

Leaning and recipient intervening questions in Mandarin conversation

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Abstract

In naturally occurring conversation, the recipient not only listens to the speaker, but also actively participates in the construction and negotiation of the ongoing talk. The recipient sometimes intervenes into the speaker's turn before it is brought to a possible completion, and one practice is initiating questions related to the ongoing talk. These questions have no direct contribution to the progress of the current project, and they impede the progressivity of the speaker's turn. While most research on recipient interventions focuses on the structure and function of the intervening sequences, this study examines the body movements involved in the production of the recipient interventions. Drawing on the methodology of conversation analysis and interactional linguistics, this article explores the role of body movements in the production of *recipient intervening questions* in Mandarin face-to-face conversation. A recurrent pattern of body movement co-occurs with the recipient intervening questions. That is, the recipient leans toward the speaker when initiating the question and holds the leaning body until the response is provided. Leaning visually displays the recipient's orientation to his/her question as disjunctive and disaligned with the speaker's ongoing turn and activity in progress. Holding of the lean is a resource usable by the recipient to mobilize response to the intervening questions. This study shows that leaning is relevant to the organization of the recipient intervening question–answer sequences in Mandarin conversation.

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1. Introduction

In naturally occurring conversation, the recipient is actively involved in a variety of activities. In addition to being merely a listener, the recipient may intervene in the speaker's ongoing talk by initiating questions related to the talk. Sequences involving such intervening questions can be observed in the following excerpts.

(1) (TO_SMW_neighboring county)

01 Sun: lin feng shi women xian women gebi xian.
(NAME) be our county our neighboring county
Lin Feng was, our county, our neighboring county

02 zai women xian dang guo [(XX);
in our county be ASP
in our county was....

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03 Mei:→ [gebi xian <<laughing>hai you zhe ge shuofa
[neighboring county still have this CL saying
Neighboring county, is there such a saying?

04 Sun: jiu shi women [lin xian.
just be our [adjacent county.
It's the county next to us.

05 Wen: [lin xian.
[adjacent county
The county next to us.

06 Mei: gebi xian.
neighboring county
Neighboring county.

07 ai wo faxian ni tai you chuangzaoxing le.
PRT I discover you very have creativity CRS
I find you are very creative.

In line 02, Sun's turn is still in progress. Mei initiates a question with laughter (line 03) in the middle of Sun's turn, displaying her problem in understanding and accepting the saying *gebi xian* 'neighboring county' in Sun's ongoing turns. Mei's question here intervenes in Sun's turn-in-progress.

The recipient's intervening question can also be observed in Excerpt 2. In this extract, Lin is telling Yan about her experience being asked to work on the organizing committee for an evening show.

(2) (TO_LY_evening show)

01 Lin: ta shuo ni yuanyi zuo ma wo shuo xing a mei wenti.
he say you willing do Q I say OK PRT no problem
He asked "are you willing to do this (help organize the party)?" I said OK, no problem.

02 fanzheng wo ye mei you shenme shir ma.
anyway I also NEG have what thing PRT
I didn't have other things to do anyway.

03 [(xx)yi wen?
[(xx)once ask
(When I) asked (him)...

04 Yan:→[ni renshi luo jing ma;
[you know (NAME) Q
Do you know Luo Jing?

05 Lin: luo jing dangran renshi women yuanlai zhu zai yiqi.
(NAME) of course know we originally live at together
Luo Jing, of course I know her. We used to live together.

((11 lines omitted regarding Lin and Yan's joint assessment of Luo Jing.))

17 Yan: ranhou houlai shi TA jiao wo cuichang de ni zhidao ba.
then later be 3SG ask me remind performance PRT you know PRT
Then later it was she who asked me to remind the performers, you know?

Here, in the middle of Lin's turn, Yan initiates a question requesting information about whether Lin knows a third-party (line 04) who assigned her the task of reminding the performers at the show (line 17). The question also intervenes in Lin's turn-in-progress and disrupts the progressivity of Lin's turn and telling.

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