



Indexing epistemic authority/primacy in Mandarin conversation: *aiyou*-prefacing as an interactional resource

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on 35 hours of spontaneous conversations collected in China, this study aims to contribute to the ongoing dialogue about how epistemic positions are asserted and contested in social interaction. Specifically, this article focuses on Mandarin *aiyou*-prefacing, and examines a hitherto unexplored interactional use of *aiyou*: when *aiyou* prefacing responsive actions in the context of disagreement or contestation. I show that in the context of disagreement, by prefacing a responding turn with *aiyou*, the speaker alerts the recipient to a heightened newsworthiness associated with the information that will follow, while simultaneously introducing speaker-side evidence that was previously inaccessible to the recipient. In the context in which *aiyou* prefacing a contesting counterinforming, the speaker, while not explicitly disagreeing with the recipient's prior claim, counteracts the claim by providing a more nuanced understanding of the matter at issue; in this context, *aiyou*-prefacing often figures in competitive co-informing when the party who goes second has equal or even greater knowledge about the matter under discussion. I argue that together with the constellation of features that accompany its use, the *aiyou*-preface in both contexts indexes a claim of epistemic authority and/or primacy over the matter at hand.

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1. Introduction

From how information is presented or gets to be understood on the basis of the assumed knowledge state of the interlocutor (e.g., Chafe, 1976; Li and Thompson, 1976; Labov and Fanshel, 1977; Givón, 1995; inter alia), to ways in which speakers convey the source of the knowledge in question or express their level of confidence about their knowledge regarding a state of affairs (e.g., Lyons, 1977; Chafe and Nichols, 1986; Aikhenvald, 2004; Palmer, 2001; inter alia), the relevance of the knowledge state of speakers to language use has long been recognized in the linguistics literature. Within conversation analysis (henceforth CA), until quite recently, matters of speakers' knowledge and their bearing on social interaction have not often been treated as a topic of inquiry in its own right; however, this is one area in CA which has witnessed booming scholarly interest over the past decade. Unlike the linguistics approaches, though, this growing body of CA research focuses not just on the content of what is said, but on the moment-by-moment expression and/or negotiation of the speaker's knowledge status vis-à-vis that of their interlocutor.

The present study further explores this vein of CA research and aims to contribute to the ongoing dialog about how epistemic positions are asserted and contested in social interaction. More specifically, it focuses on one Mandarin practice, *aiyou*-prefacing, and examines its interactional role in contexts in which participants in conversation orient to and manage their asymmetrical epistemic standing vis-à-vis each other.

Abbreviations: ASSC, associative (-de); ASP, aspectual marker; BA, the *ba* marker in the *ba* construction; CSC, complex stative construction; C, classifier; N, negator; NOM, nominalizer (*de*); PRT, particle; Q, question marker; 3SG, third person singular pronoun.

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Traditionally, *aiyou* has been classified under “interjections”¹ (Chao and Ren, 1968) and has been simply glossed as a strong expression of “Goodness me” (Chao and Ren, 1968: 818) or an exclamation of surprise or pain (Hu, 1987: 100). In a recent study based on videotaped naturally-occurring conversations collected in China, Wu (2016, 2018) provides an empirically grounded account of the use of *aiyou* in Mandarin conversation. Wu argues that a major function of *aiyou*-prefacing is to convey a heightened sense of unexpectedness and/or deviance the speaker perceives as involved in the matter being addressed. Such a stance display may be conveyed through a stand-alone *aiyou*, as in Excerpts (1) and (2)²:

Ex. 1 (Cao_6_12_06_14:50)²

- 1R: *wo- wo hai zhuanmen da- da le nei ge: (.)*
 I I still deliberately hit hit ASP that C
 ‘I- I deliberately went to get- get what’s-that-called (.)’
- 2R: *bu shuo- bu shi shuo shenme-*
 N say N be say what
 ‘Isn’t- isn’t (it) called what-’
- 3R: *nei ge liugan de nei ge shenme ma*
 that C flu ASSC that C what Q
 ‘the uh- flu something?’
- 4R: *hai zhuanmen da le=*
 still deliberately hit ASP
 ‘(I) deliberately went get’=
- 5M?: *=zhen=*
 needle
 =‘the shot.’=
- 6C: *=yufang zhen ha*
 prevent needle PRT
 =‘the vaccine, huh?’
- 7R: *a. <jieguo wo juede jiu shi qian ban nian*
 PRT result I feel just be front half year
 ‘Yeah. <But I feel- I mean- the first half year’
- 8R: *wo you shi duo ci ganmao=*
 I have ten more times flu
 ‘I got a cold more than ten times.’=
- 9M: *→=ai:you!*
 PRT
 =‘ai:you!’
- 10C: *a. da:zhen [hai lao ganmao.*
 PRT get:shot still often get:a:cold
 ‘What? (You) still got a cold so often [(after) the flu: shot?!’

Here, Rita (R), a woman in her early 50s, is sharing with her two old friends, Mary (M) and Carla (C), the news that she had been struck down with a cold more than ten times despite having gotten a flu vaccine. This reported health condition, treated as highly unexpected by Carla (line 10), is receipted by Mary with *aiyou*.

In Excerpt (2), a middle-aged woman, Brianna (B), is telling her friend Carla (C) about her mother’s health insurance coverage.

¹ In addition to “interjections,” *aiyou* also shares the traits of “response cries” (Goffman, 1978) and “change-of-state” tokens (e.g., Heritage, 1984; Heinemann and Koivisto, 2016; Wu and Heritage, 2017).

² Unless otherwise specified, the article uses transcription conventions from Jefferson (2004) and Wu (2004).

Ex. 2 (Cao_5_24_06_38:04)

- 1B: *ranhou yi nian ta:*
then one year 3SG
'Then per year they:.'
- 2B: *yi nian wo ma jiu gei ta sibai kuaiqian.*
one year I mom just give 3SG 400 dollar
'my mom- give her only 400 dollars per year.'
- 3 (.)
- 4B: *n[ei ge: (0.2) kanbing qian*
that C see:a:doctor money
'the [uh: (0.2) medical allowance.'
- 5C: [°(...)
- 6C: *A::=*
PRT
['WHAT::?!'=
- 7B: *=yi nian jiu sibai duo kuaiqian.*
one year just 400 more dollar
='Just a little over 400 dollars per year.'
- 8B: *ranhou zhe yi nian ba (.)*
then this one year PRT
'And then this year (.)'
- 9B: *quanbu dou shi: (.) zifei*
altogether all be self:pay
'all (her medical expenses) had to be paid: (.) out of pocket.'
- 10C:→*aiyou:*
PRT
'aiyou:.'
- 11B: *ni yao zhuyuan,*
you need hospitalize
'If you need to be hospitalized,
- 12B: *ta jiu k-keneng gei ni bao yidian qian*
3SG just maybe give you claim a:little money
'they'd pr- probably give you only a little bit of money for reimbursement.'
- 13 (0.5)
- 14B:→>*aiyou=tebie kelian*<
PRT especially miserable
>'aiyou=really miserable!'
<

Upon learning about the dreadful situation in which Brianna's mother had to pay all her medical expenses out of pocket this year, Carla utters an "aiyou" (line 10).

Alternatively, *aiyou* can be followed by additional turn components, such as assessments, reinforcing exclamations, relevant second pair-part actions, and accounts (Wu, 2016). In the previously-examined Excerpt (2), for example, Brianna's move to wrap up her story of her mother's medical predicament is done with an *aiyou*-prefaced assessment (*aiyou=tebie kelian* 'aiyou = really miserable'; line 14).

Excerpt (3) offers an instance of *aiyou*-prefacing followed by a relevant second pair-part action and by a reinforcing exclamation, respectively. This excerpt comes from a multi-party conversation among a group of friends in their mid-twenties while they are

eating Chinese hot pot. As this excerpt begins, Michael (MH), who is hosting this hot pot lunch with his wife, Wendy, has just peeled a cooked shrimp and, out of the blue, proceeds to put the peeled shrimp in another co-participant Heather's (H) bowl.

Ex. 3 (HR_01_27_09_tape1: 36:17)

1MH: (serves Heather a shrimp that he has just peeled.)

2H:→ > \uparrow *aiyou*= \uparrow *aiyou*. (0.2) *xiexie ge. xiexie ge.*<
 PRT PRT thank brother thank brother
 > \uparrow *aiyou*= \uparrow *aiyou*. (0.2) Thanks, bro. Thanks, bro.'<

3H: (..) *ziji lai, ziji lai*
 oneself come oneself come
 '(..) (I'll) do it myself. [(I'll) do it myself.]'

4G: *[chi (ba)=chi (ba)=*
 eat PRT eat PRT
 ['Eat.=Eat.']=

5G: *ni kan Heather nei yi wan=*
 you see (name) that C bowl
 'Look at Heather's bowl.'

6G:→ =*aiyou: tian a=*
 PRT sky PRT
 = '*aiyou: Gosh!*'=

7M: *[hhhh*
 (laugh)
 ['hhhh']

8H: *[(...) dui qilai le.*
 pile up ASP
 ['(...) (it's) all overfilled.']

Apparently caught off guard by Michael's unexpected offering, Heather rushes to produce two consecutive *aiyou*'s followed by thanking (line 2) – a relevant second pair-part action – before preemptively turning down further favors (line 3). Notably, another co-participant Geoff (G), after urging Heather to take Michael's offer (*chi (ba)=chi (ba)* 'Eat = Eat'; line 4), teases Heather about her overfilled bowl of food (*ni kan Heather nei yi wan* 'Look at the bowl of Heather's'; line 5) and marks the unusual quality of this matter with an *aiyou*-prefaced exclamation (*aiyou: tian a aiyou: Gosh!*; line 6).

In this article, I examine a further, hitherto unexplored interactional use of *aiyou*: when *aiyou* prefacing responsive actions in the context of disagreement or contestation. I will show that such *aiyou*-prefaced responses consistently exhibit design features that are different from those of other disagreeing or contesting turn types in my data. I argue that together with the constellation of features that accompany its use, the *aiyou*-preface in this sequential context embodies a claim of epistemic authority or primacy on the part of the speaker.

The data for this article are drawn from a corpus of approximately 35 h of audio- and videotaped face-to-face conversations collected in Beijing and Hebei, China, during 2001–2002 and 2006–2010. 148 instances of *aiyou* were identified and compiled for the purposes of this study.³ All participants spoke what is considered the standard variety of spoken Mandarin, Putonghua, although they were not all from Beijing or Hebei originally. Most participants came from middle-class backgrounds, and their ages ranged from the early twenties to the late sixties. Participants in each conversation were family members, friends, and acquaintances who were recorded during activities such as lunches, dinners, visits to relatives, mahjong games, or simple get-togethers to chat.

In the remainder of this article, I will examine in detail two sequential contexts of *aiyou*-prefacing which are clearly fraught with participants' struggles for the epistemic upper hand, and will discuss the integral role *aiyou*-prefacing plays in this process. However, as this article is conversation analytic in orientation, before proceeding to a discussion of *aiyou*-preface in Mandarin, a brief overview of the development of the study of epistemics in CA is in order. Given the rapid growth of the recent literature in this area, the review will necessarily be non-exhaustive, and will focus primarily on seminal works that draw from mundane conversation, as well as studies that are most pertinent to the current project.

³ Although other expressions, such as *aiyouwei* or *aiyouhe*, appear to share some interactional functions performed by *aiyou*, I'll focus mainly on *aiyou* and its apparent phonetic variants *ouyou* and *eiyou* in this article.

2. Epistemics in CA

Early seminal CA works on the management of knowledge and information – or what is now referred to as “epistemics” – commonly addressed the topic under the rubric of recipient design (cf. Schegloff, 2010), viz. “a multitude of respects in which the talk by a party in a conversation is constructed or designed in ways which display an orientation and sensitivity to the particular other(s) who are the co-participants” (Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson, 1974: 727). At the heart of this CA literature is a broad concern with the relationship between epistemic access and action or turn formats.

For instance, Sacks (1974, 1995) highlights the effect of a recipient's access on the contingency of storytelling in conversation, noting that the speaker's decision to move forward with a telling (or not) normally hinges on its “supposed supposable unknownness to recipients” (1974: 341). This issue is subsequently taken up in a number of studies which show that action formats such as pre-announcements (e.g., “Didju hear the terrible news?” Terasaki, 2004 (1976)) and story prefaces (e.g., “Did I tell you (about) X?” Jefferson, 1978) are designed precisely for establishing recipient access in advance of a telling. Along the same line, in his now classic paper, Goodwin (1979) focuses on the unfolding of a single utterance and demonstrates how the speaker adeptly modifies his utterance-in-progress as he shifts attention from one recipient to another with a different knowledge state. And in a series of studies, Pomerantz (1980, 1984a, 1984b) develops Sacks' (1975, 1984) proposal of distinct knowledge types, and distinguishes between different dimensions of epistemic access – equivalent versus non-equivalent access on the one hand (Pomerantz, 1984a), and “Type 1 knowables” (i.e., firsthand access or direct experience) versus “Type 2 knowables” (i.e., derivative access or hearsay) on the other (Pomerantz, 1980: 187, 1984b). She shows that when someone initiates a telling about some event based on his or her limited, derivative Type 2 knowledge, it can be heard as probing for more information about this event from someone with Type 1, firsthand access (Pomerantz, 1980). She further observes how speakers, when challenged, may push back with different epistemic forces through different ways in which they draw on their bases of knowledge (Pomerantz, 1984b).

Although issues of epistemics were clearly implicated in these early CA studies, epistemics *per se* was not the central question pursued in this literature. It was not until the turn of the 21st century that “epistemics” officially entered CA's technical vocabulary and started to emerge as a primary domain of inquiry.

In their influential pioneering works, Heritage and Raymond (2005) and Raymond and Heritage (2006) discuss issues related to epistemics which had remained until then largely unexplored from CA's perspective – issues such as “the distribution of rights and responsibilities regarding what participants can accountably know, how they know it, whether they have rights to describe it, and in what terms is directly implicated in organized practices of speaking” (2005: 16). Concentrating on sequences in which participants offer evaluative assessments, their papers explore “the terms of agreement” (2005: 17) and “epistemics of social relations” (2006: 681) respectively by examining how participants manipulate the design of their assessment turns in accord with sequential position and their differential rights to assess.

Along the same line, Stivers (2005) shows how confirmatory modified repeats in responsive position, employed when their use is not sequentially implicative, perform a similar function of undermining a position-based tacit claim of primacy by the prior speaker while simultaneously asserting the repeat speaker's own epistemic authority over the matter at hand. Stivers further argues that this claim of greater authority is closely tied to a claim of the primary rights to have made the assertion previously made by the prior speaker – rights which are frequently grounded in the interactional or social role of the speaker.

Subsequent research has also investigated the interplay between epistemics and conversational repair – that is, the set of practices dedicated to indicating or resolving possible trouble in speaking, hearing or understanding the talk (Schegloff et al., 1977). For example, focusing on two repeat-formatted other-initiated repair practices in Mandarin (i.e., question-intoned repeats and repeats suffixed with the final particle *a*), Wu (2004, 2006) observes that the division of labor between these two repair initiations is sensitive to the epistemic status of the speaker who initiates the repair, with the *a*-suffixed repeats commonly marking a relatively higher degree of speaker certainty about his or her knowledge or understanding of the matter at issue. Likewise, Bolden (2011, 2013) examines the distribution of epistemic rights in the process of repair resolution and shows that, even though one's local role as the producer of the trouble source ordinarily entitles one to repair his or her own talk, such rights or entitlements may be trumped by considerations such as relative experience or expertise in a specialized domain of knowledge.

These observations, and especially Heritage and Raymond's (2005) notion of epistemic authority/primacy as a situated action configured within sequentiality that can be displayed or contested, have stimulated the development of a rapidly growing body of research. The edited volume by Stivers et al. (2011), for example, brings together a collection of papers devoted to analyzing issues of knowledge asymmetries in conversation. Of particular relevance to the present study is Hayano's (2011) analysis of *yo*-marked assessments in Japanese. By showing that assessments with *yo*-marking are frequently designed in the form of an upgraded, stronger, and more specific evaluation, she argues that this design appears to be geared toward establishing the speaker's credentials and is thus congruent with *yo*-marking's proposed main function of claiming epistemic primacy.

Whereas Hayano's (2011) study focuses on spontaneous naturally occurring conversation, Mondada (2013) examines ‘category-bound’ epistemic authority/primacy in the context of guided visits. Particularly, she shows that although the organization of guided visits ordinarily presupposes a biased distribution of domain-specific knowledge and authority (i.e., the guide expected to know (K+) and the guided expected to not know (K-)), such knowledge rights and epistemic authority are not always unquestionably granted, for often they can be renegotiated and redefined through the combination of specific turn formats and the turn's sequential position.

In many of these studies, it has been interestingly revealed that the competition for the epistemic upper hand does not always occur when parties in conversation disagree, but also when they agree (e.g., Heritage, 2002; Heritage and Raymond, 2005; Stivers, 2005; Raymond and Heritage, 2006; Hayano, 2011). This phenomenon can perhaps be best explained by considering two distinct epistemic concepts proposed by Heritage (2012a, b, c, 2013): “epistemic status” and “epistemic stance.”

Drawing together Labov and Fanshel's (1977) classification of knowledge, Pomerantz's (1980) distinction between Type 1 and Type 2 knowledge, and Kamio's (1997) concept of territories of information, Heritage argues that "epistemic status" should be differentiated from "epistemic stance." According to Heritage, "epistemic status" refers to the relative positioning of parties in conversation along an "epistemic gradient" (more knowledgeable [K+] or less knowledgeable [K-]), and involves the parties' "joint recognition of their comparative access, knowledgeable, and rights relative to some domain of knowledge" (Heritage, 2012b: 376). "Epistemic stance," on the other hand, concerns the moment-by-moment expression of such relative epistemic standing, as managed through the design of turns at talk. Heritage argues that participants in conversation normally conduct themselves in a way that preserves a congruence between the epistemic stance encoded in a turn at talk and the epistemic status of the speaker relative to the topic and the recipient. However, with various interactional exigencies or contingencies, they may defy this principle by (inadvertently or willingly) appearing to be more (or less) knowledgeable or authoritative than they really are. Such incongruity does not always occur in outright disagreement. The aforementioned studies show instances in which parties, while not directly opposing what another has just said, decline to align themselves with the expectations related to their epistemic status by tooting their own horn of authority.

In the following sections, I will demonstrate how the practice of *aiyou*-prefacing a responsive action can similarly be employed as a means of resisting the terms of epistemic authority/primacy that were tacitly set by another's first action. Following the prior CA literature (e.g., Heritage and Raymond, 2005; Raymond and Heritage, 2006; Stivers et al., 2011), the terms "epistemic authority" and "epistemic primacy" will be used interchangeably in this article, and will refer to the primary or privileged access, knowledgeable, and/or rights relative to some domain of knowledge or information.

3. Indexing epistemic authority/primacy

In this section, we examine two common sequential and activity contexts of *aiyou*-prefacing: the contexts of disagreement and counterinforming. We will see that in both contexts, *aiyou*-prefaced turns or turn-constructive units offer information that the speaker takes as primarily known to him- or herself – that is, information about which the speaker perceives him- or herself to assume a more knowledgeable or authoritative K+ position relative to the recipient. Such *aiyou*-prefaced turns or turn-constructive units are typically launched in the service of problematizing a situation that has just transpired in the interaction – most commonly, what another has just said or done in a prior turn.

3.1. In the context of disagreement

An obvious context in which a declaration of K+ status may come due is when one is disagreed with or otherwise challenged. Here, as a means of rebutting, the speaker may draw on information to which he or she has *a priori* access relative to the recipient. Such epistemically speaker-advantaged information is frequently, though not invariably, prefaced by *aiyou*. A case in point is Excerpt (4), which comes immediately prior to the talk in Excerpt (1). As this excerpt begins, Mary (M) is conveying a depressing outlook on aging.

Ex. 4 (Cao_6_12_06_14:28:01)

1M: *bu de zhei bing jiu de nei bing*=
N catch this illness just catch that illness
'Will get sick with this or that.'=

2R: *=mei cuo*
N wrong
='(That's) right.'

3R: *[kending dei you bing]*=
definitely have:to have illness
['Definitely will get sick.'=

4M: *[ni shuo shi bu shi,*
you say be N be
['Don't you think so?'

5M: *na [ni shuo wo ma ne*
that you say I mom PRT
'You see [like my mom,'

6C: *[(...mei bing)*
N illness
['(...not sick.)'

- 7C: *[[youde hao- ting-*
some very quite
[[‘Some (are) very- quite-’
- 8R: *[[uh*
PRT
[[‘Yeah.’
- 9C: *ye you hao duo laotou laotaitai*
also have very many old:guy old:lady
‘There are also very many old guys, old ladies’
- 10C: *jiankang mei bing (de)*
healthy N illness NOM
‘(who) are healthy and are not sick.’
- 11 (0.2)
- 12R: *keshi yiban dou shi a=*
but generally all be PRT
‘But in general (it’s) all like that.’=
- 13R: → =*aiyou=wo xianzai (jiu) jue de=*
PRT I now just feel
=‘aiyou=now I just feel’=
- 14R: =*maobing tebie [duo*
problem especially many
=‘(I have) so many [problems.’
- 15M: *[jiu shi nianling [[da (...)*
just be age big
[‘(As you) get [[older (...)]’
- 16R: *[[tch!=*
[[‘tch!’=
- 17R: =*jintian zher bu shufu na-*
today here N comfortable that
=‘Don’t feel right here today, ther-’
- 18R: *mingtian nar bu shufu de le*
tomorrow there N comfortable NOM ASP
‘(and) don’t feel right there tomorrow.’
- 19R: (continues to talk about her recent inexplicable health problems, including her catching a cold more than ten times despite having gotten a flu shot)

Here, while Rita (R) clearly agrees with Mary's sentiment (lines 2–3), Carla (C) questions its validity by proffering counterexamples (lines 6–7, 9–10). To this, Rita launches a disagreement with Carla. In her disagreeing turns, Rita first categorically rejects Carla's counterexamples by endorsing what Mary has just said (i.e., health declines with age) as generally true (*keshi yiban dou shi a* 'but in general (it's) all like that; line 12); immediately thereafter, Rita backs up her view by offering an *aiyou*-prefaced informing of her own recent inexplicable health problems (lines 13–14, 16–19).

It can be noted first that Rita's use of an intensifier (*tebie* 'especially'; line 14) and of hyperbolic statements (lines 17–18) (cf. Pomerantz, 1986; Couper-Kuhlen and Thompson, 2005) in the report of her medical plight is compatible with the use of *aiyou*-prefacing in underscoring the matter in question as highly unexpected, deviant, and/or newsworthy (Wu, 2016).

It can be further noted, however, that this *aiyou*-prefaced information, concerned as it is with the recent deterioration in Rita's overall health, is not just highly unexpected, deviant, and/or newsworthy, but is indeed privileged knowledge primarily possessed by the speaker. Compared with Carla's earlier disagreement (lines 6–7, 9–10), in which she draws on evidence from unspecified people in general terms (e.g., *hao duo laotou laotaitai* 'very many old guys, old ladies'; line 9), Rita's *aiyou*-prefaced information about herself is arguably more epistemically credible and irrefutable. By launching the *aiyou*-prefaced rebutting, then, Rita can be seen to be invoking the asymmetry in the knowledge state of the two parties involved, displaying a claim of epistemic authority over the matter under discussion.

Excerpt (5), from a conversation between two long-term friends, offers a similar instance of *aiyou*-prefaced rebutting. At this point, the talk has turned to one of Gina's favorite TV talk shows, which her friend Carla (C) has never watched. Here, Gina has just explained to Carla that this TV show is structured as daily five-minute talks on a given topic with a recapitulation provided by the hostess during the weekend session.

Ex. 5 (Cao_6_4_06 13:05:23; C4_audio)

- 1G: *jiu ba zhe yi zhou de quan*=
then BA this one week NOM all
'Then (she'd) review the entire week's (contents)'
- 2G: *=[jiang yi bian=ranhou zai zuo yi ge zongjie*
speak one time then further do one C summary
=[*'one more time=and then give a summary.'*
- 3C: *[wu fenzhong neng jiang sha ya, ha*
five minute can speak what PRT PRT
[*'What can be covered in five minutes, huh?'*
- 4 (0.2)
- 5G: *hang*=
huh
'huh?'
- 6C: *=wu fenzhong neng jiang shenme ne*
five minute can speak what PRT
=[*'What can be covered in five minutes?'*
- 7G:→ *aiyou=jiang de hai- ting shenke de*=
PRT speak CSC still pretty deep NOM
[*'aiyou=(the show) has gone- into quite some depth.'*=
- 8C: *=[shi ma*
be Q
=[*'Has it?'*
- 9G: *=[jiang wenhua de wuqu*
speak culture ASSC misunderstanding
=[*'(It has) talked about the myths about culture.'*
- 10G: *jiang le san ge- gu wenhua de wuqu*
speak ASP three C ancient culture ASSC misunderstanding
[*'Has talked about three- myths about ancient culture.'*
- 11G: (continues to enumerate topics talked about in the show)

In lines 3 and 6, Carla launches a tacit criticism, questioning the depth such five-minute talks can probe into. In response, Gina produces the *aiyou*-preface, whereupon she rushes to refute Carla's implied assumption (line 7), followed by a detailed telling of the subject matters covered in the talk show (lines 9–11). Here again, the *aiyou*-preface precedes and introduces a piece of information that is not merely *newsworthy* (in view of the range and depth of the topics covered in these otherwise 'unremarkable' five-minute talks); given that this information was also previously accessible to the speaker but *inaccessible* to the recipient, the information is indeed *news* to the recipient as well. Considering this pre-existing asymmetry of knowledge between these two individuals, Carla's challenge-implicated queries (lines 3 and 6) are hearable as treading into Gina's domain, and the prefacing by *aiyou* can be understood as a means of embodying Gina's orientation to her epistemic primacy with respect to the matter at hand.

In the examples considered thus far, the *aiyou*-preface is deployed as part of a turn or turn-constructional unit to rebut a challenge already launched by the recipient. However, *aiyou*-prefaced turns or turn-constructional units can also serve to initiate disagreement. Consider Excerpt (6), from a recording of an extended family lunch. Prior to this excerpt, Helen's aunt (A) was pouring wine for several lunch guests, and some diners were urging people to drink more while others were begging off. In lines 1–2, apparently puzzled by the alcohol content of the wine, Helen's aunt initiates an inquiry while reaching over to grab the wine bottle:

Ex. 6 (HR_01_25_09_tape2 00:34:47)

1 [(^a to ^b A reaching over to grab the wine bottle)]

2A: ^a *zhe daodi duoshao du (a)*
this to:the:bottom how:many degree PRT
'What on earth is the alcohol level of this?'

3 (.)

4A: *shuo ban tian*
say half day
'(Now we've) talked (about this) for so long.'

5H: [*san*: *wu*:^b]
three five
['35%.'

6 [(^c to ^d A checking the bottle)]

7 ^c (0.3)

8A: [*zhen (shi) sanshiwu ya*
really be thirty-five PRT
['35% for real?'

9UW: [*kan- (.) kan zheyang jiu bu gao*. =
look look this:way just N high
['This just doesn't seem- (.) seem strong. '=

10UW: =*ni kan ni*:: (to husband)
you look you
='Look at you::'

11UW: *ni jiu [mei he yiyang]*^d
you just N drink same
'You look as if [(you) didn't drink any.'

12 [(^e to ^f A turning and presenting the bottle to the group)]

13A: → [^e < *aiyou* ↓ >
PRT
[< *aiyou* ↓ >]

14 (0.2)

15A: *dou shenme bu gao a*^f
all what N high PRT
'What (do you mean by) "not strong"?!'

- 16 (.)
- 17A: *wu: san ne. hhhhh*
 five three PRT (laugh)
 'It's 53%! hhhh'
- 18 (participants laugh)

After Helen offers a candidate answer to the inquiry about the wine's alcohol level (*san: wu: '35%'*; line 5), her uncle's wife (UW) chimes in, claiming that this must be a low-alcohol wine, given that her husband is showing hardly any physical effect (lines 9–11). To this claim, Helen's auntie launches an *aiyou*-prefaced disagreement in which she follows the *aiyou*-preface with a challenge (*dou shenme bu gao a 'what* (do you mean by) "not strong"?!'; line 15) before providing the correct answer to the puzzle (*wu: san ne 'it's 53%'*; line 17).

Here, a wine with 53% alcohol content is recognizably anything but ordinary, and Helen's auntie's moves to stress and stretch the key syllables in the information (*wu: san '53'*; line 17) and her use of the *aiyou*-preface appear to embody just this stance. As with the other excerpts examined in this section, though, the information in question is not only news-worthy but again asymmetrically distributed in terms of epistemic primacy: In contrast to the recipient, who uses her husband's lack of observable physical reaction as the basis for giving the assessment of the alcohol strength, the *aiyou* speaker provides an exact and accurate answer based on her immediate, direct and sole access to the information acknowledged on the wine bottle (lines 6 and 12). Once again, the *aiyou*-preface appears to figure centrally in the process of epistemic competition as the speaker undertakes to assert the more knowledgeable/authoritative K+ status vis-à-vis the interlocutor.

Before proceeding further, it may be worthwhile to register that although *aiyou*-prefaced turns or turn-constructional units commonly occur in the context of disagreement, disagreeing turns in Mandarin conversation need not be prefaced by *aiyou*, as a return to the previously-examined Excerpt (4) about health issues and Excerpt (5) about a TV talk show illustrates. In the partially reproduced excerpts below, our focus will be on Carla's disagreement with Mary and Rita in lines 7 and 9–10 in Excerpt (4), and her disagreement-implicated queries with Gina in lines 3 and 6 in (5), respectively.⁴

Ex. 4 (Cao_6_12_06_14:28:01)

- 1M: *bu de zhei bing jiu de nei bing=*
 N catch this illness just catch that illness
 'Will get sick with this or that.'=
- 2R: *=mei cuo*
 N wrong
 ='(That's) right.'
- 3R: *[kending dei you bing=*
 definitely have:to have illness
 ['Definitely will get sick.'=
- 4M: *[ni shuo shi bu shi,*
 you say be N be
 ['Don't you think so?'
- 5M: *na [ni shuo wo ma ne*
 that you say I mom PRT
 'You see [like my mom.'

⁴ For highlighting purposes, these lines (i.e., disagreements without *aiyou*-prefacing) are framed in boxes in the transcript excerpts.

6C: [(...mei bing)
 N illness
 [‘(...not sick.)’]

7C: [[youde hao- ting-
 some very quite
 [[‘Some (are) very- quite-’]

8R: [[uh
 PRT
 [[‘Yeah.’]

9C: ye you hao duo laotou laotaitai
 also have very many old: guy old: lady
 ‘There are also very many old guys, old ladies’

10C: jiankang mei bing (de)
 healthy N illness NOM
 ‘(who) are healthy and are not sick.’

Ex. 5 (Cao_6_4_06 13:05:23; C4_audio)

1G: jiu ba zhe yi zhou de quan=
 then BA this one week NOM all
 ‘Then (she’d) review the entire week’s (contents)’

2G: =[[jiang yi bian=ranhou zai zuo yi ge zongjie
 speak one time then further do one C summary
 =‘one more time=and then give a summary.’

3C: [wu fenzhong neng jiang sha ya, ha
 five minute can speak what PRT PRT
 [‘What can be covered in five minutes, huh?’]

4 (0.2)

5G: hang=
 huh
 ‘huh?’=

6C: =wu fenzhong neng jiang shenme ne
 five minute can speak what PRT
 =‘What can be covered in five minutes?’

Here, we see that neither Carla’s rebuttal to Mary and Rita about the general deterioration of human health with age nor her challenge-implicated queries about the TV talk show under discussion are prefaced by *aiyou*. Notably, in contrast to the co-participants’ subsequent rebuttals discussed earlier (i.e., Rita’s invoking her own health condition, lines 13–14 and lines 17–19 in (4), and Gina’s furnishing the specifics about the talk show, line 7 and lines 9–11 in (5)), these disagreeing turns without *aiyou*-prefacing are grounded not on information primarily known to the speaker, but rather on unsubstantiated claims or common knowledge.

A similar instance is shown below in Excerpt (7). Here, a couple is visiting their cousin (C). As this excerpt begins, the husband (H) is trying to console his wife (CC), who has just complained bitterly about her stepmom.

Ex. 7 (Cao_6_3_06_video 12:06:00)

1H: *bie gen ta jijiao.*
N with 3SG fuss
'Don't deal with her.'

2H: *ni fan ta ganma ya= [(...)*
you bother 3SG why PRT
'Why do you bother with her?=[(...)]'

3CC: [(...)]

4C: [(...)] =

5C : =*shenjing you maobing.*=
nerves have illness
'=(She's) emotionally sick.'

6CC: =*wo jiu juede ta shenjing you maobing.*=
I just feel 3SG nerves have illness
'=I do think she is emotionally sick.'

7CC: =*[Chunjie-*
Chinese:New:Year
'=[On the Chinese New Year's Day-'

8H: =*[bu shi- bu shi. ta bu: shi you maobing.*
N be N be 3SG N be have illness
'=[No- No. She is not: sick.'

9H: *jiu shi yi zhong benneng de fa[xie.*
just be one kind instinct ASSC outlet
'(It)'s just one form of emotional re[lease.'

10CC: [*ta jiu shi zhe yang*
3SG just be this way
'[She's just like that.'

In response to the wife's and the cousin's remarks on the stepmom's behavior (i.e., that she is emotionally sick; lines 5–6), the husband straightforwardly disagrees, re-characterizing the stepmom as simply acting out an involuntary coping mechanism (lines 8–9). Once again, the disagreement, based on unfounded claims, is not prefaced by *aiyou*.

A careful comparison of the disagreements with and without an *aiyou*-preface reveals some distinctive functions and features exhibited by *aiyou*-prefacing. Specifically:

Mandarin speakers do not ordinarily *aiyou*-preface a plain assertion of disagreement.

In contrast to disagreements without *aiyou*-prefacing, disagreeing turns or turn-constructional units prefaced by *aiyou* normally contain information with a dual feature: First, consistent with the use of *aiyou* as marking a heightened sense of unexpectedness and/or deviance (Wu, 2016), the information that follows *aiyou*-prefacing is ordinarily taken by the speaker as particularly newsworthy to the recipient. Secondly, the information prefaced by *aiyou* also involves some state of affairs to which the speaker has primary and/or privileged access; that is to say, it involves speaker-advantaged information.

Whereas the information prefaced by *aiyou* is not always asymmetrically tilted toward the speaker's "epistemic domain" (Stivers and Rossano, 2010), this seems to be characteristic of *aiyou*-prefaced disagreements. In this context, speaker-privileged information is proffered as evidence to counter the interlocutor's contrasting views or displayed misalignment.

These combined features suggest that although *aiyou*-prefacing, in and of itself, does not serve to index epistemic authority and/or primacy, its use in the context of disagreement appears to indicate just that. In this sequential context, by initiating a responding turn or turn-constructional unit with *aiyou*-prefacing, the speaker alerts the recipient to a heightened newsworthiness associated with the information that will follow, while simultaneously introducing speaker-side evidence

that was previously inaccessible to the recipient. In this way, *aiyou*-prefacing contributes a sense of a superior epistemic positioning of the speaker, conveying a claim of epistemic authority over the matter at issue.

As a resource for declaring more knowledgeable or authoritative K+ status relative to the recipient, *aiyou*-prefacing frequently occurs in contexts which are primarily occupied with epistemic incongruity (or knowledge discrepancies) (cf. Heritage, 2002; Wu, 2004; Heritage and Raymond, 2005; Hayano, 2011; Stivers et al., 2011; Mondada, 2013). Such contexts include not only disagreement sequences, but sequences in which participants do not disagree with each other but talk competitively nonetheless. We will turn next to this latter context, the context of counterinforming.

3.2. In the context of counterinforming

With its frequent use in conveying epistemic authority, it is no surprise that *aiyou*-prefacing can occur as part of a process of competitive counterinforming (e.g., Heritage, 2002; Wu, 2004, 2006, 2012; Mondada, 2013). In this sequential context, the *aiyou*-preface is deployed when the speaker, while not disagreeing with the recipient's prior claim, counteracts the claim by providing a more nuanced understanding of the matter at issue. Excerpt (8) offers a case in point. In this excerpt, Carla's cousin (CC) is talking about a prior visit she and her husband (H) had had with Carla's stepmother.

Ex. 8 (Cao_6_3_06_video 13:25)

- 1H: wo (q- neici-) jiu neici lai dehua=
I that:time that:is that:time come if
'I (I- last time-) I mean when I came last time,'=
- 2H: =jiu shi ni ma zai zher (...women liang...)
just be you mom at here we two
'=I mean (when) your mom lived here (..we two..)'
- 3H: wo (... [...])
I
'I (... [...])'
- 4CC: [wo ye-
I also
['I also-']
- 5CC: wo- kan wan ta=wo jiu yugan=
I see finish 3SG I then have:a:premonition
'After I- saw her=I got the feeling that'=
- 6CC: =ta nei ge ren ye bu shi sheng you °de deng°.
3SG that C person also N be save oil NOM lamp
'=she, too, was a real °piece of work.°'
- 7CC: neng ganjue de °chulai°=
can feel CSC out
'(You) could feel °that.°'=
- 8C:→ =ai ↑you=ta genben- ta y- nei shenme jiu-
PRT 3SG at:all 3SG that what just
'=ai ↑you=she's not at all- she al- what's-that-'
- 9C: wo ba te daomei.=wo gen ta- ta-
I dad especially unlucky I with 3SG 3SG
'My poor dad=I and she- she-'
- 10C: dang zhe women mianr, °ta bu gan°
in:front:of ASP we face 3SG N dare
'In front of us, she °didn't dare.°'

11C: *dan wo ba te daomei*
 but I dad especially unlucky
 ‘But my poor dad,’

12C: (continues about her stepmom’s temper tantrums)

In lines 5–7, CC proffers an assessment of Carla’s stepmother based on this visit, describing her impression of Carla’s stepmother as “*bu shi sheng you de deng*,” namely, someone particularly difficult to deal with. In response, Carla launches an *aiyou*-prefaced turn (lines 8–12). Here, after some initial difficulties in framing the story, Carla details how her (Parkinson’s-stricken) father falls victim to her stepmother’s emotional outbursts.

It can be noted that CC’s assessment is couched in impressionistic terms (e.g., *yugan* ‘have a premonition’ in line 5 and *ganjue* ‘feel’ in line 7), which clearly reflect her rather limited knowledge, and the lack of evidence, of the details in this matter. In contrast, Carla’s *aiyou*-prefaced telling is not only formulated with relatively extreme language (e.g., *genben* ‘(not) in the slightest’ in line 8; *te* ‘especially’ in lines 9, 11), but also offers a firsthand account recalling detailed specific events that are lacking in CC’s impressionistic view of Carla’s stepmother.

In this excerpt, then, it can be argued that the less knowledgeable K- party (CC) initiates a telling about something that the *aiyou* speaker (Carla) has primary access to – that is to say, the K- party is hearably overstepping the bounds of the *aiyou* speaker’s epistemic domain. Here, Carla’s *aiyou*-preface, though not part of a straightforward disagreement, can be understood as in line with the *aiyou* cases we’ve seen in Section 3.1 in its interactional function of embodying a declaration of epistemic authority or priority over the matter in question.

A special feature of *aiyou*-prefacing in the context of counterinforming, as illustrated in Excerpt (8), is its systematic deployment by a more knowledgeable K+ party when this person is ‘going second’ in the discussion of a matter primarily known to him or her. In conversation analytic research, it has been established that going first and going second in offering an assertion or assessment can have interactional significance (e.g., Heritage, 2002; Heritage and Raymond, 2005; Stivers, 2005; Raymond and Heritage, 2006; inter alia). This is due in large part to an implied claim of epistemic primacy inherent in the initial sequential position; that is, by offering a first assessment or assertion, the speaker can be understood to claim superior access, expertise, authority, and/or rights to talk about or comment on the matter in question. However, such sequentially-based tacit claims of primacy can be contested. Heritage (2002), for instance, shows that a speaker may *oh*-preface an assessment in second position as a way to convey the independence of his or her assessment from the first speaker’s. Likewise, Heritage and Raymond (2005) show that a tag question or negative interrogative in second position can be used as a practice to combat a first position claim of epistemic primacy.

Whereas CA’s findings about the intersection between sequential positioning and differential rights to assess or assert have been based primarily on English materials, there is some evidence, in my data at least, that similar phenomena exhibit in Mandarin as well.⁵ Returning to Excerpt (8), for example, we see that the *aiyou* preface occurs in a sequential context in which there is an apparent incongruity of the parties’ knowledge relative to each other and a position-based implied claim of epistemic primacy over the matter. Specifically, by taking the initiative in offering an assessment of Carla’s stepmother, CC is vulnerable to the hearing that she is asserting epistemic authority over a matter to which Carla is supposed to have superior access – a move which is arguably countered by Carla’s *aiyou*-prefacing her second-position reporting as a way to reclaim her epistemic authority and priority.

A similar use of *aiyou*-prefacing is the following. This excerpt comes from a conversation among four old high school friends, most of whom are in their mid to late 50s and have retired. At this point, the participants are talking about organizing travel tours with some of their other retired classmates.

Ex. 9 (Cao_6_26_06_38:16)

1M: *(hai) jingji tiaojian zenmeyang*
 also economy condition how
 ‘Also, how’s (everyone’s) economic status?’

2M: *neng bu neng yizhi le*
 can N can in:sync ASP
 ‘Can (everyone’s needs) be in sync?’

3M: *dou dei kaolü zhouquan*
 all have:to consider thoroughly
 ‘All (these) require thorough consideration.’

⁵ Needless to say, more work is needed to provide a more complete picture of the relationship between epistemic priority, turn design, and sequential positioning in Mandarin.

- 4H: *mm*
PRT
'uh huh.'
- 5M: (clear throat)
- 6H: *na yao baoming bei*
then need register PRT
'So (we) should register, huh?'
- 7M: *dui dui dui*
right right right
'Right. Right. Right.'
- 8H: *shi ba*
be PRT
'Right?'
- 9M: *dui*
right
'Right.'
- 10H: *mm°*
PRT
°'Yeah.'°
- 11 (0.2)
- 12M: *ranhou Jinjin ta airen ne*
then (name) 3SG lover PRT
'And then Jinjin's husband,'
- 13M: *shenti you bu hao=*
body also N good
'(his) health is not good.'=
- 14M: *=ta xianzai bu neng zutuan le=*
3SG now N can organize:tours ASP
'=She can no longer organize tours now.'=
- 15H: →=*aiyou, ta shuo ya,*
PRT 3SG say PRT
'=↑aiyou, she said,'
- 16M: *en*
PRT
'uh huh,'
- 17H: *ta airen- (0.2)*
3SG lover
'her husband- (0.2)'
- 18H: *genben jiu bu rang ta zou=*
fundamentally just N let 3SG leave
'didn't let her go at all.'=
- 19H: *=gengnian[qi le,* *[[(jianzhi shi)*
menopause ASP really be
'=Menopau[se.' *[['(Almost like.)'*

- 20M: *[en*
PRT
[‘Yeah.’]
- 21C: *[[en:*
PRT
[[‘Yeah:.’]
- 22H: *nei ge- jiu shi shuo:*
that C just be say
‘That is- I mean.’
- 23M: *[hehh*
(laugh)
[‘hehh’]
- 24H: *[nei ge-*
that C
[‘That is-’]
- 25H: *ta f- ta- (.) muqin yuanlai dou zhaogu de [ha*
3SG 3SG mom originally all care:for ASSC PRT
‘His f- his- (.) mother used to care for him, [right?’]
- 26M: *[en en*
PRT PRT
[‘uh huh.’]
- 27H: *(wan le) muqin- q- qushi le yihou ne*
End ASP mom pass ASP after PRT
‘(And then) after (his) mom p- passed,’
- 28 (0.3)
- 29H: *ta airen cheng zhe zhong^o* (smile voice)
3SG lover become this kind
^o‘her husband became like that.’^o
- 30C: *a:.*
PRT
‘Oh:.’
- 31H: *jiu- jiu dei zai shen bianr*
just just have:to at body side
‘Just- just gotta stay by (his) side.’
- 32C: *aiyou. [zhende a hh*
PRT really PRT (laugh)
‘aiyou. [Really! hhh’]
- 33H: *[a.*
PRT
[‘Yeah.’]
- 34H: *ni shi tian ban yue zou mei keneng*
you ten day half month leave N possible
‘For you to leave for 10 days or a half month, no way.’

- 35C: a:.
PRT
'Yeah:.'
- 36H: hmhh=
(laugh)
'hmhh'='
- 37C: =hehe=aiyou
(laugh) PRT
='hehe=aiyou'
- 38H: [houlai (jiu)
later then
['(And) later'
- 39L: [(haoxiang) cheng le yi da erzi le
Seem become ASP one big son ASP
['(Seems to) have become a big son.'

As the discussion about possible logistical issues concerning organizing such tours has come to completion (lines 1–10), Michelle (M) gives an update on an old classmate of theirs (Jinjin) (lines 12–14). To this, Hanna (H) immediately launches an *aiyou*-prefaced turn (with *aiyou* in a higher pitch and slightly stressed ('↑*aiyou*'; line 15) wherein she furnishes a further report on the matter.

Here, Michelle cites the poor health of Jinjin's husband as the reason for her inability to take on the task of organizing tours. While not explicitly rejecting the validity of Michelle's informing, Hanna offers a revised understanding of the matter in question, revealing that the true reason behind Michelle calling it quits is her husband's over-reliance on her (lines 17–19, 22, 24–25, 27, 29, 31, 34).

If we compare Michelle's informing with Hanna's *aiyou*-prefaced report, we can notice a clear asymmetry of their knowledge about the matter at issue. This asymmetry is not only reflected in the factuality and specificity of their accounts, but is also indexed in their claimed access (or a lack thereof) to the matter being reported. In contrast to Michelle, who makes no explicit reference to her source (lines 12–14), Hanna claims privileged access to the matter by attributing what she is reporting to Jinjin herself (*ta shuo ya* 'she said'; line 15) and does so at the beginning of her report.

As previous CA studies have shown (e.g., [Heritage and Raymond, 2005](#); [Raymond and Heritage, 2006](#); [Clift, 2007](#); [Stivers et al., 2011](#)), conveying differential access to the matter being addressed is one way through which participants in conversation can implicitly advance a claim of epistemic authority or primacy. In this excerpt, as with Excerpt (8), we see that despite her apparent more knowledgeable K+ status, the *aiyou* speaker finds herself going second in telling about some state of affairs of which the less knowledgeable K- party has proffered a less than adequate description. Here, Hanna's underscoring of her privileged access, just like her move to *aiyou*-preface her second position informing (line 15), are arguably ways to defeat any implication of epistemic inferiority that could be associated with such sequential positioning, as well as to embody a claim of epistemic authority and primacy concerning the matter in question.

Excerpt (10) offers another instance of *aiyou* prefacing a responsive contestation. This excerpt is taken from a conversation among four middle-aged female friends who apparently have not seen each other for a long time. Earlier in the conversation, the participants were updating each other on what they do for work. Here, Leah (L), a class advisor at a private test-prep school for students who have failed China's national college-entrance examination, is sharing her classroom experiences. The topic has turned now to how some students are already actively engaged in the hunt for a girlfriend or boyfriend just a few days after the school starts.

Ex. 10 (Cao_6_11_06_59:52)

- 1L: *renjia ZI:ji jiu- jiu- zhao shang le*=
other self just just find up ASP
'They THEMselves just- just- hooked up.'=
- 2L: *=jiu- jiu- (.) tan hao le*
just just talk good ASP
'I mean- I mean- (.) (They) have got a deal.'
- 3L: *ranhou ni yao bu rang ta zuo dao yikuai*=
then you if N let 3SG sit to together
'And if you don't allow them to sit together,'=
- 4L: *=yinwei laoshi dou dei- (.)*
because teacher all have:to
'Because teachers all gotta- (.)'
- 5L: *xiwang (yao) fenkai ha*
hope want separate PRT
'want to (have them) separated, right?'
- 6L: *>yinwei bu:: shi gang shi ji sui*
because N be just ten several age
>'because are::n't (you) only in (your) teens?'
- 7L: *ganma ya*
what PRT
'What are (you) doing?!'
- 8L: *ni deng zhe kao shang daxue zai shuo bei*=
you wait ASP exam up college further say PRT
'Wait until you get into college.'=
- 9L: *=zhao- zhao shenme ji a*=
get get what rush PRT
'What are you rushing for?'
- 10M: →=(ai)you::, *xianzai*,
PRT now
'=(ai)you::, nowadays,'
- 11M: *[na TAI:: pubian le*=
that too common ASP
['that is TOO:: common.'=

- 12L: *[daxue biye (zai shuo...) wan le yihou=*
college graduate further say finish ASP after
[‘(Wait) until after you graduate from college (...). And then’=
- 13L: =*quan zuo zai yi[kuai*
all sit at together
=‘(they) all sit to[gether.’
- 14M: *[chuzhong::*
middle:school
[‘(In) middle schools::’
- 15M: *xiaoxue: [jiu kaishi le*
primary:school just begin ASP
‘elementary schools;, [(it) has (all) started.’
- 16L: *[jiu wang yikuai zuo=*
just toward together sit
[‘Just sit together.’=
- 17L: =*ni xiang bu rang ta zuo yikuai nar xing a*
you want N let 3SG sit together where work PRT
=‘How can you possibly not let them sit together?’

In the midst of describing these students' obsession with finding love and their insistence on sitting next to each other in class, Leah suddenly shifts “footing”⁶ (Goffman, 1981) by ostensibly addressing the (non-present) students and rebuking them for seeking romantic relationships at a premature age (lines 6–9). As this rebuke comes to a possible completion point,⁷ Melissa⁸ (M), a journalist working for a state-owned news agency, rushes to launch an *aiyou*-prefaced turn (line 10), latching it onto Leah's just-finished utterances.

Here, as with the other examples in Section 3.2, the *aiyou* speaker, while not explicitly rejecting the validity of what the prior speaker has just said, offers some information which can nonetheless put the prior telling in a problematic light. Specifically, in and through her complaint about the students' pursuit of love in the fast lane at the mere age of 18, Leah appears to treat this situation as unusual and remarkable. In contrast, however, Melissa's *aiyou*-prefaced responsive informing appears to do just the opposite: By asserting that teen romance is “too common” nowadays (lines 10–11) and can start as early as middle school and even elementary school (lines 14–15), Melissa implicitly marks the matter reported by Leah as expected and unremarkable, thereby diminishing its newsworthiness.

Of particular interest in this excerpt are the ways in which Melissa works to assert her epistemic authority. Whereas the information about Leah's students presupposes a biased distribution of knowledge, entitling Leah to a more knowledgeable and authoritative K+ position relative to the recipient, by broadening the topic to have the discussion predicated on teen romance in general, Melissa not only creates a level playing field but indeed offers a countervailing argument which can problematize Leah's position.

⁶ This shift of footing is indexed in the acceleration of the pace at which these utterances are delivered (indicated by “>” in line 6), as well as in a sudden shift of the intended addressees to the students (*ni deng zhe kao shang daxue zai shuo bei* ‘Wait until you get into college’; line 8).

⁷ Despite the fact that Leah opts to continue with her story subsequently (lines 12–13, 16–17) and that some of her turns wind up being produced in overlap with Melissa's rebutting remarks (lines 11, 14–15), Leah's rebuke arguably has come to a possible completion point at line 9, where a recipient response is made relevant.

⁸ As it transpired in the earlier conversation, Melissa's mom was a highly-respected high school teacher and had received a Teacher of Distinction award.

In this excerpt, then, even though the *aiyou* speaker does not have *a priori* or primary access to the matter reported by the prior speaker, she is evidently engaged in a competition for the epistemic upper hand.⁹ Once again, *aiyou* is deployed to preface a responsive rebuttal in this process and arguably serves (as part of a package) to embody a claim of epistemic authority on the part of the speaker.

As a resource for maneuvering claims of epistemic authority and priority, *aiyou*-prefacing can be prompted by the action of somebody other than the recipient to which the *aiyou*-prefaced informing is addressed. A case in point is Excerpt (11)¹⁰ below. This excerpt is taken from a visit Winnie (W) pays to the family of a friend (who lives with his parents but is not present when the conversation is recorded). In this excerpt, Mom (M) and Dad (D) are talking about the hobbies of their son/Winnie's friend. Here, Mom's and Dad's talk quickly turns into a somewhat competitive mode when Dad enters the talk (line 3) in the midst of Mom's telling (lines 1–2) and begins to share the information about their son's special interest in Beijing Opera.¹¹

Ex. 11 (CMC_04_02 01:58)

1M: *shì: wǒ yě bù zhīdào tā zěnme xué de=*
be I also N know 3SG how learn NOM
'Yeah: I don't know how he's learned those.'

2M: *=zhīdào hǎo duō [(...)]*
know good many
'=(He) knows lots of [(...)]'

3D: *[tā: tīng guài de.=*
3SG pretty odd NOM
'[He]:s pretty strange.'

4D: *=nǐ kàn- (0.3) niánqīng de rén,*
you see young ASSC person
'=You see- (0.3) young people'

5D: *rénjiā xiànzài dōu xǐhuan tǐyù ba*
others now all like sports PRT
'today they all like sports, right?'

6 (.)

7W: *ēn:.*
PRT
'Yeah:.'

8D: *tā bù xǐhuan.*
3SG N like
'He doesn't like (sports).'

9 (0.8)

10D: *tā xǐhuan jīngjù*
3SG like Beijing:Opera
'He likes Beijing Opera.'

11 (.)

12W: *Jīng:jù=*
Beijing:Opera
'BEIJing: Opera?!'=

⁹ This competition can also be seen in the sustained overlap that ensues, in which Leah and Melissa apparently refuse to yield to each other.

¹⁰ This data fragment is from a corpus of approximately 7 h of face-to-face conversations collected in Beijing, China by Monica Turk and her assistant. My thanks to Monica for allowing me access to this data set.

¹¹ *Eiyōu* is arguably a phonetic variant of *aiyou*.

- 13D: =*[a* (...)
 PRT
 =['Yeah. (...)']
- 14W: *[houhou haha*
 (exclamation) (laugh)
 ['Wow! hahah']
- 15M: → ^a *ei:you*¹¹ = *ni kan nei:* ^b
 PRT you see that
 'ai:you=you see there::'
- 16 [(^a to ^b M raises her right hand and points to, and also gazes toward, the objects being referred to on the other side of the living room.)]
- 17M: *jingju- hao duo: yi da ben*
 Beijing:Opera good many one big C
 'Beijing Opera- a whole lot: a huge collection.'
- 18 (.)
- 19M: *zhe hai shi: (.) [(yi xiao [[bufen)*
 this still be one small part
 'This is only: (.) [(a small [[portion).'
- 20W: *[shi ma*
 be Q
 ['Is (that) right?']
- 21D: *[[xihuan=*
 like
 [['(He) likes'=
- 22M: =*HUilai jiu kan=*
 return then look
 ='(When he) COMes home, (he) then watches'=
- 23M: =*na jingj [u- daizi*
 that Beijing:Opera tape
 ='those Beijing [Opera tapes.'
- 24D: *[xi:huan::*
 like
 ['(He) likes::']
- 25D: *gudian yinyue.*
 classical music
 'classical music.'
- 26D: *[xihuan jingju.*
 like Beijing:Opera
 ['(He) likes Beijing Opera.'
- 27W: *[dui= dui=dui=gudian yinyue*
 right right right classical music
 ['Right=right=right.=Classical music.'

We can note, for instance, that as soon as Dad's report about the son's interest in Beijing Opera comes to a possible completion (line 14), Mom proceeds to offer further information and prefaces this informing by *eiyou* (line 15). However, before Mom is finished, Dad intervenes again (line 21); this time, apparently determined to have her way, Mom interdicts the start-up of Dad's talk with a sudden sharp increase in the volume of her talk (represented in the transcript by the capitalization *HUilai jiu kan*, line 22) as she is finishing up her *eiyou*-prefaced report.¹²

In this case, Mom and Dad presumably have equivalent knowledge about their son's interests as well as equal rights to share this information with a visitor. Evidently in this sequence, the two of them are involved in competitive talk,¹³ where epistemic priority clearly matters. If we focus on Mom's *eiyou*-prefaced informing (lines 15–19), we can note that Mom's elaboration about the son's passion for Beijing Opera comes after Dad's talk – that is, she is going second on a matter to which she and her husband arguably have equal access. Here, we can note that Mom appears to design her informing with a view to combating Dad's implied claim of epistemic primacy in going first on this matter about their son: Her informing, while in line with what Dad has just said, offers more finely nuanced details depicting their son's enthusiasm for Beijing opera (e.g., his enormous collections of Beijing Opera disks and scripts, lines 17, 19; and his indulgence in this hobby, lines 22–23). Here, in her *eiyou*-prefaced turn, Mom “takes advantage of” the eminently visible disks and scripts to give herself some extra ‘spur of the moment credibility’; that is, by presenting this additional visible evidence not mentioned by Dad, Mom acts as if she's the more knowledgeable party even though both have equal access to the matter at issue.¹⁴ In this way, and together with the use of *eiyou*-prefacing, Mom conveys a sense of epistemic independence and authority over her husband.

What we've seen in this section, then, is another context in which *aiyou*-prefacing embodies a claim of epistemic authority and primacy on the part of the speaker when epistemic congruity is at issue. What is in question here, though, is not a disagreement about a state of affairs previously described by another speaker, but rather about who has relatively greater knowledge and hence greater rights to talk about that matter. In other words, by invoking his or her epistemic authority and/or primacy through, in part, the use of an *aiyou* preface, the speaker is implicitly contesting an implied claim of epistemic authority inherent in another's just prior talk. As we have seen, this often happens in competitive co-informing when the party who goes second arguably has equal or even greater knowledge about the matter under discussion. In this sequential context, the *aiyou* speaker does not disagree outright with the other party, but rather provides a more nuanced understanding of the matter, with *aiyou*-prefacing deployed as a means to reclaim his or her potentially undermined epistemic authority or priority.

4. Conclusions

In this article, I've focused on a hitherto unexplored interactional use of the Mandarin *aiyou*, and examined the role it plays when *aiyou* prefaces responsive actions in the context of disagreement or contestation. I've shown that in the context of disagreement, disagreeing turns with the *aiyou*-preface generally exhibit a dual function which is lacking in disagreements without *aiyou*-prefacing: Specifically, by prefacing a responding turn with *aiyou*, the speaker alerts the recipient to a heightened newsworthiness associated with the information that will follow, while simultaneously introducing speaker-side evidence that was previously inaccessible to the recipient. In this way, *aiyou*-prefacing contributes a sense of a superior epistemic positioning of the speaker, conveying a claim of epistemic authority over the matter at hand. On the other hand, in the context of contesting counterinforming, the speaker, while not explicitly disagreeing with the recipient's prior claim, counteracts the claim by providing a more nuanced understanding of the matter at issue. In this context, *aiyou*-prefacing often figures in competitive co-informing when the party who goes second has equal or even greater knowledge about the matter under discussion. What is often at issue here has to do with an implied claim on who is “the right person” to talk about that matter. I've argued that although *aiyou*-prefacing, in and of itself, does not serve to index epistemic authority and/or primacy, its use in the context of responsive disagreement or counterinforming appears to indicate just that. Together with the constellation of features that accompany its use, the practice of *aiyou*-prefacing serves here to resist the terms of epistemic authority/primacy that were tacitly set by another's first action.

As noted at the beginning of this article, CA's recent resurgent interest in the study of epistemics has generated a rapidly growing literature investigating the management of knowledge asymmetries in social interaction. Among other things, this body of work has interestingly revealed that issues such as “the local distribution of rights and responsibilities regarding what each party can accountably know, how they know it, whether they have rights to articulate it, and in what terms” (Raymond and Heritage, 2006: 681) are not simply theoretical constructs but problems that people have to deal with in everyday social encounters. The present study joins this scholarly conversation. By looking at how the Mandarin *aiyou*-prefacing can be

¹² Before Mom is able to press her talk to completion, though, Dad restarts his abandoned competing turn (line 24) and manages to resume the line of talk he has been pursuing (lines 25–26).

¹³ A reviewer argued that rather than characterizing the talk by Mom and Dad as competitive talk, it should be characterized as “co-telling or cooperative talk,” “because they are talking to a guest, W, who clearly has a different epistemic status from them.” I beg to differ. As noted in the CA literature (e.g., Heritage, 2002; Schegloff, 2000), whether or not a stretch of co-telling involves “cooperative talk” or “competitive talk” has little to do with the presence of a third party who does not have equivalent access to the matter at issue, but rather has to do with the *conduct* of participants when they are engaged in the telling. As demonstrated in this excerpt, the participants deploy a series of features (e.g., cut-offs, sound stretches, speech volume, entry into another's turn space prematurely) that exhibit a hallmark for turn competition.

¹⁴ I am indebted to Sandra Thompson for bringing this to my attention.

employed and exploited as a means of addressing similar epistemic considerations, I hope to have extended our understanding of how resources such as initial particles can also figure in participants' efforts to "patrol and defend" (Goffman, 1971; Heritage and Raymond, 2005) their own knowledge turf in the face of an apparent epistemic incongruity between themselves and their interlocutors.

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