K- Part's Choice of Tag Question at the End of the TCU

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Abstract

In daily conversation, there are many types of interrogative questions that can be used to confirm information. In the reporting sequence environment, it is a very dangerous behavior for K- to report to K+ or for K- to give feedback to K+. In the process of sequence development, both sides of the conversation will inevitably show their stance on the relevant events in the turn design. When K - need to make statement for the related event, from the perspective of epistemic primacy, K- Do not have the right to affirm, so K - party usually choose a tag question with optimization at the end of the turn, the purpose is that can show their own emotional tendencies and appropriately at the same time reduce the power of emotional statement. The use of such conversational conventions enables both parties to know each other's stance while maintaining harmonious social relations. This study uses the method of conversation analysis to explore the specific sequence environment of tag questions and the social effects of tag questions.

Keywords: tag question, epistemic status, at the end of the TCU, turn design, conversation analysis

1. Introduction

The process of grammaticalization of Mandarin Chinese tag questions refers to the means and methods through which pragmatic factors or semantic content related to interrogative sentences, these comparatively concrete intentions and meanings, solidify into certain grammatical functions and structures (Niu Baoyi, 2001). This is specifically manifested in the commonly accepted usage patterns in everyday communication. In modern Mandarin Chinese, tag questions generally occur in the following situations: A. Chunking: This involves the solidification of pragmatic factors such as doubt or inclination towards seeking information into a fixed structural form with established grammatical functions and meanings. In the process of grammaticalization of tag questions in Mandarin Chinese, pragmatic factors such as doubt solidify into a structure like "X 不 X?" to express a request, where the grammatical function of inquiry is determined by the form and meaning of this chunk "好不好" (hǎo bù hǎo - good or not). This form indicates the asker's inclination towards the sought information. B. Cognitive schemas: Cognitive schemas stem from the human tendency to use stable entities as topics to elicit varied, i.e., new information (Lu Bingfu, 1998). In Mandarin

Chinese, the distribution pattern of "direct statement + question" in tag questions follows the grammaticalization coding of cognitive schemas from known to unknown. The statement part, whether declarative, imperative, or exclamatory sentences, mostly consists of known information, while the questioning part, whether in the form of "X 不 X" chunks or standalone questions, typically represents unknown information. C. Independent form: This often appears as "a statement followed by an independent question." Here, "independent" means that structures like "你知道么" (nǐ zhīdào me - do you know?) or "可好" (kě hǎo - is it okay?) are not restricted by the choice of the preceding statement. It's akin to appending a complete question to the preceding statement. Besides the structural forms of tag questions in Mandarin Chinese mentioned above, in pragmatics, tag questions are often regarded as a form of politeness in language, generally more indirect, and frequently used in feminine discourse (Feng Quangong, 2015).

The achievements of previous scholars in studying tag questions are noteworthy. From a semantic perspective, the tag questions discussed in this paper belong to the second category mentioned above: cognitive schemas. That is, they use known information in conversation to elicit relatively uncertain and variable new information. Most existing research on tag questions has been conducted from a semantic perspective, with less consideration given to the real-life speech communication situations, the constituent elements of talk turn construction, and the actions and influences of sequences. Therefore, this paper employs conversation analysis as a research method, starting from the actions performed by language and the sequential environments, and conducts common sense reasoning and practical reasoning on existing data (Yu Guodong & Wu Yaxin, 2018). It focuses on studying the tag questions used at the end of talk turns by K-role speakers in the reporting sequence in real speech communication environments and the social functions they serve.

2. Research Methodology and Corpus Collection

The conversational analysis research method employed in this paper is a sociological research method established by Harvey Sacks, Emanuel Schegloff, and Gail Jefferson in the 1960s. It is a qualitative, experiential, and inductive research method focusing on social interaction. The primary objective of conversational analysis research is to identify, describe, and interpret the orderly and recurrent ways or routines that interactants use to accomplish social actions.

Since data from novels, scripts, and audiovisual works constitute non-naturalistic corpora, insufficient to reflect the objective facts of how people actually use language, this study adopts the conversational analysis research method. It utilizes authentic telephone conversations as the source of data, specifically focusing on the additional tag questions occurring at the end of K-selected turn construction units. The study aims to explore the application patterns and specific social actions performed by these tag questions in this position.

The corpus utilized in this paper is selected from 105 minutes of everyday telephone conversations involving friends, family members, colleagues, etc. All data are transcribed according to Gail Jefferson's transcription conventions (1984)

3. Knowledge Status and Knowledge Prioritization in Conversation Analysis

Background information on knowledge status in turn design plays a crucial role in the generation and recognition of social behaviors, as interactants in social interactions monitor each other's absolute and relative knowledge states and enact behaviors consistent with them. Interactants stratify the knowledge domain involved in dialogue based on different states, occupying different positions on a cognitive gradient. This divergence in positions signifies differences in knowledge status, denoted as K+ for possessing more knowledge and K- for possessing less, with varying degrees of slope. Based on the differing knowledge states of the interactants, asymmetry exists in their rights to knowledge (i.e., describing, asserting, and evaluating relevant matters). This asymmetry arising from the depth, specificity, and completeness of knowledge among interactants is termed knowledge prioritization.

Regarding knowledge prioritization, scholars have identified three social conventions: (1) New knowledge, especially "big news," is disseminated based on the proximity of relationships (for instance, news of someone's marriage should be shared first with those closer in relation); (2) People assert events only when

they possess sufficient relevant knowledge and authority; (3) Individuals with higher authority on a particular matter have greater rights to assert it. These conventions are clearly evident in the design of conversational turns, where when one party with greater knowledge (K+) reports something to a party with less knowledge (K-), the latter often refrains from direct evaluation or assertion but instead uses tag questions to pass on the opportunity for final decision and assertion to the former.

4. Analysis

In the context of everyday telephone conversations, the calling party often reports on a particular matter to the receiving party. As the reporting sequence unfolds, the knowledge status of the receiving party undergoes continuous change. Interactants typically showcase their knowledge status and rights through turn design concerning the evaluation object. When both parties engage in a discussion on a topic, their respective stances on relevant events are initially unclear, leading to a tendency for mutual probing and confirmation during the conversation. The use of emotionally charged tag questions by the K- party allows for the expression of their viewpoint without appearing overly assertive. In the reporting process, two scenarios may arise: Firstly, when the K+ party reports to the K- party, they may subtly or overtly demonstrate their stance on the event itself, expecting the K- party to acknowledge their response. When seeking feedback from the K- party, the latter may speculate based on existing knowledge, a risky endeavor requiring confirmation from the K+ party. In the confirmation-seeking process, the K- party often employs tag questions at the end of turns to mitigate the weight of their viewpoint description. Secondly, when the K- party reports to the K+ party, they may also use tag questions due to their weaker knowledge possession, seeking confirmation from the K+ party. This paper explores the communicative significance and social function of tag questions used by the K- party at the end of conversational turns during the interaction process.

Type 1. When the K- party provides feedback to the K+ party's information:

例 1 [YQL/满月酒/00:00-03:11]

01　袁：喂：

02　龚：喂，

03　（0.3）

04　龚：嗯=

05　袁：=嗯：杨智昨天给你打电话了没，

06　（0.4）

07　龚：ai：：谁？杨智啊？

08　（0.4）

09　龚：没啊，他-他给我打电话干什么呀？

10　袁：他昨天给我打电话了

11　　说是他：（.）表哥孩子快满月了，

12　　让我回去一趟喝：满月酒（这样）。

13　龚：他表哥：↑孩子>都满月啦<？这么快，

14　袁：可不嘛。

15　龚：但是他表哥-哥：的孩子满月

16　　那（.）又不是他孩子，

17　　有-有必要去吗？

18　袁：我也觉得没必要，

19　　毕竟不是特别近的亲戚，

20　　但是这电话都打到我这来了，

21　　我这不去都不合适：

22　　他要是没给我打电话的是，

23　　我还能假装不知道。

24　龚：那他：j-既然给你打电话了那就去呗，

25　　你（.）你答应了吗？

26　袁：答应啦，

27　　我当时也没想出什么好的借口拒绝

In this conversation, Yuan calls Gong to inquire whether Yang Zhi has called him. In line 07, Gong initiates a correction by repeating the important information within Yuan's turn, which belongs to the category of interrogative repetition in the second turn. This indicates that the initiation of the correction is not due to misunderstanding but because the content of Yuan's inquiry was unexpected. Wu believes that the initiation of conversational correction is a dual action, "not only initiating a correction but also executing other communicative tasks." She categorizes other-initiated correction into interrogative and "ah"-ending types, and argues that both types can serve a negative pragmatic function. In line 09, Gong responds to Yuan's question and raises a new one, "Why would he call me?" Both the content and the turn design, which uses "ya," reflect the unexpectedness of Yuan's question and the unreasonableness of Yang Zhi's call to him. Through Gong's question in line 09, Yuan starts a reporting sequence,

indicating that Yuan holds more knowledge (K+) compared to Gong, who, apart from knowing the main characters involved, does not possess any knowledge of the event, marking him as K-. From the structure of the sequence, Gong's question is supposed to correspond to Yuan's response to his question, but Yuan does not directly answer Gong's question and instead explains the event itself, thereby altering Gong's state of knowledge. In line 10, Yuan says "He called me yesterday," a turn design presupposing multiple turns involving the content of the call, preventing K- listeners from switching turns according to normal conversational rules. Yuan's turn construction shows a mitigating function when using "say is," which in Chinese lowers the force of assertion and expresses uncertainty or misunderstanding about the event. Yuan's phrase "let me go back for a full moon feast" shows a greater effort on his part in comparison to a simpler expression, indicating the inconvenience and effort involved. Additionally, the pause after "he" and the emphasis on "cousin" reveal Yuan's emotional inclination.

Lines 12 and 13 are expansions of the story told in line 11. Gong partially repeats the content of line 11, using "dou" (all) in the turn construction, which usually affects the element to its left. Hence, in line 12, "dou" refers to "his cousin's child." Yuan's affirmative response not only confirms the identification of the characters involved but also agrees with Gong's evaluation of the story as "so quick." This middle expansion suggests emotional alignment between Yuan and Gong and propels Gong's reasoning based on this alignment in line 13. People often reason based on existing experiences or common sense. Gong's reasoning reflects a common sense notion: one does not need to attend the full moon celebration for a child of a distant relation like Yang Zhi's cousin. However, Yuan, being more knowledgeable about the situation, holds more information. Hence, Gong does not assert his own opinion directly but summarizes and explains the facts stated by Yuan before making a judgment with a tag question "Is it necessary to go?" This reduces the impact of his direct evaluation and leaves the final judgment to Yuan. Although Gong appears objective, his turn construction also reflects an emotional stance of "no need to go," evident through delays, repetitions, and the choice of words contrasting with a different

scenario. The priority answer to Gong's tag question is "no need to go." Hence, whether Gong's implied reasoning is correct depends on Yuan's response in the following turn. In line 16, Yuan agrees with Gong's question from line 15, "I also think it's not necessary," interpreting Gong's objective description, contrast with another situation, and the question as support for "no need to go." Yuan then provides detailed explanations supporting Gong's second half of line 14. Thus, both parties use communicative resources to build turns and perform a specific social action, being recognized by each other as performing the same action, thus completing the communicative task. Both parties not only adhere to the structural consistency of sequence development but also achieve emotional agreement regarding each other's stance. In this sequence, through Gong's specific questions, we see that Yuan holds a more knowledgeable stance, so Gong's opinions are based on the knowledge provided by Yuan. According to the principle of knowledge priority, Gong does not have the right to assert, so he transfers the right to Yuan through the tag question, reducing the interpersonal risk associated with assertion.

Type 2. When the K- party asks the K+ party about a certain issue:

例 2 [LZ/买饭/00:00-01:15]

01　浩：喂?小强:?

02　(1.2)

03　强：伴郎吃的话,我在下边给他们买点(0.5)其他早餐不行:?

04　[非要去咸亨 1

05　浩：[呃:

06　(0.6)

07　浩：伴郎不用,是:e 刘奇要吃了.

08　(3.0)

09　09 强：不是,(°en°)吃个早饭>意思<还有讲究呢?

10　浩：ong:他那边儿要讲究了么.刘奇要的,

11　不是我们要.我们都吃完饭啦.

12　(1.2)

13　强：我还说是你们这(0.2)伴郎要吃呢.

14　[( )

15　浩：[新郎么.你还-你现在到哪儿啦,

16　(1.4)

17　强：我到了:(1.2)刘奇家这边了.

18 浩：<我靠>.来不及啊我怕.=我-要在那边再找
    个人?

19 (0.3)

20 浩： 你赶快过吧.>快快快快快<.

21 (0.6)

22 浩： 去吧.

23 (2.3)

Summarize the collected data and the analysis performed on those data relevant to the discourse that is to follow. Report the data in sufficient detail to justify your conclusions. Mention all relevant results, including those that run counter to expectation; be sure to include small effect sizes (or statistically nonsignificant findings) when theory predicts large (or statistically significant) ones. Do not hide uncomfortable results by omission. Do not include individual scores or raw data with the exception, for example, of single-case designs or illustrative examples. In the spirit of data sharing (encouraged by APA and other professional associations and sometimes required by funding agencies), raw data, including study characteristics and individual effect sizes used in a meta-analysis, can be made available on supplemental online archives.

4.1 Recruitment

Provide dates defining the periods of recruitment and follow-up and the primary sources of the potential subjects, where appropriate. If these dates differ by group, provide the values for each group.

4.2 Statistics and Data Analysis

Analysis of data and the reporting of the results of those analyses are fundamental aspects of the conduct of research. Accurate, unbiased, complete, and insightful reporting of the analytic treatment of data (be it quantitative or qualitative) must be a component of all research reports. Researchers in the field of psychology use numerous approaches to the analysis of data, and no one approach is uniformly preferred as long as the method is appropriate to the research questions being asked and the nature of the data collected. The methods used must support their analytic burdens, including robustness to violations of the assumptions.

In the beginning of the conversation, line 03, Qiang asks about buying meals, initiating a conversational turn. In this process, he first uses a presupposition "if the best man eats,"

indicating that Qiang himself does not possess knowledge regarding who will eat the meal. The phrase "XXX's case" shows Qiang's own reduction of the accuracy of the information he has. "Can't I just buy them some other breakfast downstairs?" is also based on the presupposition established in his previous sentence, expressing his current thoughts. The use of "Is that not okay?" at the end of his turn places him in a disadvantaged position within this knowledge-gap dialogue, handing the decision-making power over to Hao. From the design of this conversational turn, "Is that not okay?" reflects Qiang's stance more distinctly than other tag questions like "Is it okay?" The expected answer to "not okay" is "okay," and the phrase "have to go to Xian Heng" chosen by Qiang expresses his dissatisfaction with going to that place for meals, showing an unreasonable demand. The consistent response to Qiang's inquiry structure in line 03 should be "okay" or "not okay," but since the presupposition — "if the best man eats" — is incorrect, Hao does not provide a direct answer to Qiang's "okay or not okay" until after correction, following which Qiang also adheres to Hao's opinion.

5. Discussion

In the conversational turn, using a tag question at the end of a reporting sequence, whether K- is reporting to K+ or K- is responding to K+'s feedback, is a very risky action. Throughout the development of the sequence, both parties in the conversation inevitably express their stance on the event during the factual recounting. However, since the K- party does not have sufficient knowledge when voicing about the event, choosing a tag question with a stance while lacking sufficient authority can appropriately reduce the weight of K-'s statement while expressing personal emotional inclination. The conventional use of this conversational tactic allows both parties to understand each other's stances while maintaining harmonious social relationships.

6. Conclusion

In the process of everyday communication, to avoid causing embarrassment and displeasure between parties, speakers unconsciously adopt a series of conversational conventions. This paper, using conversation analysis research methods, explores the specific characteristics and patterns of the choice of tag questions by the K- party at the end of conversational turns, a conventional

conversational tactic. Compared with semantics research, this paper's material selection of real daily phone conversations can more objectively showcase their actual verbal communication situations in daily life, the components of the conversational turns constructed, and the role and impact of the actions performed in the sequence. Moreover, authentic materials can provide effective references and guidance for people in daily communication, playing a significant role in maintaining harmonious interpersonal relationships and promoting positive social interactions.

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