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"Zhen de" (真的) at the Response Position in Mandarin Chinese: A Conversation Analytic Perspective

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Abstract

In natural conversation, "zhen de" can appear as a turn construction component before, in or after a turn, or as a single turn construction unit at the response position of a sequence. Using the research method of conversation analysis, this paper takes the video and audio data of daily conversations as the corpus to conduct an in-depth study on "zhen de", the practice that appears in the response position of the sequence. Combining with the existing corpus, we found that in the sequence environment of story telling, "zhen de" independent as turn construction unit usually performs other initiated open repair, this case "zhen de" can appear in second pair part, seeking a response and explanation. It can also appear as first pair part in non-minimal post-expansion of second pair part to challenge the authenticity of the responses of it.

Keywords: conversational analysis, "zhen de", response position, repair

1. Introduction

Lv Shuxiang (1980), from the perspective of syntax and semantics, defines "zhen de" in modern Chinese as an adjective indicating the meaning of "true, and clear" and an adverb of "really, indeed". However, in talks-in-interaction, "zhen de" can not only modify a predication as attributive, adverbial and other syntactic elements, but also appear at different positions in the sequence as a turn construction unit (TCU) or a component of TCU to implement different interactional functions and social actions. Schegloff (2007) points out that the adjacency pair, the smallest structural unit of a sequence, is composed of two adjacent turns, the first pair part (FPP) and the second pair part (SPP). The FPP is initiated by the prior speaker and occurs in the first position of the sequence, while the SPP is responded to by the next speaker and occurs in the second position. Adjacency pairs can also include pre-expansion, insert-expansion, and post-expansion, which occur before the FPP, between the FPP and the SPP, and after the SPP, respectively. Post-expansion can be further divided into minimal post-expansion, which consists of only one turn and occurs after the SPP, often referred to as the third position of the sequence, and non-minimal post-expansion, which can take various forms, such as the speaker's comment or agreement on the content

of the prior speaker's turn, or the speaker's challenge of the information contained in SPP (Sidnell, 2010). This paper focuses on the analysis of the interactional functions and social actions of the use of "zhen de" in the sequence environment of storytelling, specifically in the second position and non-minimal post-expansion.

2. Literature Review

Research on the use of "zhen de" has been ongoing in academic circles for a long time. Zhu Dexi (1982) indicates that although "zhen de" is a structure composed of the adjective "zhen" and the particle "de," it can also function as an adverbial in a sentence. Naoko Miyashita (2002) summarizes that there are two structures when "zhen de" functions as an adverbial in modern Chinese: "zhen" + structural particle "de" and "zhen" + modal particle "de." The former emphasizes the authenticity of a certain form or behavior, while the latter mainly serves to connect sentences or phrases and affirms the previous sentence or clause. Yan Hongju (2006) applies the theory of discourse marker to explain the grammatical properties of "zhen de," and concludes that its grammaticalization results in its ultimate development into a discourse marker. Fang Qingming (2012), from a synchronic perspective, studies the grammatical meanings and pragmatic functions of "zhen de," and finds that it has four different uses: differentiation word, confirming adverb, emphasizing adverb, and discourse marker. Peng Wu (2020) believes that in interactive communication, "zhen de" as a discourse marker has discourse functions such as initiating turn-taking, filling pauses, responding, and reinforcing.

The researches above show that scholars have conducted extensive studies on the usage and functions of "zhen de" in syntax, semantics, and pragmatics, from initially analyzing its components and functions from a morphological perspective to emphasizing its discourse marker function. When studying a linguistic phenomenon, paying attention to its language form is necessary. However, as "zhen de" is a complex and frequently used practices in communicative interactions, the examination of it should not only focus on formal aspects such as vocabulary, intonation, and multimodality but also consider its specific sequential context and social actions executed through its position in the sequence. Therefore,

this article takes a conversation analysis perspective to study the occurrence of "zhen de" in natural conversations, exploring the social actions implemented when it appears in the response position in story-telling sequences.

3. Data and Methods

The method of conversation analysis adopted in this article is "a qualitative, empirical, and inductive research method that focuses on social interaction. The main objective of conversation analysis is to identify, describe, and explain the ordered and repeated ways in which interactants use conversational practices to accomplish social actions" (Margutti, Tainio, Drew & Traverso, 2018: 53) (quoted from: Yu Guodong & Wu Yaxin, 2018: 7). Turn design, sequential position, and social action are the core concepts of conversation analysis. The social action enacted by a turn is determined by the current turn's design and its position in the sequence. Therefore, to investigate the social action executed by the practice of "zhen de," it is necessary to consider its sequential context and position as a TCU.

The data for this study were collected from conversations between friends under natural conditions, in the form of videos and audios, with a total duration of 233 minutes. They were transcribed using Gail Jefferson's (1984) transcription system and supplemented with Lorenza Mondada's (2018) transcription of multimodal content.

4. Analysis

Through observation of the data, it was found that in the sequence of storytelling, when "zhen de" appears as a turn-constructional unit in the response position, it can function as a response to the FPP. Furthermore, if the prior speaker's statements are contrary or unknown to the current speaker's epistemic domain (Heritage, 2012), the current speaker may express surprise with an interrogative intonation and seek explanation from the prior speaker. In addition to appearing at the SPP, "zhen de" may also occur as a challenge to the initial adjacent pair's the SPP in the non-minimal post-expansion. The current speaker perceives that the response at the SPP does not align with their expected response, resulting in a challenge.

4.1 "Zhen de" Implements Other-Initiated Repair in the SPP

[1] OUC-WHY

(In the previous sequence, Wang's mother would spank her for being naughty when she was a child)

156 Wang: ˚n˚ Ni xiao shi hou shi baba(.)<geng yan ge > hai shi mama geng [yan ge

　　　　　When you were a kid, was your dad stricter or your mom stricter?

157 Lv: [wo ba:

　　My dad

158 Lv: [wo::-ze(.)wo you hao ji nian::jiu shi ji ben shang >bu gen wo ba shuo hua<

　　　　I, I barely talked to my dad for years.

159 Wang: [ni pa?

　　　　　Your dad?

160 Wang: zhen de?

　　　　　Really?

161　　　(0.4)

162 Lv: dui::jiu shi:-(0.7)wo[cong::-

　　　　Yes, That is, I-

163 Wang: [yan-yan su d-na zhong ma?(.) bu shuo hua

　　　　　Is it the serious kind? You didn't talk to him.

164 Lv: ang::jiu shi wo cong <chu zhong::>-wo cong chu zhong::jiu-yin wei wo ba xiao-wo ba jiu shi-

　　　　Yes, When I was in Junior high school, when I was in Junior high school, it's because, my dad-

In this example, line 158 is the FPP in the adjacency pair, which performs the action of informing, and provides evidence for line 157's response "my father:": precisely because he is strict, there had been several years when Lv didn't talk to him. Line 160 is the SPP in the adjacency pair, which acts as a response. From the sequential context, before this sequence, Wang talked about when she mischievously cut sandal straps as a child, her mother would spank her bottom. Therefore, in her epistemic domain (Heritage, 2012), Wang assumes that her mother was stricter when she was young, as also evidenced in line 159. After Lv's answering "my father:" in line 157, Wang overlaps with Lv in lines 159, saying "your pa?" through repeating Lv's words to initiate repair, showing that she is surprised by Lv's response and does not understand why Lv thinks her father is stricter than her mother. By using the means of repair,

she seeks affirmation from Lv. In terms of turn design, Wang mitigated the absoluteness of her informing in line 158 by adding "basically" before stating "haven't talked to my father." Consequently, when Wang responds in line 160 by saying "zhen de" to acknowledge the truthfulness of Lv's statement, it is evident that the "zhen de" here does mean questioning the veracity of the information given in line 158. Rather, it implies that the fact that Lv has not talked to his father for years conflicts with her epistemic domain, where Lv's father was good-natured; this fact is the source of her desired repair. Therefore, in line 160, Wang initiates an open repair by saying "zhen de?" to show her surprise and indicate that she cannot understand why Lv stated like that, and seeks her clarification. As a result, Lv responds to Wang's question form of "zhen de" in line 162 by affirming it, then explains why they hadn't spoken: "her father had hit her."

[2] OUC-WHY

164 Lv: ang::jiu shi wo cong<chu zhong::>-wo cong chu zhong::jiu-yin wei wo ba xiao-wo ba: jiu shi bu hui-ni ba hui da ni ma?

　　　　Yes, When I was in Junior high school, when I was in Junior high school, it's because, my dad-does your dad beat you?

165 Wang: >bu hui<.

　　　　No

166　　　(0.5)

167 Lv: wo ba ye-(0.5)na ta jiu da guo wo yi ci:jiu you yi ci da w-da le wo yi ci(0.2)er qie hai shi da de wo lian::

　　　　My dad also-But he hit me once, he hit me once, and he hit me in the face

168　　　(0.4)

169 Wang: zhen de?

　　　　　Really?

170 Lv: dang shi shi:-yin wei ta zhen de<fei chang sheng qi> ta[jiu da wo

　　　　It was because he was really angry, and he hit me.

In this conversation, line 167 is the FPP in the adjacency pair that performs the action of telling in the story-telling sequence and line 169 is the SPP in this adjacency pair that performs a response to line 167. From a sequential perspective, prior to this sequence, at line 164, there is an inquiry initiated by Lv in the form of

yes-or-no question which also clears obstacles for her subsequent storytelling. In line 165, Wang gives a preferred response: "No." If Wang gave a dispreferred response, namely "Yes," it might be Wang telling her own tragic experience, and the trajectory of subsequent sequences would change. The 0.5 second silence in line 166 indicates that what is going to be told next is something unpleasant, and from the turn design in line 167, "also" corresponds to Wang's "No" in line 165, indicating that Lv supports Wang's response. However, she cuts off here to make a self-initiated repair and says, "He hit me once, and he hit me on the face.", thus implementing the action of trouble-telling. After a 0.4-second silence, Wang initiates a repair in line 169 with "zhen de?" The source of this repair is "He hit me once, and he hit me on the face." But because she has learned about some "bad" aspects of Lv's father in previous sequences through her detailed storytelling, Wang's repair initiation here is not to seek confirmation of its truthfulness, which is also evident from Lv's non-confirming response in line 170. Wang delays her response using silence in a dispreferred organization, indicating that she cannot understand the concept of Lv's father hitting her face, which contradicts Wang's epistemic domain where father should not hit child. She is very surprised by this and therefore seeks an explanation from Lv through an open repair. In line 170, Lv also treats this repair as a request for explanation through storytelling, explaining that her father hit her because he was "really angry."

In the two examples above, "zhen de" initiates open other-initiated repair in the SPP to address misunderstandings of the speaker's narrative in the prior turn. This use of "zhen de" differs from its literal sense of "true, genuine". As viewed through sequential analysis, the phrase "zhen de?" is not seeking confirmation of the truthfulness of the preceding content in question form, but rather is used because the prior speaker's statement contradicts what the current speaker knows about the topic in his or her epistemic domain. In addition to initiating repair, the speaker also expresses surprise and seeks clarification from the prior speaker through the use of "zhen de?".

4.2 *"Zhen de" Implements Other-Initiated Repair in the Non-Minimal Post-Expansion*

[3] OUC-WHY

170 Lv: dang shi shi:-yin wei ta zhen de <fei chang sheng qi>ta [jiu da wo

      It was because he was really angry, and he hit me

171 Wang: [ni zen me le a

      What happened to you

172   (0.2)

173 Lv: wo wang le wo zhi ji de ta>da wo le<, wo bu ji de wei shen me da wo le

      I forgot. All I remember is that he hit me. I don't remember why.

174   (0.3)

175 Wang: zhen de?

      Really?

176 Lv: wo yin xiang tai shen ke le na ci, .hhh jiu shi ta: yi qian(0.2)ta jiu:[:(0.4)cong xiao dao da jiu da guo wo=

      I was so impressed that time, he used to, he used to hit me once when I was a kid.

In this extract, line 171 is the FPP in the root adjacency pair, performing an action of inquiry. Line 173 is the SPP in this adjacency pair, performing a responding action. Line 175 is the FPP in the non-minimal post-expansion, which is a response to the SPP in the root adjacency pair. In the sequence before line 171, Lv has told that her father hit her and the reason was that he was "very angry." Based on the turn design of line 171, although it is an open-ended question and does not involve preference organization, Wang hopes to get an explanation for why Lv's father got so angry, given the partial overlap with the previous utterance and the emphasis on "how." Simply replying with "I forgot" when responding to Wang's inquiry at line 173 is not enough, so Lv adds the evidence "I only remember he hit me" to prove that she really doesn't remember the reason for the beating. Therefore, after a 0.3s silence, Wang launches a challenge to the SPP in the root adjacency pair at line 175 through other-initiated repair, indicating that the response in line 173 does not meet her expectation. Wang seeks an explanation from Lv because she was asking for an explanation for why Lv's father hit her in line 171, but Lv's response at line 173 only proves that she cannot give an explanation. In line 176, Wang's response is also treated as a challenge by Lv, so she first rejects the challenge by saying "the impression is too deep that time," placing "that time" after "the impression is too deep"

also indicates that she really doesn't have a strong memory of the specific event. Later, she tells a story to prove the truth of her memory of the beating, explaining that her father had only hit her once throughout her life, providing a detailed explanation.

[4] OUC-WHY

50 Wang: .hhh wo hao xiang<xian zai jiu hui jia>a::

   I really want to go home now:

51 Lv: wo ye shi(.) wo ye xiang

  Me too.

52 Wang: >ying gai bu hui you ren<bi wo men<geng wan [le ba>

   I don't think anyone will be later than us.

53 Lv: [you::>wo you ge tong xue shuo ta<(.)er shi duo haocai fang jia

   Yes, one of my classmates said the holiday doesn't begin until July 20.

54   (0.2)

55 Wang: zhende?

   Really?

56   (0.4)

57 Lv: en::>ta men xue xiao<mei nian dou zhe yang, ta ting xue jie shuo:(.)ta men qu nian>fang jia de shi hou dou<[la yue=

   Yes, it happens every year at her school. She heard from the senior students that they don't have a holiday until December.

In this conversation, line 52 initiates an action to seek confirmation as a FPP in the root adjacency pair, and line 53 responds as the SPP. Line 55 is the FPP in the non-minimal post-expansion and responds to the SPP in the root adjacency pair. Prior to this sequence, Wang describes her stress and difficulties during final exam review and expresses her desire to go home. Based on the turn design of line 52, Wang seeks confirmation through "wouldn't...right?", and her use of the question particle "ba" instead of "ma" indicates that Wang has more knowledge about holiday schedules and her school may have the latest break time. The use of negation shows her preference for a negative answer, indicating her negative attitude towards the possibility of someone having a later break. In response in line 53, Lv gives a dispreferred answer in preferred organization through overlapping speech, and provides additional evidence by indirectly quoting other people's narratives, demonstrating that she has more knowledge regarding break times. After a 0.2 second pause, Wang initiates an other-initiated self-repair through "zhen de", challenging the truthfulness of Lv's response and defending her own knowledge by seeking an explanation from Lv, who is expected to have more knowledge. In response to this, Lv first addresses the question form in line 57, and then maintains the truthfulness of her previous statement with the extreme expression "every year", providing additional evidence through storytelling to support her explanation.

In the above examples, "zhen de" appears in the non-minimal post-expansion of the SPP in the root adjacent pair and initiates a response action. It is worth noting that in this case, the FPP in the root adjacency pair generally implements an inquiry through an interrogative question or an open question. In non-minimal post-expansions, the current speaker initiates other-initiated repair of the SPP conducted by the previous speaker, indicating that the response is not their expected or preferred response, and challenges the truthfulness of content that contradicts their expectations.

5. Conclusion

In previous studies, "zhen de" often appears as a component of turn constructional unit in the front, middle, or end of the turns, functioning as a sequential connector to implement the action of agreeing with the prior speaker or current speaker. In this article, however, "zhen de" is identified as a turn constructional unit, occurring in response position in the form of questioning, used to initiate others' repair for communication problems. Repair is a fundamental topic in conversation analysis, dealing with problems that arise when participants encounter difficulties in listening, speaking, and understanding. According to Sidnell (2010), the repair process consists of three basic components: the trouble source (such as an unfamiliar word), the initiation of repair (a signal to start the repair process), and the resolution of repair (such as restating the unfamiliar word). Speakers or recipients who identify the trouble source can initiate or complete the repair. Thus, there are four types of repair: self-initiated self-repair, other-initiated self-repair, self-initiated other repair, and other-initiated other repair. The initiation of repair often blocks the trajectory of the sequence and marks the separation from the current

sequence. The completion of repair may lead to the resolution of the problem and subsequent continuation of the sequence or abandonment of the issue and further development of the sequence. In this study, "zhen de" is an other-initiated repair that occurs in response position, used by a recipient to initiate the repair of the current speaker's comprehension problem caused by a deviation between the prior speaker's statement or response and the current speaker's epistemic domain or expectation, which hinders the progression of the sequence. The resolution of the repair is completed by the prior speaker in the next turn to provide the information required by the initiator of the repair. As a conversational practice, "zhen de" cannot be simply understood as a literal inquiry about the truth or falsity of information from the prior turn; instead, it should be studied from the sequential context by examining its position in the sequence. In the story-telling sequence of this article, "zhen de" is used to initiate other-initiated repair in response position, and based on the analysis of prior sequence, it indicates that the current speaker expresses surprise at the deviation between the prior turn and his/her epistemic domain or expectation, thus initiating a request for clarification. The recipient's response to this request can be seen as providing evidence to defend their knowledge, showing that they perceive this exchange as seeking clarification.

Conversational practice is a means for people to implement social action in talks-in-interaction. The investigation of it should also be carried out from the perspective of conversation analysis, starting from its specific position in the sequence. Based on the research method of conversation analysis, this paper studies the conversation practice of "zhen de" from the aspects of sequential environment and turn design. It is found that in the sequential context of story telling, "zhen de" appears independently as the turn constructional unit in the response position and initiates other-initiated repair in the interrogative tone. Different from the previous literal understanding of "zhen de" of "true and exact", the speaker shows his or her surprise, so he or she seeks explanations from the other side while executing the response action.

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