012). After the student’s affirmative answer interviewer 1 displays
and after a second confirmation by the student he explicitly asks her what she knows about the department. In his follow-up questions (in a yes/no- and wh-question format, often in overlap with the student’s account) the interviewer also takes on a relatively downgraded epistemic stance (“is Dortmund a good place then?”, 026, “why?”, 029 f., “what do they do there?”, 040). Yet, the way he then treats the student’s answers contextualizes these questions as “exam questions” or “known-information questions” (Mehan 1979; Sinclair and Coulthard 1975; see also Koshik 2010: 160–161): The three-part sequential structure of question-answer-evaluation rather than a pattern of question-answer-next question (e. g., in news interviews) or question-answer-acknowledgement (which is a regular pattern in ordinary conversation) establishes a frame comparable to student-teacher interactions. With his concluding evaluation (“very nice,” 067, “very good,” 068) the interviewer indicates that he already knew this prior to the student’s account. At the same time, by taking on the role of a person who tests knowledge, he changes the initial spatial construction from an imagined space (see segment 009) to a knowable space (segment 017), i. e., a space of which one can have researchable, verifiable objective knowledge. The applicants are treated as being “expected” to know this kind of information; interviewers can hold them accountable for this knowledge (as the repeated follow-up questions in this excerpt show). Interviewers might use these “exam questions” as a means to check the students’ motivation and willingness to engage in the study program. When students construct a knowable space in placement interviews, they position themselves as suitable candidates.

The next excerpt illustrates that the evaluation of the students’ knowledge displays can even lead to extended praise or compliment sequences (Antaki et al. 2000; Lipovsky 2008):

**Excerpt 3: #2015_48 [3:43] “you have already found out very much”**

001 STU11 und ich habe auch im internet recherCHIEren,  
*and I have also done research on the internet*

002 es gibt _äh_ eine ( ) sprachliche erRICHtung,  
*there is a linguistic institution*

003 INT3 hm_hm,  

004 STU11 _äh_ in der Uni.

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11 Such surprise is also displayed by interviewer 2. The *ah* she utters in Segment 035 can be characterized as a change-of-state token (Heritage 1984) which displays the uptake of new information (despite the fact that as a representative of the German department she knows about the center mentioned by the student).
at the university

hehe,

JA,

[Nämlich die-]

namely the

[uni DORTmund,]

JA [ja] uni DORTmund,

[ja;]

nämlich (.). ähm (-) <h> zentrum (-) empirische> linguS[ tik; ]

namely the center for empirical linguistics

[<<h>!JA!;>]

he;

<<h>ganz geNAU;>

exactly

[JA; ]

[hm_hm,]

haben sie GUT recherchIert.

you have done a good job researching

ich finde (.). dort gibt es ähm ähm (.). ähm sp’ sprachliche

DAtenbank.

I find there ehm there is a linguistic data base

hm_hm,

genauf.

exactly

und das sind äh grundmateriAlien,

and there are basic materials

hm_hm,

für das ähm für das. äh sprachliche proJEkte;

for linguistic projects

hm_hm,

an denen die studierenden (.). äh ARbeiten können.

on which the students can work

genauf;

exactly

[JA;]

[JA-]

ich ich Möchte wirklich solche [(-) fach] solche bereich (.). ähm

[stuDIE]ren

I would really like to study such a field
INT3 [hm_hm,]

[hm_hm,]

STU11 und (. ARbeiten.

and work

INT3 ja geNAU.

yes exactly

STU11 JA;

INT3 ≪h> ja das ist RICHtig. ≥

yes that is right

= wir ham eine DAtenbank mit ähm sEhr vielen gesprächen (.) er

we have compiled a database with very many conversations

STU11 [hm_hm,]

[hm-]

INT3 [und] (. die studierenden können im rahmen von verschiedenen

and the students can work with this data in the context of different seminars

STU11 [hm_hm,]

[hm-]

INT3 aber das transkribieren haben sie ja bereits bei herrn wang ≪:-)>

but you have already learned how to transcribe from mister Wang

STU11 JA_ha[haha,]

INT3 [ähm] und dann kann man auf diese Daten ZUGreifen,

and then one can access these data

STU11 [JA,]

[JA,]

INT3 [und] ähm diese Daten (. analysIERen. (-)

and analyze these data

[JA;]

INT3 [nach] verschiedenen gesICHtspunkten.

from different angles

[JA;]
053  INT3  da haben sie ja schon sEhr viel °h recherCHIERT- =  
you have already found out very much 
054  = und sEhr konkrete VORstellungen- =  
and you have very concrete ideas  
055  = was sie MAchen möchten-  
what you want to do 
056  in DORTmund.  
057  hm_hm,

In this excerpt, the student and the interviewer co-construct the German academic space as a knowable space. Following the applicant’s knowledge display (which is introduced by the identification of her source of information, see Excerpt 5), the interviewer praises the student for her research – in a marked or even exuberant way. First, a rather high number of confirmatory continuers is notable. There is a backchannel signal after or in overlap with nearly every utterance of the student. With these minimal responses the interviewer does not only display her “active listening” (Erickson and Shultz 1982: 198). Some of these confirmatory backchannels are also upgraded prosodically (e.g., the high-pitched and strongly accented “!JA!” 012), which contextualizes a highly supportive stance. Second, in addition to explicit praise (“you have done a good job researching,” 017, “you have already found out very much,” 052), the interviewer articulates numerous affirmative reactions, which at the same time claim epistemic primacy (genau, ‘exactly’, 014, 020, 026, 033; Oloff 2016).

Note that in this excerpt the student is not praised for her motivation to study empirical linguistics but rather for the adequacy of her knowledge display. The interviewer’s reaction in Segment 033 and following is not aimed at confirming the student’s account of her motivation to study empirical linguistics; the interviewer rather acknowledges the information the student has presented before (“that is right”, 035). With the following account of her department’s assets, in which she partly repeats what the student has already said, the interviewer takes on a stance of primary epistemic access (also indicated by the exclusive use of the first person plural pronoun wir ‘we’, 036). In contrast to everyday conversation (Golato 2005; Pomerantz 1978) it is characteristic of the students in the praise sequences in our corpus to not comment on the compliment. They either continue their accounts (like in Segment 018) or do not show any verbal reaction (Segments 053 ff.).12 In this way the interlocutors treat the interaction as an institutional encounter in which particular constraints apply.

12 Future research will have to take nonverbal, visual bodily resources into account.
(Gathman et al. 2008; Pillet-Shore 2012). Praising students for researching the German university – its study programs and departments – is another practice interviewers engage in to construct German academia as a *knowable* space. But in the act of complimenting\(^\text{13}\) and giving rather lengthy accounts of this space the interviewers still claim epistemic primacy.

When asking students to discuss student life in Germany interviewers use different linguistic means to contextualize the student’s construction of a space as only *imagined*, thus indicating the rather low epistemic status they attribute to the Chinese students. At the same time, they explicitly construct the German academic space as a *foreign* space of which the Chinese applicants have no adequate first-hand knowledge. When the interlocutors do talk about the university’s departments, work groups, or study programs, interviewers formulate “exam questions” with a particular three-part question-answer-evaluation structure, treating these spaces in German academia as *knowable*. Students are expected to have this kind of knowledge about these particular German academic spaces.

### 5.2 Applicants’ interactional practices

We now turn to the students’ linguistic practices for constructing academic spaces in university placement interviews. As most students have no direct access to knowledge about the university they are applying for, we are particularly interested in the epistemic stances of applicants toward the spaces they have to construct in placement interviews. The following excerpt illustrates the collaborative construction of an *imagined* space.

**Excerpt 4: #754, [10:07], “I don’t know that just yet”**

001 INT2 und wenn sie dann jetzt in in dortmund oder in deutschland studieren, (.)

*and when you study in Dortmund or in Germany*

002 9h ähm WIE stellen sie sich vor-

*how do you think/what do you imagine*

003 w_wie funktioniert das STudium da;

*how does a course of study take place there*

004 oder inwiefern (.) könntes das studium an einer deutschen (.) universität ANders sein-

*or how is a course of study at a German university different?*

\(^{13}\) “The production of a compliment highlights the asymmetry of knowledge between interviewers [ ... ] and respondents [ ... ].” (Gathman et al. 2008: 290)
ALS (. ) hier in CHINA;

FROM (ONE) HERE IN CHINA?

JA: ICH GLAUBE-

YES I BELIEVE/THINK

ÄH EIN STUDIUM IN DEUTSCHLAND IST ÄH BESTIMMT (-)

A COURSE OF STUDY IN GERMANY IS CERTAINLY DIFFERENT

ALS ÄH [IN CHINA;]

FROM (ONE) IN CHINA

HMM, HMM,

WI::::R; (-)

WE

Vielleicht wir haben (. ) nicht äh so viele: "h äh (. ) ver äh; (. )

MAYBE WE DON’T HAVE AS MANY

WIR HABEN NICHT ÄH::: (-)

WE DON’T HAVE

ÄH WIR HABEN NICHT ÄH SO VIELE NEIN;

WE DON’T HAVE AS MANY NO

ÄHM; (-)

ÄH WIR WIR HABEN VIELE CHANCES;

EHM WE WE HAVE MANY CHANCES

die äh sch stu äh sch (. ) die kurse zu wählen,

to choose our courses

HMM, HMM,

UND ÄH WIR HABEN (. ) AUCH ÄH (. ) ÄHM (. ) WIR KÖNNEN SELBST LERNEN,

AND WE HAVE WE CAN STUDY ON OUR OWN

ÄHM (. ) IN: DER BIBLIOTHEK,

IN THE LIBRARY

= ODER (. ) IM STUDENTENWOHNHEIM,

OR IN THE STUDENT DORMITORY

ODER [IN:] EINER WE GE,

OR IN A SHARED HOUSE

HMM, HMM,

ICH HEHE MEINE ICH AUCH WEISS DAS NOCH NICHT;

I HEHE MEAN I DON’T KNOW THAT JUST YET

HMH;
also [um SPRACHpraxis zu bekommen;]
so to gain linguistic experience

STU06 
[ah UND und-]

ah and and

im unterricht wird (. ) es ANders sein;
classes will be different

INT2 hm_hm,

In a sequence of questions including the verb vorstellen (‘imagine’) and the subjunctive könnte (‘could’ 004), downgrading the student’s epistemic access to the relevant information, the interviewer elicits a comparison between study conditions in China and in Germany. Here, like in Excerpt 1, it is the interviewer who presupposes differences in the academic cultures in the two countries.\(^\text{14}\) The student is now asked to construct her idea of a space in German academia. Her response turn is bracketed by numerous epistemic hedges (Kärkkäinen 2003; Weatherall 2011). She starts with a phrasal epistemic hedge, the first person singular indicative active form of the verbum sentiendi glauben (‘believe/think’, 006), thus framing her following utterance or following turn as an opinion or a conviction. After having confirmed the interviewer’s supposition that there are differences between studying in China and in Germany, she gives examples of these differences. Again she starts her turn construction unit with an epistemic hedge, the modal word vielleicht (‘perhaps’, 011) which treats the given proposition as a guess rather than something she is convinced of. The student closes her turn with an explicit denial of knowledge of her future living arrangements (“I don’t know that just yet,” 024). Also notable in this unit is her unreciprocated laughter, which can be heard as “nervous” laughter (Glenn 2013), contextualizing the utterance as potentially problematic in the context of a placement interview. In sum, with these epistemic hedges the student actively “unclaims” secure or direct knowledge about student life in Germany. She thus assumes the comparatively low epistemic stance ascribed to her by the interviewer in the previous turn. The space she constructs in her turn is clearly framed as an imagined space. By communicating her ideas about studying in Germany in a rather positive affective stance (“we have many chances,” 015, “we can study on our own,” 019) – showing her motivation to study abroad – she also evaluates this space as a desired space (Trinch 2007).

\(^{14}\) Note that the interviewer changes the focus of her question from “studying in Dortmund” to “studying in Germany,” thus constructing differences on a national level rather than between different universities.
In our corpus, students use epistemic hedges regularly to contextualize their reduced epistemic stance. However, this does not mean that they are unable to claim any knowledge about academic spaces in Germany. Excerpt 5 illustrates how Chinese applicants present information about the university they are applying for and the town they would live in, even though they have never been to these places before.


001 INT1 und ähm (-) dieses interEsse an HESse-
this interest in (Hermann) Hesse

002 ist das irgendwie mit DORTmund verbunden,
is that connected to Dortmund somehow

003 für (.) für SIE?
for for you?

004 STU01 ähm-

005 INT1 haben sie dort irgendwas entDECKT,
have you found something there

006 was mit hesse zu tun <<lachend>hat oder so?>
that is related to Hesse or something like that

007 STU01 ähm (.) dann hesse ist eine DEUTscher;
then Hesse is a German

008 [dortmund] gehört zu [DEUTSCHland;]
Dortmund belongs to Germany

009 INT1 [aha, ]

010 [ah JA;]

011 hm_hm; =

012 = hm_hm;

013 STU01 äh und (.) äh (.) nachdem ich ähm (-) habe geHÖRT-
and after I heard

014 °h diesmal habe eine chance in dortmund stuDIER, (.)
this time I have a chance to study in Dortmund

015 ich surfe auch im INternet;
I also surfed the internet

016 etwas über DORTmund,
for something about Dortmund

017 INT2 hm_hm,

018 STU01 äh es gibt_äh es ist_äh eine Alte (.) äh (-) alte STADT;
there is ehm it is an old ehm old city

019 mit LANger geschichte;
with a long history

020 INT2 hm_hm,
hm_hm,> 

I believe in this em atmosphere  

(künstlerischen) atmosphär (-) dieser (-) kann ich (-) (kunste) verFÜGung haben; (-)  

artistic atmosphere I can have access to art  

hm_hm,

[und] AUCH,  
in deutschland gibt es viele autoren und SCHRIFTsteller- (.)

and also in Germany there are many authors and writers  

DICHTer- (.)

poets  

natÜrlich möchte ich nach deutschland EIN jahr.  
of course I want to go to Germany for one year  

[studier] (.) [zu er]LEben;  
to experience studying  

hm_hm,

hm_hm,

hm_hm; =  

= hm_hm;  

ich glaube sie haben sich auch das ähm STUdienangebot in dortmund- 

I believe you have also taken a closer look at  
ein bisschen nÄhe:r ANgeschaut;  
the range of courses taught in Dortmund  
also welche semiNAR es gibt- 
that is to say which seminars there are  
die für sie interesSANT sein könnten; (.)

which can be of interest for you  
°h ähm haben sie da verANstaltungen gefunden- 
have you found seminars  
wo sie SAGen- 
of which you would say  
da können sie das würden sie gerne stuDIERen? 
that you can that you would like to study  
°h äh diese semiNAR in in dortmund- 
emh this seminar in Dortmund  
und VORlesung [in dort]mund-

and lecture in Dortmund
In the foregoing interview, the student has talked extensively about her interest in the author Hermann Hesse without, however, establishing a relationship between this interest and her motivation to study at Dortmund University. When asked to reflect on this, she starts to comment on the city of Dortmund. In this context, the student explicitly names her source of information, the internet, before she presents her knowledge about the small town, a regular practice in our corpus (see Pomerantz 1984 for practices of telling “how I know,” see also Excerpt 3). When answering the next question about which courses at Dortmund University might be of interest to her, she also refers to an online resource (the
university course descriptions, 044–046) as the source of her information. Following this explicit naming of information sources, the student demonstrates her knowledge (“old city with a long history,” 018 f., “there are six departments,” 052) and then comments on the features she might benefit from (“I can have access to art,” 023, “for me what is interesting”, 056). The student’s utterances about the town and the German department are not marked by epistemic hedges, i.e., in this sequence the applicant takes a comparatively secure epistemic stance. Even though the student has never been to Germany, she reacts differently to the communicative task of dislocating herself from her current position in China. The German academic space constructed by the student in this excerpt (the departments at the German institute) is not framed as an imagined space but as a knowable space; one can present verified information to a person who has direct experiential knowledge of a space. Moreover, by demonstrating the possible benefits in such a space, it is also presented as a desirable space, i.e., the student takes a positive affective stance.

The applicant’s affective stance toward the academic spaces in China, however, is quite different. In Excerpt 6, student 02 compares study opportunities in Germany and China to explain why she is motivated to study at Dortmund University (see Excerpt 2 for the first part of this sequence).

**Excerpt 6: #750 [10:15] “there are nearly no professors”**

001 STU02 und die: ähm aktuellste forschungsErgebnisse !KEN!nen;
_ and know the recent research results_

002 und (. ) meine forschungsfÄhigkeit (. ) öh FÖRdern;
_ and foster my research skills_

003 aber wie sie WISsen; (-)
_ but as you know_

004 i:n diesem bereich in CHIna; (-)
_ in this field in China_

005 INT1 gibt_s [fast] NICHT.
_ there is nearly nothing_

006 STU02 [GIBT_s-]
_ there are_

---

15 The only downgrade in this account can be found in Segments 022 and 023. Here the student does not present her knowledge but rather her reasoning concerning how she might benefit from the supposed artistic atmosphere in Dortmund.

16 Note that the interviewers also claim a high epistemic status when they acknowledge the student’s accounts with epistemically upgraded backchannels (upgraded either by the combination of two hm_hm-backchannels (011f, 020 f. 030 f., 032 f., 047 f.) or with lexically upgraded backchannels like genau (‘exactly’, 049 f.). See also the analysis of Excerpt 2.
there are nearly no professors

Dortmund university owns a lot of textbooks

completely new field

but in China

as you know

in the library

we cannot find any books

and ehm and ehm but I want to write my master’s thesis
After explaining why she wants to study at Dortmund University the student now accounts for her motivation to leave China. In her construction of Chinese academic spaces (Chinese universities in general and university libraries in particular) she claims an unrestricted access to the relevant knowledge. With the formulaic expression “as you know” (003, 024) she does not claim this knowledge exclusively for herself but attributes it to the interviewers. By appealing to shared knowledge, realized in a sequential position before the student actually demonstrates the knowledge, the student uses a rhetoric strategy in which she asks for support for her argumentation (Reineke 2016: 179). This excerpt illustrates the common practice in our corpus of placement interviews of students taking a rather negative stance toward particular aspects of academic spaces in China. Study opportunities in China – e.g., access to German academic literature – are presented as insufficient for the students’ interests. The applicant frames Chinese academia as an unsatisfying space, whereas German academia is again presented as a desirable space. The degree of devaluation of the home university, however, is not as stark or problematic as in the letters of motivation Kotthoff (2009) has analyzed. This might be due to the interactional nature of placement interviews. By indicating that they already know about problems at Chinese universities, the interviewers might hinder or even close off excessive devaluation sequences. Moreover, indicating deficiencies at the home university in order to justify why one has to study abroad can be considered an important communicative task of the “hidden academic agenda” of intercultural university placement interviews.

What this excerpt also illustrates is how the student and interviewers co-construct cultural differences. Instead of comparing her home university to Dortmund University the student attributes the discrepancies she finds to differences in the national academic cultures. The interviewers support this line of thinking repeatedly: They demonstrate their adoption of the student’s affective
stance by co-constructing utterances with her (005). Moreover, their numerous backchannel signals (e.g., 008–010, 012–015, 035–038) express agreement and affiliation. Note that these not only affirm the student’s claims but also, with the repeated JAja (009, 026, 028), indicate that the interviewer is already familiar with the information the student is presenting (Golato and Fagyal 2008). This shows that the presentation of cultural knowledge in interaction can also be interspersed with claims to epistemic primacy.

In sum, our analysis showed that Chinese students explicitly “unclaim” knowledge about the peculiarities of academic spaces in Germany by using various epistemic hedges in their turns of talk. This epistemic downgrading can often be found as a reaction to a question in which the interviewer has used comparable means to downgrade the student’s access to this knowledge. Thus both interlocutors contextualize a frame of talking about imagined academic spaces. We also identified common practices students use to frame other German academic spaces as knowable spaces. Referring to the internet as their source of information they present general knowledge about the city of Dortmund, departments at the German institute and the course program in an unmitigated way. The interviewers also co-construct this frame when they explicitly ask the students for these pieces of information, i.e., they hold the students accountable for having done research about these spaces.

Moreover, the students communicate a particular affective stance toward spaces in Chinese and in German academia: While spaces at German universities are framed as desired spaces, academic spaces in China are presented as insufficient for the students’ needs and thus as unsatisfying spaces. These differences are constructed as differences in the academic cultures of the two countries. It is part of the “hidden academic agenda” in university placement interviews that students display a “thirst for academic knowledge,” which can only be satisfied at the university abroad.

6 Conclusion

In this paper we have focused on practices interviewers and interviewees use in university placement interviews for eliciting and presenting knowledge about academic spaces that are unknown to the student applicants. Based on an interactional analysis of longer sequences taken from a corpus of German-Chinese placement interviews, we argue that interlocutors do not simply attribute a low epistemic status to Chinese applicants when they talk about German academic spaces. Rather, the rights and obligations to (access of) knowledge are distributed in a more complex way: While some aspects of German academia are treated as
knowable (and students are “expected” to know them), others are treated as somewhat inaccessible to the applicants. On the one hand, peculiarities about spaces in German academia are situated in imagined spaces of which Chinese students cannot have direct knowledge (here we found the use of numerous hedging devices in the interviewers’ and applicants’ turns). On the other, students are expected to know about other aspects of German academia: Students actively construct these knowable spaces (e.g., institutions, work groups, or departments at Dortmund University) by presenting information they found on the internet (students introduce their information source before presenting their knowledge; interviewers compliment their good research). However, even though interlocutors treat some spaces as knowable, the interviewers still continually indicate their epistemic primacy of German academic spaces: They frame their questions about Germany and German universities as “exam questions” (in a particular sequential pattern of question-answer-evaluation), they comment extensively on institutions at their home university, and they use epistemically upgraded backchannels like jaja (‘yes yes’) and genau (‘exactly’) repeatedly.

We were also interested in the question whether Chinese students use different practices to talk about German academic spaces, on the one hand, and Chinese academic spaces, on the other. What we found was that in addition to contextualizing different kinds of epistemic access to academic spaces, applicants and interviewers also take varying evaluative and affective stances toward the different academic spaces in our corpus of placement interviews. In their questions, interviewers treat German academia as a different or a foreign space. While students construct German academia as a desired space with many opportunities, they present Chinese academia as an unsatisfying space they would like to leave behind. Rather than comparing study programs at different universities (here: Shaanxi University vs. Dortmund University) the interviewers and the applicants stress differences on a national level (the German university system vs. the Chinese university system). Thus, students and interviewers actively bring about cultural differences in the placement interviews.

In recent years space has become an influential concept in linguistics. Yet, we have only just started to understand the multiple and intricate ways in which its different facets are (made) relevant in interaction. In this paper, we focused on the communicative construction of academic spaces in university placement interviews, a central practice with which applicants can position themselves as adequate, suitable candidates. Knowledge asymmetries can be considered a general characteristic of institutional communication, especially of selection interviews. While interviewers know more about the institution, applicants know more about their professional biographies (Glenn and Curtis 2011). Yet, it does not suffice to simply presuppose such an asymmetry of access to particular kinds knowledge and
information; rather, a conversation-analytic approach to institutional communication aims at describing how these relative epistemic statuses are brought about actively by interlocutors (Drew and Heritage 1992; Heritage 2011; Raymond and Heritage 2006). We could show how interviewers and applicants in intercultural university placement interviews take on different epistemic stances and thus construct different spaces: Knowledge about German academic spaces can be framed as either imagined or knowable by interviewers and interviewees alike.

Interactional research on selection interviews has so far focused on the asymmetries of speaker roles or on linguistic asymmetries. Yet, our analyses show that the construction and negotiation of different epistemic stances and statuses is an underlying sequential feature of intercultural placement interviews. As the adequate management of epistemic stances might constitute another challenge in gatekeeping encounters, future research should take into account which other practices interviewers and applicants use to claim or “unclaim” knowledge. For instance, a closer analysis of applicants’ laughter can be conducted. Moreover, a multimodal analysis might be able to identify the visual bodily resources expressing particular epistemic stances (like “air quotes” or other similar gestures).

As students and interviewers actively bring about cultural differences in placement interviews, it can be gathered that culture is not merely an objective a priori fact simply brought along by the interlocutors but is brought about and constructed actively by interlocutors (Gumperz 1982; Hinnenkamp 1987). In this paper we have shown that such an interactive construction of cultural difference, this “doing culture” (Günthner 2012; Günthner and Zhu 2016), can be accomplished by taking on differing affective stances with regard to academic spaces. Moreover, rights to claim access to knowledge about these spaces depend on specific social and cultural positions (being an interviewer from a German university vs. being a Chinese applicant to a German university, see Raymond and Heritage 2006). By expressing different epistemic stances with regard to particular academic spaces interviewers and applicants actively take on these different interactional and cultural roles.

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References


Appendix

Appendix: Transcription conventions

According to the Gesprächsanalytisches Transkriptionssystem 2 (Selting and Auer 2009)

Sequential Structure

[ ] overlap and simultaneous talk
[ ] = fast immediate continuation with a new turn or segment (latching)

Pauses

(.) micro pause (estimated)
(·),(·),(·) short, intermediary and longer estimated pauses
(0.5) measured pause

Other segmental conventions

and_uh cliticizations within units
;:,;::: lengthening
eh, ehm, etc. hesitation markers, so called ‘filled pauses’

Continuers

hm, yes, no, yeah
hm_hm, ye_es, bi-syllabic tokens

Accentuation

SYLLable focus accent
!SYLLable extra strong accent

Final pitch movements of intonation phrases

? rising to high , rising to mid-level
; falling to mid . falling to low
Other conventions

((coughs)) non-verbal vocal actions and events
<<whispery>> change in voice quality as stated, with scope
(maybe) assumed wording

Changes in pitch register

<<h>> higher pitch register

 Loudness and tempo changes, with scope
<<f>> forte, loud
<<p>> piano, soft
<<acc>> accelerando, increasingly faster
<<all>> allegro, fast
<<dim>> diminuendo, increasingly softer
<<len>> lento, slow

In- and outbreaths
°h, °°hh, °°°hhh inbreaths, different duration
h°, hh°°, hhh°°° outbreaths, different duration

Bionotes

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