

# Introduction

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This special issue is devoted to research in Chinese talk-in-interaction drawing on the insights and methods of Conversation Analysis (CA). The papers in this special issue were inspired by a panel (entitled “Comparative CA: Chinese and English”) and a workshop (entitled “Doing CA in Mandarin Chinese”) on ‘Chinese CA’ for the 4th International Conference on Conversation Analysis, held at UCLA in July, 2014.

CA is an approach to the study of talk in everyday social interaction which emerged within sociology in the late 1960s and was developed by Harvey Sacks (cf. Sacks 1995a, 1995b) and his associates (most prominently Emanuel Schegloff and Gail Jefferson). Since there is now a substantial body of introductory literature to CA, to which the reader interested in further information on these issues or unfamiliar with CA may turn,<sup>1</sup> we will not attempt to provide a comprehensive overview of the field here. For our purposes, we note that CA uses detailed micro-analyses of talk in interaction as a way of understanding how participants in everyday interaction work together to bring about meaningful social encounters. CA has succeeded in uncovering the organization of talk in interaction, the mechanisms of how turns at talk are coordinated, how actions are constructed and recognized, and how these actions are coordinated with concurrent activities in sequences of interaction.

CA having arisen in the context of sociology in the US, all the early work in CA was understandably based on recordings of talk in English, and findings in the field were predicated on English data for the next decade or so. Happily, in the last twenty years or so, an expanding body of research examining interactions in languages other than English has not only provided findings which attest to recurrent features of talk-in-interaction, but also has offered an opportunity to re-examine some of these features through a comparative lens.

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1. See, e.g., Goodwin 1981, Levinson 1983, Chapter 6, Psathas 1995, Hutchby & Wooffitt 2008, ten Have 1999, Liddicoat 2007; Schegloff 2007; Heritage 2010; Sidnell 2010; and especially Sidnell & Stivers 2013 and Couper-Kuhlen & Selting to appear.

One of the earliest works to use CA to study a language other than English was the first CA work on any Chinese language, K.K. Luke's "Utterance Particles in Cantonese Conversation," published in 1990. The significance of this work can hardly be overestimated: Luke investigates Cantonese speakers' use of utterance-final particles, a resource hardly found in English, but ubiquitous in Chinese languages, and especially prominent in Cantonese interaction. This work thus not only launched CA in Chinese, but was one of the early works drawing the attention of the CA world to the fact that, for CA to be a viable approach to understanding language use in everyday encounters, it must be able to account for speakers' routine practices *in any language*.

Since then, more researchers working on Chinese interactions have joined the CA community. Most of these scholars have brought linguistics training and language-teaching experience to CA, and their work has contributed to the awareness of language diversity within this community. Landmark contributions include Zhang (1998), the first CA study of repair in Chinese, Wu (2004), which investigates the prosody, turn-taking consequences, and stance-displaying properties of the Mandarin particles *a* and *o*, and Li (2014), revealing the sequential implications of multimodality and bodily-visual conduct in Mandarin.

These four 'pioneer' CA scholars are precisely the group whose papers appear in this special issue of *Chinese Language and Discourse*, all of whom are both linguists and CA specialists, and who focus on the relationship between linguistic structure and the organization of conversation. This special issue includes five articles.

The first article, by Ruey-Juan Regina Wu, provides an in-depth introduction and a practical guide to doing CA with Chinese data, in this case Mandarin. She argues that 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, she offers the reader a glimpse of the research process in action by presenting data and findings of her own research from the last ten years and then taking the reader step-by-step through the analytic process.

The second article, also by Ruey-Juan Regina Wu, is a study of the particle *aiyou* in Mandarin conversation. Here she uses Mandarin data to illustrate a previously underinvestigated phenomenon in CA, namely, the interconnection between turn construction and the indexing of the directionality of talk. Using the paired comparison between contrasting instances and quantitative data, her article argues for the role of *aiyou* as a turn-initial particle whose prosody reveals a sensitivity to the real-time directionality of talk.

Next is Xiaoting Li's investigation of turns in Mandarin conversation which can be analyzed as incomplete syntactically, but which are oriented to by participants as interactionally complete. These syntactically incomplete turns seem to

be designed as vehicles of socially and interactionally ‘improper’ social actions. Li further observes that speakers may leave their turns syntactically incomplete with sensitivity to the recipient’s disengaging response to their ongoing talk. Her fine-grained analysis of the divergence of practices employed in this process, such as lexico-syntactic structures, prosody, and body movements underlines the importance of examining turn organization and conversational data from a multimodal perspective.

The article by Wei Zhang analyzes two strategies, reordering and parenthesizing, used as operations for self-initiated same-turn repair in Mandarin conversation. Zhang argues that these two strategies play distinct roles in organizing turn-constructional units (TCUs) in multi-unit turns, further supporting participants’ repair practices in the pursuit of intersubjectivity.

The final article, by K.K. Luke, also deals with multi-unit turns, in this case storytelling in everyday Cantonese interactions. Luke aims to bring to the study of one particularly rich Cantonese story the insights of several decades of research on stories in English interactions, and to deepen our understanding of the reflexive roles of multiple modalities, multiple participants, and multiple activities in the construction of a story.

As is typical of CA analyses, these articles contain meticulously transcribed, and sometimes lengthy, data excerpts, which require a certain amount of perseverance to go through. We strongly urge the reader to take the time to examine the data excerpts with care, and not just glance through them. Unless otherwise specified, the articles use transcription conventions from Jefferson (2004).

We are pleased to present this special issue, which brings together analytic contributions by a team of leading scholars working on CA in Chinese. We hope to stimulate future CA studies of Chinese interaction, and to demonstrate how CA can serve as a most useful theoretical and methodological approach both for uncovering the systematic organization of Chinese conversation and for offering new perspectives on both old and new issues in Chinese linguistics.

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