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I Actually Can Read Your "Poker Face": The Effect of Emotion Suppression on Language Production During Dyadic Interactions

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Abstract: Research has demonstrated that deception is more cognitively demanding than truthful communication. Furthermore, evidence suggests when put under certain cognitive constraints interlocutors exhibit more disfluencies during production planning. One common emotion regulation strategy involving deception is emotion suppression. Recent research indicated emotion suppression can lead to maladaptive threat responses in both members of a dyadic interaction. The current study juxtaposed research on communication and emotion regulation by having two participants watch and discuss an emotionally evocative video. Before engaging in the conversation, one participant (the agent) was asked to express or suppress non-verbal affective displays while the other person (the target) received no special instruction. We hypothesized that targets' perception of suppression would affect their production system. Results supported our hypothesis, disfluencies increased for suppressive agents but decreased for targets of suppression, suggesting that the social constraints may have lead dyads to expend more cognitive resources on speaking appropriate utterances.