

Doing conversation analysis in Mandarin Chinese

Basic methods

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This article aims to introduce Conversation Analytic (CA) methods to the community of Chinese scholars, and especially to linguists who work with Mandarin Chinese and are just beginning to adopt CA methods in their work. I believe doing CA requires not only an understanding of its terminology but also a working knowledge of CA methods. To this end, rather than simply explaining CA methods abstractly, I offer the reader a glimpse of the research process in action by presenting data and findings of my own research and then taking the reader step-by-step through the analytic process — from initial observations of a candidate phenomenon, through the process of making a collection of cases, and finally explaining criteria for establishing an empirically-grounded finding. Special focus is placed on the importance of detecting “participants’ orientations to action” and the more difficult process of finding evidence for the phenomenon from nonconforming specimens.

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關鍵詞：會話分析，研究方法，應用實例，中文，社會語言學

As its name suggests, conversation analysis (henceforth CA) is a field of study concerned primarily with the organization and use of conversation and the role it plays in organizing social interaction. At the outset, two important clarifications need to be made. First, it is not the case that any study which uses conversation as its data, or which has the goal of describing conversational uses of language, is an example of CA. CA employs discipline-specific methods and has delimited discipline-specific research aims. Second, it is also not the case that simply employing CA terminology in the analysis denotes a conversation-analytic study. The

term “conversation analysis” as used here refers specifically to a field of study with distinctive theoretical underpinnings and methods of analysis as can be found in the work of such scholars as Sacks, Schegloff, Jefferson, and their associates.

Over the years, although there have been quite a few papers or book chapters which present an overview introduction of CA, most of these works are focused on CA’s theoretical and/or methodological positions; only a few CA analysts have attempted to offer a practical guide to the methodology of conducting CA research.¹

In this article, I’ll attempt to outline some of the basic procedures involved in locating a phenomenon and developing an analysis of it based on CA’s methodology, and, where relevant, exemplify these procedures with Mandarin data from my own corpus and/or previous studies (Wu 2004, 2011, 2012, 2014, Wu and Heritage forthcoming).

1. Beginning with a Noticing

Strictly speaking, the first step in conducting a conversation-analytic study is to collect audio- and/or video-recorded naturally occurring conversation. As Sacks (1984) puts it:

I want to argue that, however rich our imaginations are, if we use hypothetical, or hypothetical-typical versions of the world we are constrained by reference to what an audience, an audience of professionals, can accept as reasonable... (Sacks 1984: 25)

I started to work with tape-recorded conversations. Such materials had a single virtue, that I could replay them. I could transcribe them somewhat and study them extendedly...others could look at what I had studied and make of it what they could, if, for example, they wanted to be able to disagree with me. (Sacks 1984: 26)

While an important topic in itself, there is not the space here to elaborate and detail how to collect such data. Suffice it to note that the conversation being recorded should be allowed to unfold and proceed as naturally as possible, with no pre-set agenda or topic provided. It is best to collect field recordings of talk-in-interaction from occasions where the talk is not specifically being produced so as to be collected for research, but would be produced whether or not recorded.

Once some naturally occurring conversations have been collected, the classic CA analysis normally begins with a “noticing,” which typically emerges from

1. That is, with the exceptions of Wootton (1989), Pomerantz (1990), ten Have (1999), Heritage (2011), and Sidnell (2013), inter alia. Also, Schegloff (1996b, 1997) and especially Schegloff (1996a), although not method papers in and of themselves, provide most useful clarifications and exemplifications of CA methodology.

repeated, careful examinations of the recorded data. Such a noticing is essentially a discovery process built upon the analyst's previous training and experience as well as individual intellect. Although it is impossible to provide an exhaustive list of what to notice when examining data, there are two possible trajectories of such discovery processes, suggested by Schegloff (1996a):

The trajectory of such analyses may begin with a noticing of *the action being done* and be pursued by specifying what about the talk or other conduct — in its context — serves as the practice for accomplishing that action. Or it may begin... with the noticing of *some feature of the talk* and be pursued by asking what — if anything — such a practice of talking has as its outcome (Schegloff 1996a: 172, emphasis added).

To illustrate these two trajectories, consider the following excerpt, from a conversation among three women in their fifties who have known each other for more than 20 years. In this excerpt, F has been talking about her son's interest in reading, and, as an illustration, how much he enjoyed reading an English phrase book he picked up at a cafeteria after taking the exhausting national college entrance exam.

(1) (Cao_6_12_06; audio a44; d-audio 04:06; video 4:31:11)

1F: [nei- nei hai shenme waiyu shu a=
that that still what foreign:language book PRT
['that- that was even a foreign language book.']=

2C: [(laughs)

3R: =mm:
PRT
='Yeah:?'

4F: hai shi cihui shu=
still be vocabulary book
'Was a vocabulary book. '=

5F: =jiu [duanyu de shu²
just phrase ASSC book
='like [a phrase book. '

6R: [ou::
PRT
['Oh:.'

7F: ta jiu gan xingqu jiu kan
3SG just feel interest just read
'He was interested so (he) started to read.'

2. In this article, where there are overlaps between speakers' utterances, I have aligned the Mandarin originals as well as the English translations; the result of this is that the English translations may not always appear directly below their word-by-word glosses.

- 8F: *wo shuo ni-*
I say you
'I said, "You-"'
- 9C: *na ting [hao*
that pretty good
'That's [good.'
- 10F: *[wo shuo ni bu lei a=*
I say you N tired PRT
'[I said, "Aren't you tired?"'] =
- 11F: *=ta mei- ta shuo-*
3SG N 3SG say
'He wasn't- He said-'
- 12F: *[zhe ting you yisi-*
this pretty have interest
["This is pretty interesting-"]
- 13R: *[shou ni yingxiang ba=*
receive you affect PRT
['Probably your influence.' =
- 14F: *=*ai! tch! >wo jiu- shou bu shi juan=*
I just hand N relieve volume
'=*arh! tch! > I just- always have a book in my hands,' =
- 15F: *=suiran bu du shenme ba** hahaha [hhh*
though N read what PRT (laugh) (laugh)
'=though don't read much.** hhahaha [haha'
- 16 (people laugh)
- 17 (from * to ** accompanied by exaggerated hand gestures)
- 18C: *uh:*
PRT
'Yeah.'
- 19F: *erqie xianzai-*
in:addition now
'Also now-'
- 20F: (story about how much her son is interested in reading)

For the moment, let us entertain the first trajectory of analysis proposed by Schegloff — i.e., beginning with a noticing of the **action being done**. What actions that have happened in this excerpt can we notice?

In broad strokes, we can notice at least five distinctive yet interlocking actions: (1) F's being engaged in a *storytelling*, conveying a sense of pride in her son (lines 1–12); (2) C's *providing a positive assessment* of the character/event being reported (line 9); (3) R's *paying an implicit compliment* to F at the end of the storytelling

(line 13); (4) F's apparently aligning with R's compliment by responding with what can be heard as a *positive assessment of herself* (line 14) while (5) immediately proceeding to *qualify* this assessment (line 15).

Now how shall we proceed next if we are to continue with this trajectory? That is to say, among the many actions that we have just noticed, what might be ready for further pursuit?

An intriguing theme that appears to have surfaced from the initial noticings seems to concern participants' being engaged in some sort of "praising" — both of self (i.e., self-praise) and of others (i.e., compliment). As noted, F appears to be implicitly praising her son through a storytelling, the upshot of which is proffered by the co-participant R in the form of a compliment on F, who then aligns with it by praising herself. So, here the instances of praising seem to be connected to each other.

If we are to pursue this theme, we may discover, for example, what has triggered each of these actions in the first place; that is, what has made the given action interactionally and sequentially relevant in its context and position. Or, as a Conversation Analyst might phrase it, "Why that (praise) now?" Relatedly, we might ask what sequential implications each of these actions may have brought about in interaction, as understood by the participants in the conversation. Alternatively, we could proceed to examine how each action gets accomplished by its speaker and how it gets responded to by the recipient, that is, exploring "what about the talk or other conduct — in its context — serves as *the practice* for accomplishing that action" (Schegloff 1996a: 172, emphasis added), and so forth.

Before taking this route further, however, let us turn, for now, to the other trajectory proposed by Schegloff — that is, beginning the analysis with the noticing of some **feature of the talk**. Here, for instance, if we focus on lines 14–15, we may notice that F's apparent positive assessment of self is followed *immediately* by a qualification of this just-prior assessment that dilutes the self-praise (indicated by the "=" signs in the transcript).

Is this an incidental mishap, perhaps as a result of F's incidentally skipping the "beat of silence" that would otherwise normally occur between two turn-constructional units (TCUs)? Or could this be a design feature produced by the speaker to achieve just this outcome? That is, could the speaker designedly produce a "rush-through" (Schegloff 1982) here?

According to Schegloff (1982), a "rush-through" canonically occurs when, as an ongoing turn is approaching possible completion, the current speaker speeds up the talk and shapes the prosody so as to allow an immediate start-up of a next turn-constructional unit without the usual break that might otherwise have occurred at the possible completion point. If F is indeed adopting this practice in producing her utterances in lines 14–15, exactly what might she be doing by latching a qualification to the self-praise?

If we pause for a moment and take stock of what we have come up with from these two trajectories, we might find this last question in effect bringing us back to where we stopped a few moments ago when we were looking at the first trajectory. There, as may be recalled, we began with the noticing of several actions, with one possible way of proceeding to further explore the design features of the actions. Here, we started with a particular design feature from which we moved on to pursue what distinctive work, if any, is being accomplished by the use of this turn design in relation to the type of action we noticed (praising).

To be sure, these two trajectories of analysis may not always converge in this way; there are usually, in each trajectory, many different ways in which one might reasonably proceed. And indeed, the initial noticing would normally begin with just one trajectory, rather than both at the same time. However, no matter what trajectory we may begin with when taking the initial noticing, the next step is usually the same if we are to pursue the potential line of analysis suggested by our initial hunch: namely formulating a candidate phenomenon and building collections. It is the specification of a particular action or feature that furnishes the initial ‘search criteria’ for collecting additional specimens, as now we have a sense of what to include as we inspect our field recordings and transcripts — although, of course, the search criteria can evolve as we encounter each next possible instance.

2. Formulating a candidate phenomenon and building collections

In order to develop a robust and durable view of a candidate phenomenon, it is necessary to start building a collection of cases that resemble our initial observation. Though seemingly straightforward, this collection-building process can turn out to be more complex than it first appears. There is, for example, always the possibility that it is difficult to locate other similar instances, or an adequate number of them, because of the distinctive nature of the candidate phenomenon or the lack of a sufficient database to draw instances from — or because the phenomenon has been construed too narrowly. Additionally, building a collection (or family of collections) like this essentially involves the process of refining a natural class of cases. However, delineating the boundaries when inspecting individual cases can prove to be a challenging process. As Schegloff (1996a) explains:

Assembling such a collection can be a strange operation. Though sometimes one has quite a clear idea of what one is collecting, often one does not. If one does, the effort to collect more “specimens” may quickly muddle that “clear idea,” or transform it. If one does not, one is involved in finding out what one is collecting in the very process of collecting it. (Schegloff 1996a: 502)

To illustrate this reflexive process, let us begin to search for additional specimens of self-praising with similar features to what we've seen in example (1). Let's say the initial search turns up the following two extracts.

Example (2) comes from a conversation among four middle-aged women who have known each other since their teenage years and who have kept in occasional contact. Prior to this excerpt, the participants had been talking about L, who apparently is known for not staying in one job for long.

(2) (Cao_6_11_06; audio b236; r-audio b67; video 51:34:15)

13L: =wo jiu- wo zhe ge ren jiu yunqi-

I just I this c person just luck

=‘I just- all my life my luck has just been-’

14L: [te bu hao. renjia dou shuo wo yunqi tebie=

especial N good others all say I luck special

[‘really bad. People all say/said that I have/had really’=

15M: [ei, ni bu shi gao fanyi ma=

PRT you N be do translate Q

[‘Hey, didn’t you do translation?’=

16L: =[bu hao

N good

=[[‘bad luck.’

17M: =[ni bu shi ying-

you N be English

=[[‘Didn’t you Eng-’

18M: yingwen fanyi ting bang de ma=

English translate pretty good NOM Q

‘translate English pretty well?’=

19L:1→ =↑ni kan wo yuanlai fan de dou tebie hao=

you see I originally translate NOM all especially good

=↑‘You see I used to translate really well.’=

20M: =[un

PRT

=[‘Yeah.’

21L:1→ =[erqie wo zher hai-

in:addition I here also

=[‘And I also-’

22L:1→ hai chu le hao duo za[zhi a=

also out ASP good many magazine PRT

‘also published many maga[zines.’=

- 23M: [uh.
PRT
[‘Yeah.’
- 24L:2→ =*dan xianzai dou bu xing le*
but now all N work ASP
=‘But not any more now.’
- 25 (.)
- 26L: *.hh yinwei shenme ne*
because what PRT
‘hh You know why?’
- 27L: (story continues)

Example (3) is taken from a conversation among a group of long-time female friends from Beijing in their fifties.

- (3) (Cao_6_26_06_C7; video1 49:40:00)
- 1C: *wo- wo nei ge-*
I I that c
‘I- My-’
- 2C: *wo xiansheng ye shanghairen.*
I husband also Shanghainese
‘My husband is also a Shanghainese.’
- 3R: *ou::.*
PRT
‘Oh::.’
- 4C: *dou xue bu hui.*
all learn N master
‘(I) just can’t learn it.’
- 5 (0.5)
- 6R:1→*wo xue de [hai keyi.*
I learn csc still OK
‘I learned it [OK.’
- 7C: [zhe zhong-
this kind
[‘This kind-’
- 8C: *shi ba. [ou:.=*
be PRT PRT
‘Yeah? [Oh:.’
- 9R: [um.=
PRT
[‘Yeah.’=

- 10C: =[na ni keneng cong[ming hhh
 then you probably smart (laugh)
 =['Then you must be s[mart. hhh?]
- 11R:2→=<[bu shi. (.) [nei ge-
 N be that C
 =['No. (.) ['That uh-'
- 12C: [[(...)] hhh
 (laugh)
 [[('(...)] hhh.?
- 13R:2→ [[bu shi. bu shi. [nei yisi ha
 N be N be that mean PRT
 [[['No. No. I didn't mean [that?]
- 14 [(participants laugh)
- 15C: (describes how her Shanghainese gets criticized by her husband)

At first glance, both cases have a prima facie resemblance to extract (1), with which we began, reproduced in part below:

- (1) (Cao_6_12_06; audio a44; d-audio 04:06; video 4:31:11)
 14F:1→ =*ai! tch! >wo jiu- shou bu shi juan=
 I just hand N relieve volume
 =*‘arh! tch! > I just- always have a book in my hands,’=
 15F:2→ =suiran bu du shenme ba** hahaha [hhhh
 though N read what PRT (laugh) (laugh)
 =‘though don’t read much.** hahaha[haha’

As can be noted, in all three excerpts a self-praising remark (arrows 1) is subsequently retracted or otherwise qualified by the speaker of the self-praise (arrows 2). Should this similarity then lead us to the conclusion that both of the newly located cases belong with our initial instance — i.e., that they both belong in the collection?

A closer inspection suggests otherwise. Despite the prima facie similarity, a critical distinction between example (3) and examples (1) and (2) concerns the relationship between the self-praise part and the qualification part. In examples (1) and (2), the qualification is latched onto the self-praise without the normal beat of silence and without any disfluencies on the part of the speaker in delivering the qualification. By contrast, in example (3) the qualification does not immediately follow the self-praise; rather, this qualification comes after a response from a recipient (one that itself makes relevant a response) and as part of a series of attempts by the speaker R to repair her perceivable self-praise (lines 11, 13). In this latter example, we can notice that after producing a somewhat positive assessment of her aptitude for learning this Shanghainese dialect (*wo xue de hai keyi* ‘I learned

it OK'; line 6), R first responds to the recipient C's newsmark (*shi ba* 'Yeah'; line 8) with a reaffirmation (*um* 'Yeah'; line 9). However, immediately thereafter and in overlap with C's subsequent compliment on R (*na ni keneng congming* 'then you must be smart'; line 10), R appears to pick up the possible problematic implication of her earlier remark (line 11) and proceeds to emphatically deny it (line 13).

Placing these three cases side-by-side, then, it appears that the seemingly "slight" variation in the formation of the action between example (3) versus (1) and (2) can embody distinctive actions being done by the speakers: In contrast to (3), in which the follow-up qualification appears to be produced as a repair after the speaker has come to realize the possible implication of her just-prior talk, in examples (1) and (2) there is a sense that the speakers seem to have designed the self-praise plus qualification as a pre-packaged, two-part construction.

Whereas more instances are needed to substantiate this, one possible consequence of delivering the qualification as part of the package rather than as an *ex post facto* interactional remedy is that this conveys a clear message that the packaged information needs to be appreciated as a whole in its sequential context. This feature allows the speaker to bring some praiseworthy aspect about him- or herself out in the open while at the same time mitigating the accountability of engagement in such an activity. Additionally, with the retracting or qualifying part coming right after the self-praise, this practice could avoid an awkward readjustment in interaction — as does happen in example (3) — after the recipient has treated the self-praise in its own right and produced a response accordingly.³ Returning to the initial puzzle we had with lines 14–15 in example (1), we could now argue that the rush-through between these two TCUs isn't an incidental mishap but a practice designed to produce a particular outcome. In turn, this understanding helps clarify the character of our main collection and suggests that of the two additional specimens, examples (2) and (3), only the former belongs in the main collection.

Having made clear the distinctive work accomplished by the use of this target "bipartite" self-praise turn design on the one hand and how the look-alike design in example (3) is deployed to different effect on the other, we are now in a position to proceed to build our collection by refining or redefining the candidate phenomenon and the domain of relevant occurrences. In our continued effort to search for other candidate cases, for instance, while separating cases like (3) from the core collection, we may also expand the search to consider cases which on the surface look **unlike** the design feature of interest (cf. Schegloff 1996a, 1997) but seem to do similar work. For just as features which *prima facie* appear to be equivalents may turn out to have different interactional imports (Schegloff 1997, Heritage 2011),

3. For more detailed explications of the extracts included here and for a fuller account of the interactional phenomenon explored here, see Wu (2011, 2012).

so, too, may those which do not parallel the target instance in form or content happen to accomplish similar actions (Wu & Heritage forthcoming).

So if we follow the expanded understanding of our initial target feature and broaden our investigation to explore other features which seem to be used to a similar effect, we may begin to consider cases which would otherwise initially appear to fall outside the collection. A possible case in point is the following, from the same conversation as example (2). In this excerpt, M is talking about her late mother, a distinguished middle-school teacher who had continuously attended the Chinese calligraphy classes offered by the College for Older Adults (COA) for ten years after retirement:

(4) (Cao_6_11_06; audioB180; regularB027; video 47:39:10)

14M:1→*houlai ta [fanzheng shenme-*

later 3SG anyways what

‘Later she [anyways like-’

15R: *[(qishi) wo ye keyi shang=*

actually I also can attend

[(‘Actually) I can also attend’=

16R: =*[laoren daxue=*

elders college

=*[‘the College for Older Adults.’=*

17M:1→*[shenme Zhuan[[shu a, Lishu a,*

what Seal:Script PRT Clerical:Script PRT

[‘like the Seal [[Script, the Clerical Script,’

18C: *[[uh*

PRT

[['Yeah.’

19M:1→*Caoshu a, suoyou de- zhe:xie*

Grass:Script PRT all ASSC these

‘the Grass Script, all of- these: (styles),’

20R: *[ou*

PRT

[‘Oh.’

21M:1→*[ta- ta dou neng-*

3SG 3SG all can

[‘she- she can all-’

22M:1→*fanzheng qima xie de-*

anyway at:least write csc

‘anyway at least writes to the extent that-’

- 23M:1→*xie de wo-*
write CSC I
'writes to the extent that I-'
- 24M:1→*wo juede kan shangqu bu cuo*
I feel see up N wrong
'I feel that they look not bad.'
- 25R: *[ao*
PRT
['Oh.')
- 26M:2→*[(ni dangran) bu keneng shuo: chengwei::*
you of:course N possible say become
['(Of course you) cannot become:: say:')
- 27L: *neng gua de [chulai. (°yinggai shi.°)*
can hang CSC out should be
'Can be publicly [displayed. (°Should be.°)'
- 28M:2→ *[shufajia si de. a=*
calligrapher seem NOM PRT
['like a calligrapher. Right?')
- 29R: =*[ao.=*
PRT
=['Yeah.']=
- 30M:2→*[danshi ta keyi canjia nei ge-zhanlan=*
but 3SG can participate that C exhibition
=['But she can take part in an exhibition.']=
- 31L: =*zhanlan. dui.*
exhibition right
='An exhibition. Right.'
- 32 (.)
- 33M: *[a. shenme Xicheng qu*
PRT what (name) district
['Right? (At places) like the Xicheng District.')
- 34R: *[ou, na dangran bu cuo le=*
PRT that of:course N wrong ASP
['Oh, then of course (her work) is not bad.']=
- 35M: =*ei. shenme shenme de=*
PRT what what ASSC
='Yeah. And all that.']=

If we compare this instance with the just-examined (1)–(3), there appears to be a mixture of similarities and differences in terms of turn design. For example, in this instance, as with (1)–(3), the speaker proceeds to follow up with a qualification

(arrows 2) after offering a positive assessment concerning the same matter (arrows 1). That the qualification here (line 26), like that in (1) and (2), is similarly introduced on the heels of the praise without the normal beat of silence can be supported by the fact that it collides with the recipient's move to respond to the just-prior praise (line 25). Nevertheless, similarities aside, a clear distinction between this instance and those examined so far is that what follows in this qualification is not a straightforward move to put up a modest front, such as to deny the validity (ex. (1)), current relevance (ex. (2)), or possible implication (ex. (3)) of the just-prior positive self-assessment. Rather, in this qualification (lines 26, 28, 30), what the speaker produces appears to be more complex yet less explicit at first sight: Here, the speaker notably puts forward two actions, with the first (lines 26, 28) seemingly qualifying her praise of her mother's work and the second (line 30) supporting it (within the limits of the first).

What should we make of these differences and similarities, then? Does this instance belong in the collection, or not? To answer these questions, it is crucial to understand what is going on in this instance and to determine if what is going on here is relevant to the candidate phenomenon. Or on the other hand, does what is going on here suggest that we change or broaden or loosen the candidate phenomenon somewhat? Let's take another look at example (4).

Here, we can note that in the face of a competing line of talk that another participant attempts to pursue (lines 15–16), M first praises, with caution and great restraint,⁴ the calligraphy skills her mother had acquired over the ten-year period (lines 14, 17, 19, 21–24). Immediately thereafter, M proceeds to introduce an “extreme case scenario” relevant to the matter being assessed, i.e., being a professional calligrapher (lines 26, 28). While acknowledging that scenario as an unattainable goal in the current situation, M goes on to bring up an accomplishment that her mother did achieve, i.e., having an exhibition (line 30). In doing so, M sets up a background against which her mother's accomplishment can be seen as the second-best-case scenario. Although suggesting something as second best marks it as not as good as it could be, it nonetheless places it at the upper end of the scale, underscoring its value. In introducing this additional background information right after her restrained praise, then, M can be understood to implicitly turn up the volume of the praise: Here, although she does not explicitly extoll the high caliber of her mother's calligraphy work, with her concession in lines 26 and 28, she arguably manages to invite her recipients to see just that.

4. Note, for example, the several cut-offs and restarts in lines 21–23 and her (re)framing the praise from her own perspective in line 24. See Wu (2011) for a detailed explication of this excerpt.

What this preliminary analysis suggests, then, is that even though example (4) may not on the face of it appear to be precisely equivalent to the target feature we initially encountered in example (1), the turn designs in these two instances nonetheless share some interactional similarities. In particular, both designs appear to be used to facilitate doing self-praise knowingly. That is, in contrast to example (3), in which the speaker appears to incidentally transgress the constraints of self-praise and moves subsequently to remedy the possible negative social implications, the speakers in (1) and (4) act under these constraints to do self-praise wittingly. In these two latter cases, the speakers go ahead with a self-praising move in the face of the constraints while designing their turns in such a way as to maintain a modest posture. In (1), for example, the speaker delivers an outright brag about herself but simultaneously packages it with a retraction. In (4), the speaker brings up the praiseworthiness of the matter in question while doing it implicitly through the appeal to the “disclaiming an extreme case situation” strategy (Wu 2011).

To be sure, the turn designs in (1) and (4) are not strictly functional analogs and each invites its own inquiry. However, including cases like (4), despite their *prima facie* differences from our initial target, can help broaden our understanding of the province of self-praise. In speaking of assembling a collection for a candidate phenomenon, Schegloff (1996a, 1997) repeatedly stresses the importance of initially assembling the collection *generously*, for not only does it help “avoid freezing the grasp of what is being studied at the initial understandings of the initial instances” (Schegloff 1997: 502) and allow it to grow, but it also “forces us to specify progressively just what (if anything) is distinctively going on in the fragments which set us off” (Schegloff 1997: 502). What is needed after such generous collections, Schegloff (1997: 537) adds, is “a methodical and accountable exclusion of candidates which do not belong.” Such a methodical exclusion is perhaps as important as a methodical inclusion: As I have attempted to show in the preceding discussion, it is as easy for us to fail to discern true functional differences underlying superficial formal similarities as it is to overlook potentially relevant instances with *prima facie* different appearances.

Thus far, we have considered issues related to identifying a phenomenon and building collections of candidate instances. Before leaving this section, it may be useful to register one last point. It would appear that in assembling a collection for a candidate phenomenon, one would begin with delineating the boundaries of the target phenomenon instantiated in our initial encounter of a candidate instance. While this is not untrue, it is important for us to also bear in mind that the passage from identifying a phenomenon to collecting it is not always a linear process, progressing straight from one stage to the other. Rather, as our discussion has suggested, this passage can involve an ever-refining process as we are informed by materials subsequently encountered in the journey of discovery (Schegloff 2009).

(And in fact, occasionally it can turn out that the initial case — the one that allowed us to notice a phenomenon — may later itself be left out of the collection, once we have a stronger sense of just what the phenomenon is.)

Having discussed how to begin to make observations and how to identify and collect phenomena of analytic interest, let us turn now to the analysis.

3. Building and developing analyses from a collection of cases

From its inception, one of the hallmarks of CA has been its stringent reliance on the observable conduct of participants as its central resource for developing analyses. One consequence of this reliance is that no order of detail in interaction can be dismissed, *a priori*, as irrelevant; and conversely, no analytic distinctions or social characterizations of participants (e.g., age, class, gender, etc.) should assume a first-order relevance in analyzing actual talk-in-interaction — when the aim is the understanding of how the talk itself is organized (Wu 2004). This is not to say that CA takes the position that such analytic distinctions or social characterizations have absolutely no bearing on participants' conduct on any given occasion, only that any claims made along those lines should be empirically grounded and warranted case-by-case as far as is possible.

Schegloff (1996a) outlines three fundamental elements that should enter into a CA analysis:

1. First, the account requires a formulation of what action or actions are being accomplished, with compelling exemplifications in displays of data and analysis, including ways of “testing” the claim via confrontation of problematic instances and apparent “deviant cases,” if possible.
2. Second, there must be a grounding of this formulation in the “reality” of the participants... This requires some demonstration that the interlocutors in the data being examined have understood the utterances (or other conduct) in question to be possibly doing the proposed action(s) or that they are oriented to that possibility — a demonstration ordinarily grounded in the interlocutors' subsequent talk or conduct...⁵
3. A third element of a proper account of an action is an explication and analysis of what it is about the observed talk or other conduct or the practices embodied in it, which makes the enactment of that talk/conduct possibly an instance of the proposed action, and makes it analyzable by the coparticipants as an

5. That is, an analyst can ground participants' understandings of the action implemented by a turn at talk by examining the way that action is *treated* by next speakers.

instance of that action, that is, why or how that practice can yield that action...In order to provide analytically the grounds for the possibility of such an understanding, an account must be offered of what about the production of that talk/conduct provided for its recognizability as such an action...Once explicated and established, this serves as part of the account of the utterance/action, *whether or not it was so understood by its recipient on any particular occasion* (Schegloff 1996a: 172–173, emphasis in original).

Although I cannot possibly hope to fully exemplify all three elements here, it may be useful to briefly illustrate some of these principles with actual data, and, in the process, introduce some common sources of evidence for developing CA analyses. Along the way, I also hope to address some methodological issues and, in particular, issues related to developing analyses which are based on, though not necessarily grounded in, the details of conversation.

To begin with, let us turn to a collection of instances of *a*-suffixing, assembled for examining the use of the Mandarin final particle *a*.⁶ For the moment, let us focus only on the turns involving the design feature of interest, marked with arrows in the excerpts:

(5) (CS Party A124A)

(W is telling a story about how he once mistakenly took an icon for a newly-installed computer software program as a signal of a virus alert and ended up reformatting the hard drive of his computer.)

- 1W: *wo juede zui haoxiao de shi hhh*
 I feel most funny PRT be (laugh)
 ‘I think the most funny thing is hhhhhh’
- 2W: *ta you shang jiao bu shi you chuxian na ge- gui lian ma.*
 3SG right up corner N be have appear that C ghost face Q
 ‘isn’t there a- ghost face appearing in the upper right hand corner?’
- 3L: *dui a.*
 right PRT
 ‘(That’s) right.’
- 4W: *wo yiwei na ge wo yijing zhong le bingdu*
 I thought that C I already get PFV virus
 ‘I thought that meant my (computer) had a virus.’

6. My thanks to Gene Lerner for pointing out that the choice of *a*-suffixing as a candidate phenomenon involves a “token-based phenomenon,” one which can be selected without regard to any action or sequence-organizational context. This choice is simply a matter of convenience — I happen to have more data and findings to illustrate this phenomenon. I am not suggesting that a “token-based phenomenon” is more fitted or preferred than an “action-based phenomenon.” Nor am I suggesting that CA is primarily done by figuring out the discourse functions of tokens.

- 5W: *houlai jiu ba ta hhhh %format%⁷ diao hhhh*
 later then BA 3SG (laugh) format off (laugh)
 ‘(So) later (I) just hhh %reformatted% it. hhhh’
- 6L: *qishi bu shi.*
 actually N be
 ‘(But) actually (it) was not (a virus).’
- 7X:1→ *jieguolei.* (to W)
 result PRT
 ‘And then?’
- 8L: *qishi shi bu shi de.* (to X)
 actually be N be PRT
 ‘Actually (it) was not (a virus).’
- 9X: *ni:*
 you:
 ‘You:.’
- 10 (0.5)
- 11W:2→ *wo hai da dianhua wen guo ni a* (to X)
 I still call telephone ask ASP you PRT
 ‘I actually had called you to ask you (about it) A.’
- (6) (CS Party ordinary 466A; video 37’)
 (Participants are talking about a woman (Wu Qing) whom they suspect is dating one of their mutual friends, Victor.)
- 1X: *bu xiaode shi bu shi nüpengyou.*
 N know be N be girlfriend
 ‘(I) don’t know if (she) is (Victor’s) girlfriend.’
- 2 (.)
- 3X: *yangmuzhe*
 admirer
 ‘(His) admirer.’
- 4L: *ou, yangmuzhe=*
 PRT admirer
 ‘Oh, (his) admirer.’=
- 5X: =*<tade mingzi jiu shi yangmuzhe.>*
 her name just be admirer
 =‘<Her name is just “Admirer.”>’
- 6 (0.5)

7. As a transcription convention, a pair of % symbols are placed around segments of talk during which the speaker code-switches to a language/dialect other than Mandarin.

- 7H:1→ *shei?* (in the kitchen at the moment)
 who
 ‘Who?’
- 8T: [%Victor% *bei yangmu le (ma)* (to X)
 (name) BEI admire CRS Q
 [‘%Victor% has been admired./?’
- 9X:2→ [*Wu:Qing a*
 (name) PRT
 [‘Wu Qing A.’

(7) (CS Party 216A)

(Participants are discussing L’s baseball-playing history. Prior to this excerpt, L has just confirmed that he had played in the National Little League baseball team in Taiwan.)

- 1R:1→ *shenme shihou.*
 what time
 ‘When?’
- 2L:2→ *xiao shihou a.*
 little time PRT
 ‘When (I) was a kid A.’

We can note here that in each of these instances, the response to the question is suffixed with the final particle *a*. What is going on here? Why use final particle *a* now? Or, more precisely, what is the *a*-sufficing being used to accomplish in this sequential context — i.e., in answers to questions?

There could be many different directions the analysis could take off from here. In fact, over the last several decades, aside from the ten different functions listed by Chao (1968), there have been several different proposals for the basic ‘meaning’ of the final particle *a*. The proposed meaning ranges from “reducing the forcefulness” (Li and Thompson 1981, Zhu 1982), to “conveying an import of warning or reminding” (Zhu 1982), and “expressing speaker involvement” (Chu 2002).

As a matter of fact, many years ago, in my first attempt to describe this collection of *a*-sufficing that I had put together, I initially proposed the use of *a*-sufficing as “marking an epistemic gap.” This proposal was based on the observation that across these instances, the *a*-speaker offers, in the turn suffixed with this particle, information that the recipient appears to not know and hence asks for. This commonality across the collection of *a*-sufficing thus, in my view at that time, provided a good basis for arguing that final *a* serves to mark an epistemic gap.

Although that initial analysis was able to comfortably account for all instances in this *a*-sufficing collection, it was quickly struck down when I realized that the epistemic gap is only a by-product of the question-answer sequence, with or

without an *a*-suffixing. In other words, even though the *a*-suffixing co-occurs with an epistemic gap in these instances, it does not explain or indicate the existence of this gap *per se*. Supporting this argument is the fact that in most question-answer sequences, like examples (8) and (9) below, the response turn is not suffixed with final *a*:

(8) (CS Party A184A)

(Participants are inquiring about L's baseball-playing history.)

1W:1→ *ni yiqian you da guo- liansai ma.*
 you before have play ASP league Q
 'Have you played in- the (baseball) league?'

2W:1→ *quanguo liansai.*
 national league
 'The National League?'

3L:2→ *you::.*
 have
 '(I) did::.'

4W: *wow::.* *hh*
 (exclamation) (laugh)
 'Wow:: hhh'

(9) (JX_6_3_07_1_A6 01:47)

(A conversation among three college friends. Here R and M are talking about L's boyfriend.)

1R:1→ *ei, xi- gan ma de, dang bing de* (to L)
 PRT do what NOM serve soldier NOM
 'Hey, e- what does (he) do? A soldier?'

2M:2→ *dang bing de*
 serve soldier NOM
 'A soldier.'

3R: *ou*
 PRT
 'Oh.'

Comparing this set of instances with examples (5)–(7), a clearer picture of what *a*-suffixing is used to do in question-answer sequences starts to emerge. It turns out that, on closer inspection, what *a*-suffixing indicates in such sequences is not an epistemic gap between the *a*-speaker and his or her recipient, but rather that the existence of the epistemic gap in the here and now, as embodied in the asking of the question, is unexpected and hence problematic. Specifically, *a*-suffixing is used

in these instances to mark that the questioner should have known what he or she has just inquired about (Heritage 1998, Wu 2004, Wu and Heritage forthcoming).

An initial sense of this use of *a*-suffixing is available if we compare examples (7) and (8). It is notable that in both (7) and (8), a question is asked of L about his baseball-playing history. Whereas the one asked by a friend receives no *a*-suffixing (ex. (8)), the one asked by his long-time girlfriend does (ex. (7)). An initial hunch suggests that the use and nonuse of the *a*-suffixing may have to do with L's presumption that his girlfriend should have known about his baseball-playing history while his friend W would not. That is, this *a*-suffixing conveys a tiny sanction for the girlfriend's questioning of something that she should have known.

Delving into my data, I found possible support from a further instance containing a similar use of *a*-suffixing:

(10) (CS Party 018A; video 41")

(A party is being held at H's and W's house, to which X and other friends are invited and attend.)

1H:1→ *ei;* (.) *weisheme hui duo yi wan fan zai nabian.*
 PRT why ASP additional one C rice at there
 'Hey, (.) how come there is an additional bowl of rice over there?'

2 (1.3)

3X:2→ ↑*hai you %Victor% a.*
 still have (friend) PRT
 '↑There is still %Victor% A.'

Here, as with (7), the question attracts an *a*-suffixed response. Again, the person who asks the question is arguably the one who should have known the answer in the first place. In this instance, H turns out to be one of the two party hosts and hence is supposed to have primary access to the arrangements for the party. The fact that he is puzzled about an additional bowl of rice prepared for a guest-yet-to-come and has to solicit an account for that from those who are invited can be seen as not only unexpected but also potentially problematic.

Needless to say, it would be far-fetched to assert any solid analytic claim based on a couple of single case analyses like this; to get a robust finding requires a collection. Yet, the preceding discussion suggests that it is essential not only to make a collection but also to compare and contrast that collection with comparable instances which nonetheless are lacking in the target feature. For the latter approach can help us begin to progressively make explicit what it is which our target feature distinctively serves to do, and guard us against making claims, which, though not strictly at fault, do not capture the essence of the use of the target feature.

Thus far in this discussion, we have tried to formulate an understanding of the use of *a*-suffixing by examining a collection of the target instances and by comparing and contrasting this collection with comparable instances which nonetheless are lacking in this feature. As we have tried to demonstrate, this second, contrasting procedure is crucial for warranting the validity of an analysis as it provides a safeguard to prevent a simple deductive conclusion based on superficial cross-data sharing features which co-occur, though not essentially account for, the phenomenon of interest.

However, from a CA perspective, to support the proposed argument, it is not enough to simply provide exemplifications of the target phenomenon via a display and analysis of candidate instances, followed by a comparison of comparable, albeit different, cases. To warrant the analysis, it is important to further ground the analysis in the participants' observable conduct. In the present analysis, for instance, we are required to demonstrate that the contextual information that we as analysts bring up and use as evidence is indeed something that the participants orient to in the unfolding of the conversation.

Ordinarily, such a demonstration is grounded in the participants' subsequent conduct. In some cases, it is the *a*-speaker who makes explicit the grounds for the unwarranted status of the question being responded to. A return to example (5) illustrates.

(5) (CS Party A124A)

- 1W: *wo juede zui haoxiao de shi hhh*
I feel most funny PRT be (laugh)
'I think the most funny thing is hhhhh'
- 2W: *ta you shang jiao bu shi you chuxian na ge- gui lian ma.*
3SG right up corner N be have appear that C ghost face Q
'isn't there a- ghost face appearing in the upper right hand corner?'
- 3L: *dui a.*
right PRT
'(That's) right.'
- 4W: *wo yiwei na ge wo yijing zhong le bingdu*
I thought that C I already get PFV virus
'I thought that meant my (computer) had a virus.'
- 5W: *houlai jiu ba ta hhhh %format% diao hhhh*
later then BA 3SG (laugh) format off (laugh)
'(So) later (I) just hhh %reformatted% it. hhhh'
- 6L: *qishi bu shi.*
actually N be
'(But) actually (it) was not (a virus).'

- 7X:1→ *jiieguo lei.* (to W)
 result PRT
 ‘And then?’
- 8L: *qishi shi bu shi de.* (to X)
 actually be N be PRT
 ‘Actually (it) was not (a virus).’
- 9X: *ni:*
 you:
 ‘You:’
- 10 (0.5)
- 11W:2→ *wo hai da dianhua wen guo ni a* (to X)
 I still call telephone ask ASP you PRT
 ‘I actually had called you to ask you (about it) A.’
- 12W: *wo shuo zhe yang shi bu shi zhong du le*
 I say this manner be N be get virus CRS
 ‘I said, “Is this a virus?”’

Here, while X’s question (line 7) seemingly suggests his ignorance of the matter under question, W cites a prior conversation with X (lines 11–12) as evidence for the latter’s prior knowledge of the matter, providing the basis for *a*-suffixing the response to this question.

In other cases, the questioner’s presumed prior knowledge about the matter in question is confirmed by his or her own subsequent reaction.

(6) (CS Party ordinary 466A; video 37’)

- 1X: *bu xiaode shi bu shi nüpengyou.*
 N know be N be girlfriend
 ‘(I) don’t know if (she) is (Victor’s) girlfriend.’
- 2 (.)
- 3X: *yangmuzhe*
 admirer
 ‘(His) admirer.’
- 4L: *ou, yangmuzhe=*
 PRT admirer
 ‘Oh, (his) admirer.’=
- 5X: =<*tade mingzi jiu shi yangmuzhe.*>
 her name just be admirer
 =‘<Her name is just “Admirer.”>’
- 6 (0.5)
- 7H:1→ *shei?* (in the kitchen at the moment)
 who
 ‘Who?’

- 8T: [%Victor% *bei yangmu le* (ma) (to X)
 (name) BEI admire CRS Q
 [%Victor% has been admired./?]
- 9X:2→ [*Wu:Qing a*
 (name) PRT
 ['Wu Qing A.']
- 10X:2→ [[*Wu:Qing a*
 (name) PRT
 [['Wu Qing A.']]
- 11L: [[<%Victor% *you yi ge nüpengyou*> *changchang qu zhao ta.*
 (name) have one C girlfriend often go visit 3SG
 [[<%Victor% has a girlfriend,> (who) goes to visit him very often.']]
- 12X: <*ta you yi ge yangmuzhe la.*>
 3SG have one C admirer PRT
 '<He has an admirer.>'
- 13H:3→ *ou, na ge-* [*Wu:Qing la.=*
 PRT that C (name) PRT
 'Oh. That('s)- [Wu Qing.']=

Here, H's question (*shei* 'who'; line 7) is met with two *a*-suffixed responses (lines 9–10), possibly on the ground that H is expected to have known about the matter under discussion. And indeed, this *a*-embodied supposition is subsequently confirmed. In line 13, following the production of a "realizing" *ou* and a brief word search (*na ge-* ('that('s)-'), H not only displays that he has indeed known about this mutual friend's recent romance, but does so through a display of that knowledge — i.e., by specifying the woman's name.

And in still other cases, it is neither the questioner nor the intended recipient, but rather a coparticipant, whose next move lends support to the problematic nature of the question.

(7) (CS Party 216A)

- 1R:1→ *shenme shihou.*
 what time
 'When?'
- 2L:2→ *xiao shihou a.*
 little time PRT
 'When (I) was a kid A.'
- 3R: *ni da guo ou.*
 you play ASP PRT
 'You played (ball in the league)?/!'

- 4L: *dui a. dui a.*
 right PRT right PRT
 ‘(That’s) right A. (That’s) right A.’
- 5T:3→ %*li m chai ou%*
 you N know PRT
 ‘%You didn’t know?%’
- 6R: [(*wo zhidao ta you.*) *lishi hai bu zhidao*
 I know 3SG have history still N know
 [(I know he had (played before)) (but I) didn’t know about the
 history yet.]

That L’s deployment of *a*-suffixing here may be grounded in the presumption that R should have known his past glory days as a national league player is reinforced by coparticipant T’s subsequent reaction in line 5. Here, T’s question (in Taiwanese) (%*li m chai ou%* ‘You didn’t know?!’) clearly shows that he, too, is treating R’s displayed state of knowledge about this particular matter as less than expected.

Whether it is the speaker’s, the recipient’s, or a co-participant’s subsequent talk or conduct, such data-internal evidence⁸ nicely supplements our use of other evidence based on contextual, co-textual, or contrastive information, providing a reasonable basis for arguing that the analysis is grounded in the “reality of the participants,” rather than the result of “an academically analytic imposition” (Schegloff 1996a: 172).

In addition to the evidence considered so far, there is another form of evidence that is often drawn on by conversation analysts, though rarely by discourse analysts in other disciplines — that is, the use of *prima facie* counterexamples. Here, we work to locate instances in which the target feature is absent in sequential contexts which otherwise commonly occasion its occurrence, and proceed to explore, by reference to our already formulated understanding of the target feature, if there is any analytic relevance for its “eventful” nonoccurrence (Schegloff 1996a). Our target feature here, the final particle *a*, is not particularly conducive to such evidence because its occurrence isn’t always required even in the event when its presence is highly relevant. In the following, however, I offer a rare possible case:

8. It may be helpful to clarify that although data-internal evidence such as participants’ subsequent conduct often plays a central role in CA analyses, it is not the expectation of CA that participants will always make explicit or articulate their understanding of a given action implemented by a given turn design. Most often, the displaying of such evidence in an analysis is as a result of a research process involving a rigorous analytic search for available relevant instances from the analyst’s database.

(11) (CS Party audiolift 304)

(Conversation among a group of computer science Ph.D. candidates.

Participants are talking here about an academic job that L is about to start in the fall.)

- 1X: *ni %fall% xuyao kai ke ma.*
 you fall require offer class Q
 ‘Are you required to teach classes in the %fall%?’
- 2L: *yao a*
 require PRT
 ‘Yes.’
- 3X: *ou.*
 PRT
 ‘Oh.’
- 4W: *shang shenme*
 teach what
 ‘What (will you) teach?’
- 5L: *shang ni na men.*
 teach you that c
 ‘(I’ll) teach the one you’ve taught.’
- 6C: *hhh*
 (laugh)
 ‘hhh’
- 7W: *shi shenme? %Minix%?*
 be what Minix
 ‘What’s that? %Minix%?’
- 8 (.)
- 9L: *bu shi bu shi.*
 N be N be
 ‘No, no.’
- 10 (.)
- 11L:⇒ *shi [(%Assembly%...)]*
 be Assembly
 ‘(It)’s [(%Assembly%...)]
- 12 [(people laugh)]
- 13H: *ni yao shang %Minix% ou?* (in the kitchen at the moment)
 you ASP teach Minix PRT
 ‘You’ll teach %Minix%?’
- 14L: *[bu shi la.*
 N be PRT
 [‘No.’
- 15W: [(...)]

- 16W:⇒ *ta yao shang %Assembly%.=*
 3SG require teach Assembly
 ‘He’ll teach %Assembly%.’
- 17T:⇒ *=%Assembly%.*
 Assembly
 =‘%Assembly%.’
- 18W: *hhhhhh*
 (laugh)
 ‘hhh’
- 19X:1→ *ni yao shang %Assembly% ou*
 you require teach Assembly PRT
 ‘You’ll teach %Assembly%.?’
- 20L:2→ *°(dui.)°*
 right
 ‘(‘That’s) right.°)’
- 21X: *aiyou. hen nan ou↑*
 (exclamation) very difficult PRT
 ‘Wow. (It’ll be) difficult.’

Our focus here is on the question-answer sequence in lines 19–20, in which a question about a course that L will teach is responded to with a simple confirmation, without the *a*-suffixing. Given that the information being asked about has just been made available in the immediately-prior sequence (lines 1–18), why does L not mark the stance, by using *a*-suffixing, that X has just asked about something that he should have known? This nonoccurrence of *a*-suffixing appears even more puzzling considering that in the majority of the cases at hand, the confirmation token *dui* ‘yeah/right,’ when used to reaffirm a piece of information that has just been said or implied in the prior talk, is almost always suffixed with *a*, as in the following two instances:

(12) (CMC_01_01)

(A is talking about an upcoming visit to a mutual friend’s family in the Northeast, where she apparently had visited before. The conversation has turned to expensive hamburgers there.)

- 1A: *ruguo wo xingyun dehua>neng chi dao,=*
 if I lucky if can eat eat
 ‘If I am lucky enough >(I’ll) be able to eat (the buns),’=
- 2A:⇒ *=.hhh ranhou wo rang ta:: dai wo qu chi:: kaorou.=*
 then I let 3SG take I go eat barbecue
 =‘Then I’ll ask her:: to take me to eat:: barbecue.’=

- 3A: =*wo bu zhidao ta- tongyi bu tongyi.*
 I N know 3SG agree N agree
 =‘I don’t know whether or not she’d- agree.’
- 4B:1→ *dongbei you kaorou a.*
 northeast have barbecue PRT
 ‘There is barbecue in the Northeast?’
- 5A:2→ *dui a.*
 right PRT
 ‘(That’s) right A.’
- 6B: *shi bu shi gou rou a.*
 be N be dog meat PRT
 ‘Is it dog meat?’
- 7 (1.0)
- 8A: °*bu shi,*°
 N be
 °‘No,’°

(13) (T-Dancer 211)

(D and X are talking about a mutual friend.)

- 1D:⇒ *jieguo renjia gen wo shuo ta shi waishengren=*
 result others with I say 3SG be mainlander
 ‘And then (when) other people told me that she is a mainlander,’=
- 2D: =*wo- (.) wo (ziji) dou xia yi tiao a=*
 I I self all shock one C PRT
 =‘I- (.) I (myself) was shocked.’ =
- 3X:1→ =*ta shi waishengren a;*
 3SG be mainlander PRT
 =‘She is a mainlander?’
- 4D:2→ *dui a*
 right PRT
 ‘(That’s) right A.’
- 5X: *ta yi ban yi ban la.*
 3SG one half one half PRT
 ‘She’s half and half.’

Here we can note that in each instance, the question asks about something that the question recipient has just mentioned in a prior turn and is subsequently responded to with an *a*-suffixed confirmation.

If we compare example (11) with these two latter instances, we can quickly note that even though in all three instances the question being asked can be heard as questioning the obvious, the degree to which the questioner can be ‘faulted’ for

asking for supposedly known-in-common information may be different from the recipient's perspective. In contrast to examples (12) and (13), in which the information being asked about has just been provided by the *a*-speaker to the questioner in the immediately prior turn, the information that X asks for (line 19) in (11) has only been made available to him through his peripherally participating in a clarification sequence involving other co-participants (lines 7–17). In view of these differences, there are grounds for arguing that X's seeking a confirmation of this particular information can be perceived as less unwarranted by the recipient. That is, there are legitimate enough reasons, from the question recipient L's perspective, for X to reaffirm the information just sought. This thus provides the possible interpretative relevance for L's not employing *a*-suffixing in a sequential environment otherwise normally primed for its use.

In this section, I've attempted to demonstrate how to develop CA analyses and what sorts of evidence may be drawn on to support them. As a recap, here are some hallmarks of CA that discriminate CA analyses from other analyses which otherwise are also based on conversation:⁹

- To warrant that the proposed action is indeed what the participants understand it to be, rather than an analyst's imposition, an analytic grounding in participants' observable conduct is required of CA analysis.
- Comparative analyses of the target instances and analytically comparable instances lacking in the target feature are crucial if we are to warrant that the proposed action is distinctive and consequential of the target feature.
- The use of apparent counterexamples as evidence for supporting a proposed argument is also a common practice for CA analyses.

4. Conclusion

In the past two decades, there has been a growing interest in doing CA in languages other than English. In the area of Chinese, the potential of CA to offer new perspectives has been repeatedly stressed (e.g., Biq, Tai, and Thompson 1996, Biq 2000). In this article, I have attempted to offer the reader a glimpse of the research process in action by presenting the data and findings of my own research and then taking the reader step-by-step through the analytic process — from initial observations of a candidate phenomenon, through the process of making a collection of cases, and finally explaining criteria for establishing an empirically-grounded finding. Special focus was placed on the importance of detecting "participants'

9. These are elements that CA analysts may draw on when developing analyses, though, pending the object of inquiry, not all elements will necessarily enter into any one CA study.

orientations to action” and the more difficult process of finding evidence for the phenomenon from nonconforming specimens. I hope to have shown that ‘doing CA’ goes beyond using conversational data or employing CA terminology; it requires working out an in-depth analytic account of the target inquiry by closely following the CA procedures and its theoretical premises.

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Abbreviations

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

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