

Projecting Trajectories and Regulating Relations: Address Terms in Mandarin Initiating Actions

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Abstract

This study employs Conversation Analysis (CA) to explore the usage patterns and interactional functions of address terms in initiating actions in Mandarin Chinese telephone conversations. Based on naturally occurring audio recordings and transcriptions, the research focuses on the deployment of address terms at turn-initial, mid-turn, and turn-final positions, analyzing their roles in managing conversation progression, expressing stance and emotion, and regulating interpersonal relationships. The analysis reveals that at the turn-initial position, address terms are often used to project a shift in the sequence trajectory, indicating disalignment with the prior action. At the mid-turn position, address terms primarily function to intensify the speaker's affective stance and regulate the emotional tone. At the turn-final position, they are frequently used to construct specific identities and consolidate interpersonal solidarity. These findings reveal that address terms serve as complex interactional resources in Mandarin conversation. This study contributes to the interactional study of Mandarin address terms based on naturally occurring data, enriching the literature in CA and providing practical implications for cross-cultural communication and language teaching.

Keywords: address terms, conversation analysis, initiating actions, Mandarin Chinese conversation

1. Introduction

In everyday interaction, the use of address terms is a pervasive linguistic phenomenon that not only reflects social relationships and cultural norms but also plays a crucial role in the organization and management of interaction. Traditionally, address terms frequently appear in the opening and closing sequences of telephone conversations, functioning as a means of identity recognition and politeness markers. However, the sudden emergence of address terms in the middle of a telephone conversation is associated with specific sequential organizational features and interactional functions. Based on this

observation, this study aims to explore the following questions: How are address terms used in the initiating actions of Mandarin Chinese conversations, and how does such usage impact the progression of the conversation and the relationship between participants?

Conversation Analysis (CA), an empirical sociological research methodology that respects linguistic facts (Yu & Li, 2009), provides an effective tool for investigating this issue. By conducting a detailed analysis of naturally occurring data, this study focuses on initiating actions in Mandarin telephone conversations, investigating the usage patterns and interactional

functions of address terms at turn-initial, mid-turn, and turn-final positions. This research not only helps us better understand the multiple roles address terms play in Mandarin conversation but also reveals how Chinese interlocutors skillfully utilize linguistic resources to achieve their interactional goals. Furthermore, this study offers valuable insights for applied fields such as cross-cultural communication and language teaching, facilitating a better understanding and application of this important linguistic resource.

2. Literature Review

As an important linguistic form in interpersonal communication, address terms have long garnered attention from multiple disciplines, including linguistics and sociology.

The study of address terms dates back to the 1950s. Brown and Gilman's (1960) pioneering research proposed the famous T/V model, arguing that the choice of address terms reflects the dimensions of power and solidarity between speakers and hearers. Building on this, scholars have conducted extensive sociolinguistic research on address terms across different languages and cultures. For instance, Ervin-Tripp (1972) examined the rules for using address terms in English and proposed a flowchart model of address term selection. Braun (2012) emphasized the multi-dimensionality of address term systems, noting that beyond power and solidarity, the selection of address terms is also influenced by multiple factors such as gender, age, and context. In the Chinese context, the systematic study of address terms was pioneered by Chao (1956), who provided a foundational description of modern Chinese appellations. Subsequently, researchers have explored the dynamic usage of address terms across various settings. For example, Li and Li (2013) examined the selection of address terms in e-commerce transactions, demonstrating how communicators dynamically construct relational identities.

From a pragmatic perspective, the use of address terms is closely related to face theory. Brown and Levinson (1987) suggested that address terms can serve as a positive politeness strategy used to mitigate the impact of face-threatening acts. Applying this to Mandarin Chinese, Gu (1990) systematically analyzed how politeness phenomena are realized through address practices. Furthermore, scholars have identified diverse pragmatic functions of address term

conversions. Liang (2001) and Diao (2005) highlighted that shifting address terms serves as a pragmatic strategy to mark emotional changes and index interpersonal stances. Similarly, Jiang and Liu (2014) observed that in institutional mediation, adjudicators strategically alternate address forms to minimize social distance and foster a cooperative dialogue atmosphere.

With the deepening of research, scholars realized that address terms not only reflect social relations but also construct them. From a social interaction perspective, Sacks (1992) noted that address terms are a "Membership Categorization Device" (MCD). By selecting a specific address term, a speaker can categorize the recipient into a certain social member class. Recently, within the field of CA, the interactional perspective on address terms has diversified. For example, Lerner (2003) found that turn-initial address terms can be used to establish the recipient's attention. Rendle-Short (2007, 2010) revealed the role of address terms in turn organization and topic management in political interviews. Clayman (2010) found that in news interviews, address terms often appear in disaligning actions or expressive actions to emphasize the speaker's stance. Clayman (2013) also noted that address terms in responses express speaker agency. Butler et al. (2011) explored the role of turn-initial address terms in managing disalignment and disaffiliation in telephone counseling.

In summary, research on address terms has yielded fruitful results. However, limitations remain. First, most interactional studies focus on Western languages like English; systematic studies on Mandarin Chinese address terms are relatively insufficient. Second, while research has focused on address terms in responsive actions and turn-initial positions, there is a lack of systematic study on their use in mid-turn and turn-final positions within initiating actions. Through CA, this study investigates the patterns of address terms in different turn positions within initiating actions in Mandarin conversations, revealing the underlying connections between their positions and functions.

3. Research Methodology and Data Collection

CA is a sociological approach that investigates the orderly nature of social institution operations through meticulous observation of social members' talk-in-interaction (Wu & Yu, 2022). The scientific rigor of CA is reflected in several

aspects: First, CA uses naturally occurring authentic data. Second, it follows a strict analytical procedure: identifying a phenomenon, collecting instances, and inductively uncovering sequential patterns (Drew, 2008). Third, CA emphasizes understanding interactions from an *emic perspective* (Seedhouse, 2005). Finally, CA's findings are reproducible (Jacobs, 2012).

The data used in this study is drawn from the DMC (DIG Mandarin Conversations) corpus (Yu et al., 2024). Informed consent was obtained from all participants. All transcripts follow the Jefferson (2004) transcription conventions, adapted for the specific needs of Mandarin Chinese, documenting intonation, tone, pauses, and overlaps in detail to ensure the authenticity and objectivity of the research. Adopting this methodology, the present study examines the deployment of address terms across various turn positions within initiating actions in Mandarin telephone conversations, exploring the social actions they perform and their interactional functions in authentic encounters.

4. Address Terms in Mandarin Initiating Actions

4.1 Turn-Initial Position: Projecting Sequence Trajectory Shift and Disalignment

In Mandarin conversation, the use of address terms is not merely a form of politeness, but a complex interactional resource that plays a key role in conversational organization. In initiating actions, turn-initial address terms project a shift in sequence trajectory and structural disalignment with the prior action. The following two extracts demonstrate how address terms function to reset topic directions and negotiate interactional stances.

(1) [OUC-DMC-QYN_有一个急事_0000-0127]

- 01 小浅: 你你>你知道<,
 02 你知道哪个班他没有课吗? 明天:
 03 琪琪: 明天::
 04 琪琪: 嗯:, 学姐, 要不就::
 05 >因为他们考研[嘛<,
 06 小浅: [° 嗯° .
 07 琪琪: 有保研的人有小金:, 有[小孙:,
 08 小浅: [° 嗯°
 09 琪琪: 有[小李:, 然后小吴:
 10 小浅: [° 嗯°
 11 琪琪: 这些.

In Extract (1), Xiaoqian has an urgent matter and needs Qiqi's help, but Qiqi indicates she does not have time. Consequently, in lines 1-2, Xiaoqian initiates a new information-seeking sequence to find an alternative solution. In line 3, Qiqi first repeats the increment "tomorrow" ("明天") that Xiaoqian added after a structurally complete turn-constructional unit (Yu, 2021). The prosodic feature of the sound stretch indicates that this repetition displays Qiqi's thinking process rather than initiating a repair on line 2. Subsequently, in line 4, Qiqi's stretched "en:" ("嗯:") serves as a delay component, projecting the dispreferred nature of her upcoming response.

As expected, the word "how about" ("要不"), functioning as a conversational practice for making a proposal (Yu & Hao, 2020), demonstrates that Qiqi is about to abandon providing the information sought in line 2. She breaks out of the Question-Answer adjacency pair and provides a type-nonconforming response, initiating a proposal sequence herself to solve the other party's difficulty. Notably, Qiqi suddenly adds the address term "senior" ("学姐") at the beginning of this initiating action, projecting a shift in the sequence trajectory and forecasting that her response will disalign with the prior action. In line 5, Qiqi immediately provides an account for her relevant absence (i.e., most classmates are preparing for the graduate entrance exam), logically implying that even if they have no classes, they have no time to help. Thus, in lines 7-11, she offers an alternative solution by listing students who are guaranteed admission. The continuers "en" ("嗯") from Xiaoqian in lines 6, 8, and 10 demonstrate that she does not pursue the question from line 2 but aligns with Qiqi's newly set trajectory, treating the relevant absence as unproblematic and achieving mutual understanding.

(2) [OUC-DMC-DBY_系鞋带_0000-0251]

- 01 妈妈: 嗯,那个你不是要上姥姥家去嘛,
 02 (0.6)
 03 妈妈: 怎么不去呢?
 04 壮壮: (去)((0.2 杂音))
 05 (0.4)
 06 妈妈: 嗯,
 07 壮壮: 我爸说要-我爸说要教我系鞋带儿的.
 08 (0.2)
 09 妈妈: .tch 对:你不去姥姥家吗,
 10 (2.0)

- 11 壮壮: 我去姥姥家,()我爸要教我系鞋带儿.
 12 (0.4)
 13 妈妈: 啊:那就不系了呗让姥姥姥爷教你系.
 14 (.)要不我现在打电话让姥姥去接你,
 15 (2.0)
 16 壮壮: ° 好°
 17 (0.3)
 18 妈妈: 啊:?
 19 (0.7)
 20 壮壮: 好:..
 21 (0.2)
 22 妈妈: >那为什么你们不上姥姥家去啊,
 23 都九点了,上午.<
 24 (1.0)
 25 壮壮: 妈妈,
 26 妈妈: 嗯:..
 27 (0.6)
 28 壮壮: 你现在在哪儿啊?
 29 妈妈: 我还在妇女儿童医院呢.

In Extract (2), Mom uses a rhetorical question in line 1 to inquire about Zhuangzhuang's whereabouts. The "weren't you ... right" ("不是 嘛") structure displays Mom's K+ (knowledgeable) epistemic status, as she already knows his original plan was to go to grandma's house. The 0.6-second silence projects the dispreferred nature of Zhuangzhuang's upcoming response. Therefore, Mom takes the floor again in line 3. Her turn design "why didn't you go" ("怎么不去呢") presupposes that he didn't go, carrying a blame-implicative tone. In line 4, Zhuangzhuang denies the premise of Mom's question with a positive response "go" ("去"), and subsequently provides an account in line 7 (his dad wants to teach him to tie his shoelaces). After a 0.2-second silence, possibly because Zhuangzhuang's voice in line 4 was obscured by noise, Mom seeks a second confirmation in line 9. Consequently, after a 2.0-second silence, Zhuangzhuang provides a full response in line 11 with a marked repetition, completely reiterating his account from line 7. Following a 0.4-second silence, Mom's "ah:" ("啊:") in line 13 marks a change of state, after which she immediately proposes having grandma pick him up.

After Zhuangzhuang agrees, Mom questions the reason for not going to grandma's house for the

third time in line 22. The turn-final particle "ah" ("啊") displays Mom's stance that Zhuangzhuang's response is inadequate or problematic, suggesting that his verbal expression contradicts his actual behavior and causes comprehension difficulties. Furthermore, she adds the increment "it's already nine o'clock, in the morning" ("都九点了, 上午") at the end of the turn, emphasizing the late hour and projecting blame. After a 1.0-second silence, instead of responding to the blame-implicative question, Zhuangzhuang suddenly uses the address term "Mom" ("妈妈") in line 25. This action re-establishes Mom's attention and prepares for a topic and sequence trajectory shift. Following Mom's continuer "en:" ("嗯:") in line 26, Zhuangzhuang initiates a disaligned information-seeking action in line 28 (asking where she is). Consequently, in line 29, Mom abandons her blame sequence and aligns with Zhuangzhuang's newly set trajectory, answering his question.

In summary, the deployment of turn-initial address terms in these initiating actions serves as a crucial interactional resource to project an imminent shift in sequence trajectory or disalignment. By co-occurring with other turn-design features like silences and delays, these address terms function as an attention-focusing device, explicitly marking a turning point in the interaction. Ultimately, they re-establish the recipient's attention and pave the way for a newly initiated sequence that deviates from the previously expected trajectory. Through such turn beginnings, interlocutors use linguistic resources to manage the ongoing interaction, demonstrating the complexity of sequence organization in Mandarin conversation.

4.2 Mid-Turn Position: Intensifying Affective Stance and Regulating Emotional Tone

Address terms also frequently appear in the mid-turn position during initiating actions, exhibiting a distinct interactional function compared to their turn-initial counterparts. In this position, rather than projecting trajectory shifts, address terms are primarily used to intensify the speaker's affective stance. This mid-turn deployment serves to highlight the speaker's emotional involvement, shaping the relational dynamics between interlocutors and the developmental path of the interaction.

- (3) [OUC-DMC-LXJ_乱吃保健品_0000-0430]
 01 蕾: .h 外外都不看病,就是吃保健品了,

- 02 吃的一个比一个坏,不是得了这癌,
 03 就是得了那癌,h然后她就(.)h
 04 觉得她自己得了这怪病,那怪病,然后hh
 05 ° 呃° 都给她检查啦,浑身没一点儿毛病.
 06 华: ㄟ噢::ㄟ=
 07 蕾: =° 哎° 就是一个<息肉>,她就是<那诶呀>.
 08 华: 息肉° [小毛病,问题不大° .
 09 蕾: [° 噢:我妈° 真是服啦° 哎呀 h°
 10 华: ° hehehe° [噢,
 11 蕾: [你:们就不用,° 呃° 操那心,
 12 >° 三叔° <把你们闹好就行啦.
 13 华: ㄟ放心放心ㄟ.

In Extract (3), Hua calls to inquire about Lei's mother's illness. In lines 1-5, Lei initiates a complaint sequence about her mother taking unnecessary health supplements, using detailing to legitimize her complaining action (Yu & Li, 2022). For example, lines 1-2 contrast "never sees a doctor" ("都不看病") with "just takes health supplements" ("就是吃保健品"), leading to worsening consequences. In lines 2-4, "this cancer" ("这癌"), "that cancer" ("那癌"), "this weird disease" ("这怪病"), and "that weird disease" ("那怪病") utilize extreme case formulations, emphasizing the severity of the mother's hypochondria through repetition. Conversely, in line 5, the mother's actual condition, "absolutely nothing wrong" ("浑身没一点儿毛病"), sharply contradicts the hypothetical scenarios. The lexical choice "got tested" ("检查") demonstrates that Lei's conclusion is fact-based. Since Hua is a relative, he does not join the complaint in line 6 but merely gives a smiling minimal response "oh" ("噢") to the stark contrast between imagination and reality.

In line 7, Lei clarifies the real diagnosis as a "polyp" ("息肉"), employing words like "just" ("就是"), "one" ("一个"), and incoherent expressions to downgrade the illness's severity, projecting her dissatisfaction towards her mother. When the talk touches upon the reason for the call (the mother's illness), Hua actively takes the floor in line 8, providing an affiliative response agreeing that the condition is "a minor issue" ("小毛病"). Meanwhile, Lei's overlapping talk in line 9 continues her complaint. In line 10, Hua again issues a smiling minimal response "oh" ("噢"), marking the end of the complaint sequence.

In line 11, Lei initiates a new comforting action, telling Hua's family not to worry. Here, Lei suddenly inserts the address term "Uncle" ("三叔") in the middle of her turn. Grammatically, Lei had already used "you guys" ("你们") as the subject, making the address term syntactically unnecessary. However, the insertion of "Uncle" ("三叔") significantly intensifies Lei's affective stance, reassuring Hua that her mother is fine and there is no need to worry. The kinship term closes the social distance between the two families and positively steers the sequence towards caring for Hua's family, advising them to "just take care of yourselves" ("把你们闹好就行啦"). In line 13, Hua immediately provides a preferred, repeated response "Don't worry, don't worry" ("放心放心").

(4) [OUC-DMC-LXJ_关心疱疹_0000-0152]

- 01 华: 我说一会儿° wo° ,想过-,
 02 >我说看看你害怕你<输液° 了° 是啥的,
 03 英: 啊:,不用>不用不用<,一会儿我就输液走呀,
 04 (0.2)
 05 华: 输液走呀,
 06 英: 噢.
 07 英: >不用过来不用过来<,↑ 没事儿,° .hh°
 08 华: ↑ 没事儿啊(Z 嗯:)晋英我可告诉你,
 09 别>那么那<咋的,
 10 (.)
 11 华: 哈,
 12 (.)
 13 华: ↑ 我前两天正好我们同学在这儿玩儿了,
 14 <也是>,(0.4)
 15 他都十几天了还疼:了,>不过<好多了.

In Extract (4), Hua states the reason for his call in lines 1-2: wanting to visit the sick Ying without disturbing her, which corresponds to Hua's earlier use of a pre-sequence to confirm Ying's location. In line 3, Ying's turn-initial "ah" ("啊") marks a change in epistemic state. She then immediately rejects Hua's request to visit using a cross-cutting preference structure (Schegloff, 2007) – delivering a rapid, unmitigated, and thrice-repeated preferred organization, "no need, no need, no need" ("不用不用不用"), to perform the dispreferred action of rejection. Ying then rationalizes her rejection with an objective account, "I'm going to get an IV drip soon" ("一会儿我就输液走呀"), making it difficult for Hua to pursue his request.

After a 0.2-second silence, Hua completely repeats Ying's account in line 5. Ying responds affirmatively with "oh" ("噢") in line 6, treating Hua's repetition as an information confirmation. Because Hua does not explicitly accept the rejection, Ying redoes her rejecting action in line 7 with an accelerated, repeated emphasis, "no need to come" ("不用过来"), and provides another account, "I'm fine" ("没事儿"), thoroughly eliminating the necessity of the visit. In line 8, still not explicitly accepting or declining the rejection, Hua is triggered by Ying's "I'm fine" ("没事儿") and initiates a new advising/comforting sequence. Hua first repeats "fine" ("没事儿") in a high pitch. Then, in the middle of the turn, he suddenly adds Ying's name, "Jinying" ("晋英"), seamlessly connecting it to the following turn-constructural unit (TCU) without a pause, leading to his advice against being pessimistic. The use of the address term, combined with the strong phrase "let me tell you" ("我可告诉你"), effectively grabs Ying's attention, highlights the importance of the upcoming talk, and expresses deep concern. Subsequently, in lines 13-15, Hua uses a classmate's similar experience as evidence to further comfort Ying.

In summary, the insertion of address terms at the mid-turn position operates as a specialized turn-design practice to upgrade the speaker's affective stance. Rather than serving a referential or grammatical necessity, these mid-turn insertions regulate the emotional tone of the interaction, closing the social distance between interlocutors and intensifying the emotional resonance of the ongoing action. This deployment demonstrates how interlocutors use turn-internal positioning to accomplish nuanced relational work in real time.

4.3 Turn-Final Position: Constructing Identity and Consolidating Interpersonal Relationships

Besides initial and mid-turn positions, address terms also frequently appear at the end of a turn during initiating actions. In this position, they are frequently used to construct particular identities, consolidate interpersonal solidarity, and facilitate membership categorization.

(5) [OUC-DMC-LM_帮做 PPT_0000-0109]

- 01 东: 田 j-田径队儿:的能能,
 02 ° si° 就推一次:这个行不行:?
 03 (0.5)
 04 我: h [可能想]找你帮个忙儿(.)

- 05 刘: [欧::]
 06 东: 这边[儿:].
 07 刘: [>哦]就咱班那个项目是吧.<
 08 (0.8)
 09 东: 对,我想看你如果就(.)没别的事儿就-过来,
 10 就是现在 PPT:° 我° 就想你不是((鼻子吸
 气))
 11 参加过几次嘛想让你帮忙:打磨一下.
 12 现成的东西都有,就是添添.h 加加:些东西.
 13 刘: 哦:哦:.
 14 (1.0)
 15 东: 可以不老弟?=
 16 刘: =嗯::行, 行.

In Extract (5), Dong initiates a request in lines 1-2, hoping Liu will cancel his track team activity. The "okay or not" ("行不行") structure displays a structural preference for the response "okay" ("行") (Yu & Liang, 2018). A 0.5-second silence projects the potential dispreferred nature of Liu's response. Consequently, in line 4, Dong takes the floor to provide an account for his request. The sound stretch of "I" ("我") and the in-breath delay exhibit the dispreferred organizational features of the request action, while the turn design "might want to" ("可能想") lowers his entitlement to make the request. In line 7, Liu initiates a post-first insert expansion by confirming the specific task. After a 0.8-second silence, Dong provides an affirmative response in line 9 and further details the specific request of polishing a PPT in lines 9-12. Phrases like "I want to see if you" ("我想看你"), "if you have nothing else" ("如果没别的事儿"), and "I just thought" ("我就想") display his low entitlement and high contingency for the recipient's acceptance. Furthermore, he minimizes the cost of the request by stating "we have everything ready" ("现成的东西都有") and "just adding a few things" ("就是添添加加些东西"), increasing the likelihood of acceptance.

In line 13, Liu only provides a minimal response "oh" ("哦"), marking a change of state without explicitly accepting or rejecting the request. After a 1.0-second silence without a response from Liu, Dong actively takes the floor in line 15 to pursue a definitive answer. Notably, Dong suddenly adds the address term "bro" ("老弟") at the turn-final position. This term constructs his identity as Liu's "brother", displaying their close relationship. From a sociological standpoint, this

increases the likelihood of the request being accepted. Consequently, in line 16, Liu quickly latches onto the turn and gives a preferred, repeated response “okay, okay” (“行, 行”), finally fulfilling Dong’s communicative goal.

(6) [OUC-DMC-MXX_过年问候_0000-0233]

01 勇: 哎呀.我这不行啊.今天没挣下钱.

02 刘: 哎.没赔吧.

03 勇: 嗯.没-没回本呢.现在.

04 刘: 还没回本.

05 勇: 哎东西没弄完.

06 刘: 你看.要不发发小红书啥的.

07 借着元宵节中-正月十五这一波的.

08 再往外弄一点吧.

09 勇: 我-没事.我这还有点那个啥.我试试呗.

10 刘: 对发着发-想办法.

11 正月十五之前应该.出去就行对吧.

12 勇: 对.

13 刘: 行行行.那你玩吧.不影响你挣钱了兄弟.

14 勇: 行行行没事哥.[哎

15 刘: [好来好来.

16 勇: 我等.我给你发一个那个啥-公众号.

17 不是公众号.视频号.那个视频号

18 就是做那个酒-手工的那个酒精灯.

19 刘: 哦::.没问题.行行行.你发给我吧.好来.拜拜.

In Extract (6), Yong initiates a troubles-telling sequence in line 1 by stating “didn’t make any money today” (“今天没挣下钱”). The turn-initial “aiya” (“哎呀”) projects Yong’s negative stance (Yu et al., 2020). In line 2, Liu follows up with a caring inquiry, designing the turn as “didn’t lose money, right” (“没赔吧”) to show a structural preference for “didn’t lose” (“没赔”). In line 3, Yong’s turn-initial delay “en” (“嗯”) and cut-off project the dispreferred nature of his response; “haven’t made the capital back” (“没回本呢”) indicates he did lose money. However, the turn-final temporal increment “right now” (“现在”) suggests the loss is temporary, projecting his expectation to recover the capital. In response, Liu repeats “haven’t made the capital back” (“没回本”) in line 4, adding the word “yet” (“还”) at the beginning, similarly displaying that this state will not last.

After Yong provides an account in line 5, Liu initiates a proposal in lines 6-8 using “how about” (“要不”), suggesting social media promotion. In line 9, Yong’s response “it’s fine”

(“没事”) treats Liu’s proposal as a comforting action, provides an account for being fine, and states his planned action, “I’ll give it a try” (“我试试呗”). Liu provides an affiliative response “right” (“对”) in line 10 and continues advising via a question format, where “right?” (“对吧”) displays a structural preference for an affirmative response. As expected, Yong delivers a fast, unmitigated, and unelaborated preferred response “right” (“对”) in line 12, marking the end of the advice sequence.

In line 13, Liu initiates a pre-closing sequence with “okay okay okay, then you go have fun” (“行行行, 那你玩吧”). The phrase “won’t affect you making money” (“不影响你挣钱了”) echoes Yong’s earlier troubles-telling. At the end of this turn, Liu suddenly adds the address term “brother” (“兄弟”). This not only projects the closing of the sequence but also constructs a profound brotherhood. In line 14, Yong provides an affiliative response to the closing sequence with “okay okay okay” (“行行行”), treats Liu’s “affect you making money” (“影响你挣钱”) as an apology using “it’s fine” (“没事”), and finally adds the address term “bro” (“哥”) at the turn-final position. This reciprocal use of address terms enables both parties to co-construct a harmonious social relationship. Subsequently, the conversation moves swiftly toward closing.

In summary, the use of turn-final address terms operates as a subtle interactional practice for constructing specific social identities and consolidating interpersonal relationships. Whether utilized to increase the likelihood of a request being accepted (as in Extract 5) or to mutually recognize and solidify a relationship during sequence closings (as in Extract 6), these turn-final terms are far more than simple nominal references. Within specific sequential environments, they help manage the social distance between interlocutors and steer the conversation toward the speaker’s anticipated direction. This use of address terms highlights how Mandarin speakers use address terms to negotiate identities, manage relational dynamics, and ultimately achieve complex interactional goals.

5. Conclusion

Through CA, this study systematically examines the usage patterns and interactional functions of address terms in Mandarin Chinese telephone conversations, with a specific focus on their use in initiating actions. Address terms are not

merely forms of nominal reference; they are important interactional resources for managing conversational progression, expressing affective stances, and regulating interpersonal relationships.

At the turn-initial position, address terms project a shift in the sequence trajectory, forecasting disalignment with the prior action. At the mid-turn position, they are primarily utilized to intensify the speaker's affective stance, effectively regulating the emotional tone and closing the distance between interlocutors. At the turn-final position, they are frequently associated with identity work and the consolidation of interpersonal relationships, guiding the conversation toward the speaker's expected interactional goals.

These findings contribute to the broader understanding of turn design and sequence organization in CA, highlighting the relationship between micro-linguistic choices and macro-social actions. Uncovering these nuanced interactional practices not only enriches the empirical research on Mandarin conversation but also offers valuable insights for cross-cultural communication and language pedagogy.

While this study primarily focused on telephone interactions and initiating actions, future research could explore the deployment of address terms in face-to-face encounters, where multimodal resources (e.g., gaze, body posture, gestures) operate in tandem with address terms to accomplish social actions and manage the unfolding interaction. Additionally, examining address terms within responsive actions – such as answering questions, granting or declining requests – and across various institutional settings will further unveil their complex roles in diverse social interactions.

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