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This article is focused on a particular type of communicative interaction, the “public mediumship demonstration”. Although paranormal experiences have been broadly investigated, medium-sitter interactions have been studied much less. In this article, we aim to answer the following research questions: (1) what are the linguistic strategies used by the medium (M) to manage her epistemic authority and by the sitters (Ss) to acknowledge, strengthen, resist or contest it? (2) how do these strategies affect the sequential structure of interaction? The results of our analyses reveal that:

1. M’s questions are mainly polar interrogative and declarative; they are demonstrative, (consistently with Wooffitt’s results (2006), they are knowledge implicative questions), i.e., their main function consists in demonstrating that she knows the information (and consequently that she possesses extraordinary powers); expect confirmative answers (yes or no, depending on their being affirmative or negative);
2. S’s answers are mainly confirmative, although there are some disconfirmations;
3. after confirmation failures, M resorts to three main linguistic strategies to manage her epistemic authority.

Although “public mediumship demonstrations” are designed using question-answer sequences, they are not “epistemic seesaws” aiming to balance an initial epistemic imbalance between interlocutors. On the contrary, M’s questions aim to give proof of her extraordinary powers through S’s confirmations, which represent the measure of medium’s reliability. For this reason, when S disconfirms, M has to revise her prior questions to manage her undermined epistemic authority.

Since people tend to obey orders or to agree with messages when they recognize the source’s authority, its maintenance is a central issue in many types of discourses, such as the one we have analysed.

Studying medium-sitters’ communicative interactions can, on the one hand, improve awareness of the ways in which epistemic authority is managed in those contexts, like this one, in which the interlocutors claim to have different (and potentially conflicting) access to the same information, and, on the other hand, shed light on reasons of the success of similar practices. According to Codacons (Italian coordination of environmental protection associations and protection of users’ and consumers’ rights) in 2016, 13 million Italians turned at least once to occult operators.