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Promising and Commitment to Future Actions in Mandarin Conversation

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Asian Languages and Cultures

by

Yan Zhou

2022

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2022

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Promising and Commitment to Future Actions in Mandarin Conversation

by

Yan Zhou

Doctor of Philosophy in Asian Languages and Cultures

University of California, Los Angeles, 2022

Professor Hongyin Tao, Chair

Applying an interdisciplinary approach informed by conversation analysis, interactional linguistics, and multimodal analysis of social interaction, this study investigates the verbal and non-verbal resources and sequence organization of promising and relevant commissive actions.

Chapter 1 reviews previous studies and establishes the triangle model of directive-commissive actions, which illuminates the relationships among the agent, the beneficiary, and the requested or

promised future action. Chapter 2 introduces data and methods, highlights the dimension of commitment in various action types, and distinguishes promising from other commissive actions.

Chapter 3 examines common lexico-syntactic resources used in commissive actions in Mandarin conversation, which includes a general survey of the registral differences and analyses of example illocutionary force indicating devices (IFIDs) and illocutionary force modifying devices (IFMDs). Chapter 4 investigates the sequential organization of promising and discovers the preference for first-position promises when the speaker has an unfulfilled pre-existing obligation. This preference is found to be followed by participants in both ordinary conversation and government official-journalist interaction. Chapter 5 reveals that Mandarin speakers follow the principle of proportionality in making commitments to future actions: big promises are made to fulfill future obligations with severe consequences, and small commitments are made to future actions without severe consequences. Chapter 5 also outlines multimodal interactional resources and their co-constructing relationships in performing commissive actions.

This dissertation not only answers the questions of *when* and *how* Mandarin speakers make promises in naturally occurring conversation but also sheds light on understanding a wide range of social actions in interaction by underlining the fundamental dimensions of commitment and obligation.

The dissertation of Yan Zhou is approved.

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2022

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1 Introduction

Promising is a ubiquitous social action in both institutional talk and ordinary conversations. Politicians make promises to increase jobs in election campaigns; couples make promises to love and cherish each other at their weddings; a friend may promise “I’ll drop by sometime next week” (Brown & Levinson 1987: 125). People make promises in various situations given their social roles and specific situations, which may or may not be sincere. Ordinarily, when a promise is made, an expectation of obligation is established: the promisor will perform the promised action at the promised future time. If the promisor fails to do so, it is also an established mutual understanding that they may be held accountable for the nonperformance (Brandom 1994: 164). While the pioneering studies in philosophy, linguistics, and psychology have furthered our understanding of promising as a speech act, considerably less research has been dedicated to examining when and how exactly a promise is made in a conversation. Specifically, in terms of the timing of a promise, why are some promises volunteered but some are solicited, and even coerced? What linguistic and non-linguistic resources are used by Mandarin speakers to express their commitment to a future action? What are the similarities and differences between promises made in ordinary conversations and institutional conversations such as in politicians’ interactions with journalists? A more fundamental question is, what are the interactional and social factors that shape the formation and ascription of promising in conversation? In other words, how do conversation participants design

and recognize promising as a unique social action from other actions, especially other commissive actions that express varying degrees of commitment to future actions?

Applying an interdisciplinary approach informed by conversation analysis (CA), interactional linguistics (IL), and multimodal analysis, this dissertation aims to contribute to the study of social interaction in the following aspects. First, it identifies distinctive interactional and social features of promising as a social action in the context of commissive actions. Second, it surveys common lexico-syntactic resources for promising as well as other commissive actions with lower commitment to future actions. Third, it illuminates the critical role of obligation in shaping the sequence organization of promising. Fourth, it highlights a common practice in designing promising – the principle of proportionality. Lastly, this study sheds light on the registral differences of promising in ordinary conversation and institutional settings by examining local Chinese government officials' promises made on a live broadcast television program.

This chapter begins with a review of previous studies on promising and other commissive actions with different approaches with a special focus on sociocultural dimensions that shape the formation and ascription of commissive actions. It then introduces the analytic framework that will be adopted in the main chapters.

1.1 Review on promising and commissive actions

1.1.1 Speech act theory

The first detailed analysis of promising as a social act was conducted by (Searle 1969) who defines promise as a subtype of commissive speech acts accomplished by a proposition that expresses the speaker's intention to do something in the future that the hearer wishes. Following this line of research, subsequent studies on promising and other commissive speech acts have been conducted in different registers, but most of these studies focus on the speaker's intention and cognitive state (e.g., Kibble 2006; Kissine 2008), which is inaccessible to the recipient of the promise in the conversation and the researcher of social interaction.

The first comprehensive analysis of promising as a linguistic phenomenon was conducted in the field of linguistic philosophy. In his famous statement, Austin (1962) firstly accounts for human language as speech acts: "By saying something, we do something" (91). Building on Austin's notion of illocutionary force and his categorization of English performative verbs, Searle (1969) highlights the differences between *meaning* and *use*, arguing that semantic meanings of speakers' utterances are not necessarily mapped to the illocutionary acts accomplished in the contexts. He further proposes four felicity conditions that must be fulfilled to accomplish each speech act (propositional content condition, preparatory condition, sincerity condition, and essential condition). Based on the variations of these conditions, Searle (1976) categorizes five types of speech acts: representatives (or assertives), directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations. Among these, commissives are defined as "illocutionary acts whose point is to commit the speaker (again in varying degrees) to some future course of action" (Searle 1976: 11)

Promising has been included in Austin's (1962) analysis of commissive speech acts, which also includes vows, pledges, covenants, contracts, guarantees, embraces, and swearing. Searle (1969) follows this categorization and defines a promise as a speech act accomplished by a proposition that expresses the speaker's intention to do something in the future that the hearer wishes (Searle 1969: 57–61). In his analysis of constitutive rules (51) and felicity conditions of illocutionary acts, Searle (1969) presents the following conditions for promising: (1) The propositional content condition of a promise is that the expression of the promise predicates a future action of the speaker; (2) The preparatory conditions of a promise include that the hearer prefers the speaker doing the action and that the speaker believes so too. In addition, it is not obvious to both the speaker and the hearer that the speaker will perform the action "in the normal course of events" (Searle 1969: 59); (3) The sincerity condition of a promise is that it places the speaker under an obligation to perform the action; (4) The essential condition of a promise is that the speaker intends that the utterance will place him or herself under an obligation to do the promised action. Searles (1969) also highlights the importance of the speaker and hearer's knowledge of the semantic meanings of the utterance so that both parties can recognize each other's speech act, which aligns with the later idea of action ascription in conversation analysis (Sacks 1995; Levinson 2012). In addition to these conditions, Searle (1969; 1976) points out other principles to identify promises, such as the point or purpose of the act, the relative positions of the speaker and the hearer, the degree of the commitment undertaken (the difference between a mere expression of intention and a promise), the difference in propositional content, the

difference in the way the proposition relates to the interests of the speaker and the hearer, and the different ways in which an utterance relates to the rest of the conversation.

An important distinction in speech act theory is between direct speech acts and indirect speech acts. Speech acts whose form and function are directly related are referred to as direct speech acts, for example when an interrogative is used to ask a question. In contrast, indirect speech acts are those performed by means of another speech act. In other words, the form and function of indirect speech acts are not directly related to each other, and the function (“action” in the sense of CA and IL) is implicated. For example, interrogatives such as “Could you pass the salt?” are often used as indirect forms of requests. The more direct and explicit the speech act performed; the stronger the illocutionary force indicated in the speech act is (Searle 1989; Austin 1962; Yule & Widdowson 1996).

Speech act theory was later criticized for merely focusing on intention and for inferencing rules that contribute little to understanding the linguistic format and interactional aspects of promising (Paul Drew and Elizabeth Couper-Kuhlen 2014). However, Searle’s (1969) study established the foundation for future studies on social actions and identifies promising as recognizably different from other speech acts.

1.1.2 Face and politeness theory

Another important approach to promising and other speech acts is Brown and Levinson’s (1987) politeness theory. Influenced by Goffman’s (1959) idea of public self-image, Brown and

Levinson (1987) develops the analytic framework of *face*, including negative face and positive face, to analyze various strategies in linguistic politeness. Negative face refers to people's preference for freedom of action and freedom from imposition; positive face refers to people's desire to be appreciated and approved of (Brown & Levinson 1987: 61). Actions that damage people's positive face or negative face are defined as face-threatening actions (FTAs) and speakers across different languages all take politeness strategies to avoid FTAs or to reduce the damage brought by FTAs. Common politeness strategies include conventionalized indirect speech acts, questions, and hedging,

Under the framework of politeness theory, promises and offers both threaten the hearer's negative face as the hearer is imposed to accept or reject the promise or offer and possibly incur a debt to the speaker. If the promise or offer is made by the speaker without the intention to perform the future action, they not only threaten the speaker's own negative face but the hearer's positive face. In terms of strategies for doing FTAs, offers and promises are often made on record (explicit) with the good intention to cooperate and to satisfy the hearer's positive-face needs, even if some promises are false¹. Politeness theory emphasizes the cooperation and affiliation aspect of actions in human interaction and treats promising as such an action that speakers "claim that (within a certain sphere of relevance) whatever [the hearer] wants, [the speaker] wants *for* him and will help to obtain" (Brown & Levinson 1987: 125).

¹ See the analysis of the example "I'll drop by sometime next week" in P. Brown and Levinson (1987, 69, 125).

Speech act theory and politeness theory lay the foundational work for the study of promising as a speech act by illuminating the definitional conditions and pragmatic consequences of making a promise. However, both approaches focus on the conceptual aspects of promising with little consideration of actual practices of promising in natural conversation, thereby overlooking the rich interactional details. For example, the parallel made between promises and offers as face threatening actions points out one similarity between the two actions but it shows the limitation of the analysis by implicitly treating both actions as first-position actions (see more discussion on sequential position in Chapter 4), which cannot be validated without a careful examination of naturally occurring conversational data.

1.1.3 Promises in language development and psychology

With the foundational work of speech act theory, researchers in other fields have studied promising with different approaches, such as experimental studies on language development and behavioral psychology. Studies on children's first language development find that promising is mastered later than other speech acts, and the most explicit form of promise – performative verbs such as *promise* – are uttered only by older children (Astington 1988; Snow et al. 1996). In terms of how adults produce and understand promises, Gibbs and Delaney (Clayman 2001: 403) find that adult speakers often make promises to “reaffirm previously existing, and often unstated obligations” (107). That means not all obligations in promises are established by the promising utterance as Searle (1969; 1976; 1989) claims, and some obligations may exist prior to the promising action in the conversation. As will be discussed in later chapters, this crucial distinction

between obligations existing prior to the conversation and obligations educed in the conversation is a fundamental factor determining the position and composition of promising.

1.1.3.1 Promises in political discourses and critical discourse analysis

Promising is particularly prominent in political discourse as a common strategy used by politicians to increase their credibility and to sway public opinion to serve their interests on occasions such as election campaign speeches, political debates, and news interviews (e.g., Fetzer 2002, 200; Krebs and Jackson 2007; Malkmus 2013; Misic Ilic and Radulovic 2015; Mohammed Hashim 2015). Common linguistic patterns for political promises include first-person plural *we*, explicit performative verbs such as *promise* and *commit*, modal verbs that indicate strong commitment such as *must*, and statements about future actions such as *we will...* (Chilton et al. 2012; Depaula 2020).

Focusing on the linguistic representation of sociopolitical issues in written and spoken discourses, Fairclough's (2003) critical discourse analytic approach categorizes speech acts, termed as *speech functions*, differently from the original speech act theory. Fairclough (2003) firstly distinguishes two types of exchanges in discourse: knowledge exchanges and activity exchanges. Each type of exchange is further classified into two speech functions: knowledge exchanges include statements and questions; activity exchanges include demands and offers. With different speech functions, the speaker (termed "author" following Goffman's (1981) participation framework) uses modality devices – epistemic modality for knowledge exchange and deontic

modality for activity exchanges – to express their varying degrees of commitment to truth or obligations/necessities. When making a statement/assertion, the speaker indicates their commitments to the truth value (also see discussions on epistemic stance such as (Ochs 1993)). Correspondingly, when asking a question, the speaker elicits the recipient's commitment to the truth declarative. In the case of demands and offers (equivalent to commissive speech acts in speech act theory), the speaker indicates their commitment to obligations and necessities when making a demand and expresses their commitment to act-undertaking when making an offer.

Note that offers and promises in Fairclough's (2003) framework are defined differently from those in Searle's (1969) framework. Offer here is used as an umbrella term for commissive actions, and promise is a subcategory of the offer. The following utterances are used by (Fairclough 2003: 168) as examples of offers with different degrees of commitment to act.

(1) I'll open the window. (undertaking)

(2) I may open the window. (modalized)

(3) I won't open the window. (refusal)

The current study adopts an inclusive approach to commissive actions and treats offer as a type of weak commitment or initiation of commitment, which will be further discussed in Sections 1.1.5.2.6 and 2.3.1 on the continuum of commitment to future actions.

1.1.4 Promising and commissive speech acts in Chinese discourses

Research on promising and commissive actions in Chinese linguistics has mainly focused on the linguistic formats and pragmatic strategies to realize the speaker's commissive intention in different genres of discourses. Among these, semantic meanings of performative verbs have attracted the most attention. Zhang (2007) identifies 23 performative verbs that express commitments in Mandarin, and Dong (2010) finds that performative verbs are mostly used in formal institutional discourses. In institutional settings, Yin and Chen (2020) study diplomatic commitments made by Chinese foreign ministry spokespersons in their regular press conferences and observe that the majority of commissive speech acts are produced with implicit performatives such as future tense and modal verbs. Regarding pragmatic strategies in making commitments, Zhu (2012) investigates direct and indirect commissive speech acts and identifies four factors that influence the speaker's expression of commissive intention, including the speaker's social role, the social context and the goal of the commitment, how difficult the involved action is, and objects involved in the commitment. In the same line of research, Xu (2021) explores various combinations of different elements in commissive speech acts, including the agent, the commissive intention, the beneficiary of the committed action, the committed action, and references to time and location. In a different line of research, Y. Wang and Chen (2014) investigate children's first language acquisition of promising. They find that from age 6 to 9, children recognize effective promises regardless of the perceived sincerity level and that promises stated with an explicit future act are more likely to be recognized as a promise.

1.1.5 Conversation Analysis and Interactional Linguistics

1.1.5.1 Actions in talk-in-interaction

In recent decades, conversation analysts and interactional linguists have shifted the research focus of speech acts from conceptual ideas like *intention* to speaker's practices in natural conversations. Particularly, *action formation* and *ascription* (Levinson 2012) of social actions in interaction have become the research loci, which analyze "how ... the resources of the language, the body, the environment of the interaction, and position in the interaction [are] fashioned into conformations designed to be, and to be recognized by recipients" (2017) Despite its prevalence in natural conversation, promising remains under explored in CA and IL. However, some closely relevant actions in the directive-commissive family (Couper-Kuhlen 2014) have been studied extensively in CA and IL, such as invitations (Drew 1984; Drew 2018), offer (Curl 2006), proposals (Stevanovic 2015; Stivers & Sidnell 2016), requests and request-like actions (Ervin-Tripp et al. 1987: 1982; Curl & Drew 2008; Clayman & Heritage 2014; Kendrick & Drew 2016; Rossi 2015). Among these studies, a common research locus is the interplay between conversation-external factors such as the power relationships between the participants and the conversation-internal/interactional features such as sequence organization and turn design of the social action. For example, many researchers recognize that offering is preferred over requesting when assistance is needed because the latter is face-threatening (Levinson 1983; Sacks 1995; Lerner 1996; Lindström 2005; Robinson & Bolden 2010), although Kendrick and Drew (2014) argue that the speaker's choice in making a request or offer depends on other situational circumstances (110-

112). In terms of turn design, requests and offers are designed with different linguistic formats given the speaker's evaluation of entitlement (having rights to have something done by someone) and contingencies (circumstances might prevent someone from doing something) in specific contexts (Heinemann 2006; Curl 2006; Curl & Drew 2008). A few studies have examined the linguistic format of responses to requests with the consideration of different deontic rights and entitlements (Steensig & Heinemann 2014; Thompson, Fox & Couper-Kuhlen 2015), which provide important perspectives to the current study on commissive actions.

CA and IL studies on Chinese conversations are relatively lacking, although the field has been expanding rapidly in recent years. Luke's (1990) work on utterance particles in Cantonese conversation is the first of its kind and provides a typological perspective to the then English-dominated CA field (Thompson & Wu 2016). Later researchers have investigated various linguistic phenomena in Chinese, such as utterance-final particles (SFP) (Wu 2004), repair (Tao 1995; Zhang 1998; Zhang 2016), intonation units (Tao 1996), stance-taking (Tao 2003; Endo 2010; Liu & Tao 2011) and discourse markers (Wang 2017). Chinese interactional linguists have also moved on to the multimodal analysis of bodily-visual conduct in Mandarin conversation (Tao 1999; Li 2014; Li & Ono 2019).

Among the few studies on action formation and ascription in Mandarin conversation, assessment (e.g., Fang (2017)) and question-answer sequences (e.g. W. Wang (2020, 2022)) have received the most attention. A recent contribution is Yu and Wu's (2020) edited special issue with five studies on different social actions, including assessment (Zhang & Yu 2020), teasing (Li 2020),

accounts in request sequences (Liu 2020), self-repair (Li & Li 2020), and generic solicitude in telephone calls (Dong & Wu 2020).

Yu and Wu's (2018) investigation on inviting is relatively relevant to the current study on commissive actions. They report that the distribution of invitation forms is related to "the inviter's anticipation of the likelihood of the success of an invitation" (147) and that the inviter's choice of syntactic forms is usually congruent with the invitee's responsive forms. The study aligns with other studies on English conversation in examining how social and interactional factors shape the format of the social action.

In summary, previous CA and IL studies on action formation and ascription have mainly focused on first-position actions, especially requesting and offering. Commissive actions, especially those in second position, are relatively under-explored. Moreover, although studies on individual actions have yielded fruitful results, a comprehensive framework that accounts for the nuances of these actions is still lacking.

In the following Section 1.1.5.2, I provide a comprehensive review of the sociocultural and contextual dimensions that shape the design and recognition of actions as discussed in previous studies, based on which I propose the analytical framework in Section 1.2 – *the social action triangle*, which illustrates the intertwined dimensions that shape the sequence position and composition of directive-commissive actions.

1.1.5.2 Sociocultural and contextual dimensions in directive-commissive actions

1.1.5.2.1 Benefactive relationships

A benefactive relationship is the fundamental social relationship in directive-commissive actions that leads to a future event benefiting the recipient and/or the speaker. Based on Searle's (1976) framework of directives and commissive, Couper-Kuhlen (2014) categorizes an extended family of sequence initiating directive-commissive actions: requests, proposals, and suggestions are directives as the recipient will be the agent of the future action if an agreement is reached; offers and invitations are commissive actions as the speaker is committing themselves to the future action if the offer or invitation is accepted. She specifies the three general features of this extended family of actions: 1) the speaker attempts to bring about a future action or event, 2) participants' deontic stance and status – who has the right to determine the future action (Stevanovic & Peräkylä 2012) – are involved in these actions, 3) the preferred responses of these actions are accepting, acquiescing, or complying.

The idea that conversation participants can differentiate requests, offers, proposals, and suggestions based on who is the agent of the future action and who bears the cost and benefit of the action is also explored by Clayman and Heritage (2014) in their study on offers and requests. They propose the notion of *benefactive stance* – the distribution of benefits and/or costs encoded in the linguistic signal – and *benefactive status* – the actual benefits and costs to the recipient, as well as the recipient's ability and willingness to perform the action. Specifically, benefactive relationship is formulated in three ways: 1) reference to participants' interests in the nominated action (the recipient's interest in offers and the speaker's needs/preference in requests), 2)

reference to the agent or recipient of the action, and 3) reference to the nominated action itself with expanded details about costs and benefits. It is also pointed out that speakers can maximize or minimize self or/and others' costs and benefits in the presentation to achieve their interactional goals (Clayman & Heritage 2014: 15).

These understandings of benefactive relationships provide a foundation for analyzing promising and other commissive actions in Mandarin conversation. In addition to the strategies discussed in previous studies, an explicit reference to the benefactive relationship is observed in the current study of Mandarin conversation, the *gěi* construction, which will be analyzed in Chapter 3.

1.1.5.2.2 Bilateral or unilateral activities

In Rossi's (2012; 2015) study of requests in Italian, he proposes to distinguish bilateral and unilateral requests as the ownership and engagement of actions. Two criteria are applied to distinguish the two types of requests: the relationship between the request and the requestee's ongoing line of action and the distribution of the benefit brought by the request. With these criteria, he refers to requests that are integral to an already established joint project as bilateral requests, and requests that enlist help in new, self-contained projects in the interest of the speaker as unilateral requests. The current study separates the criteria into two aspects of actions: the distinction between an established project and a new project is incorporated into the two types of obligations: pre-existing obligations and educed obligations, whereas the difference between a self-contained project and a joint project is included in the discussion of deontic right.

1.1.5.2.3 Entitlement and contingency

Another important notion related to the directive-commissive action family (especially requests and offers) is the idea of entitlement, which refers to the speaker's assessment of their right to make the request to the recipient and to expect the granting of the request as claimed in interaction (Lindström 2005; Heinemann 2006; Vinkhuyzen & Szymanski 2005). Previous studies on institutional conversations have shown that different linguistic formulations are adopted in the environment in which the speaker has a high or low entitlement in making the request (Lindström 2005; Heinemann 2006). Curl and Drew (2008) further this line of research by relating entitlement to contingency factors that could compromise the grantability of a request, such as schedules, procedures, and practices (Curl & Drew 2008; Steensig & Heinemann 2014).² They argue that the speaker displays a low entitlement in the request when they orient to contingencies (using the preface *I wonder*) and a high entitlement when it is little or no consideration of contingencies (using modal verbs such as *Can you*). Craven and Potter (2010) also point out that directives implemented with imperative sentences display a high entitlement without considering contingencies on the recipient's side.

In the same line of research, Nolen and Maynard (2013) find that contingency and entitlement operate separately in interaction: in the same interactional environment of requests for participation in survey interviews, contingency is presented by the speaker (the interviewer in their

² In Clayman and Heritage's (2014) study, contingencies are included in the concept of *benefactive status* along with factors such as the speaker's willingness and abilities to perform the future action.

study) as the options of participating times (“now” or “later”) provided to the recipient (the potential interviewee in the study), whereas entitlement is displayed by the presence or absence of mitigators, task partitioning, and *I wonder* prefaces. Labov and Fanshel’s (1977) sociolinguistic study on indirect requests also indicates a separated operation of entitlement and contingency: requests related to needs³ and abilities – associated with contingency – are generally mitigating, whereas requests invoking rights – the speaker’s entitlement – and obligations are aggravating. Wootton’s (1981) study on children’s requests provides another example to support this argument: In a similar sequence position where the child’s first request has been turned down and an imperative has been implemented by the parent, children use two different linguistic formulations of requests – the declarative *I want* and the interrogative *Can I*. While the contingency factor remains the same as neither of the two structures refers to the recipient’s ability or willingness or other uncertainties related to the grantability of the request, the two structures display the children’s different orientations towards their entitlement to impose the request: the interrogative *Can I* offers an alternative yes/no to the recipient, whereas the declarative *I want* does not give the recipient an option to reject.

The current study treats entitlement and contingency as two separate dimensions and pairs entitlement with obligation under the notion of deontic rights that will be discussed in the next section. As illustrated by the two edges in the social action triangle in Section 1.2, entitlement,

³ The speaker’s benefit and interest (Clayman and Heritage 2014) is treated as a separate edge in the social action triangle of requests.

paired with obligation, is an aspect of deontic right – a social structure relationship between the speaker and the recipient (Stevanovic & Peräkylä 2012) – and is displayed with self-attentive linguistic resources (Bolden 2006), whereas contingency is considered a relationship between the agent and the nominated action, and coded with another set of linguistic resources (e.g., time references). It might be observed that a high entitlement is accompanied by little or no consideration of contingency and that a low entitlement occurs with the consideration of contingencies, but as Nolen and Maynard’s (2013) analysis has shown, the two dimensions are not necessarily correlated. An example of entitlement and contingency will be presented in Section 1.2 along with other dimensions in the social action triangle.

1.1.5.2.4 Obligation and accountability

As entitlement is crucial in directive actions, obligation is a fundamental dimension in commissive actions. Scholars in philosophy, ethical and political theory have a long tradition of analyzing various types of obligations, such as political obligations – obedience of laws and regulations in society, on the part of citizens, and obligations we owe to people in a particular social relationship such as family members and friends (Searle 1969; Searle 1975). In the field of linguistics and language philosophy, speech act theory scholars argue that obligations are established by the speaker’s utterance of promises (Searle 1969; 1975). However, Gibbs and Delaney (1987) find that promises that “reaffirm previously existing, and often unstated obligations” (107) are recognized more prominently by participants in their experiment, indicating

a distinction between pre-existing obligations and new obligations. In sociolinguistics, obligation has been touched upon in Labov and Fanshel's (1977) discussion on the recipient's ability and obligation to accomplish the requested action. More recently in the fields of conversation analysis and interactional linguistics, Steensig and Heinemann (2014) find that Finnish speakers use modal full clauses (e.g., *skaa(l) jeg nok*, 'I shall...') in their responses to requests to encode social and moral obligations in performing a requested action (and the reverse indicates the requestor's entitlement to make the requestee do a future action).

Considering both the real-world sociocultural context and the interactional environment discussed in previous studies, the present study categorizes obligations into two types: pre-existing obligations and educed obligations. The first type could be obligations that the speaker promised to perform but failed to or social obligations that the speaker is expected to perform in their social roles regardless of explicit expressions before or during the current conversation, such as family obligations and political obligations (Jeske 2019). Educed obligations are generated by the speaker's utterance of commitment in the conversation. The crucial role of different types of obligations in the sequence organization of commissive actions will be discussed in Chapter 4.

The idea of accountability is related to but different from obligation. Accountability is embedded in the basic idea of action formation and ascription. Participants in a conversation are accountable to construct their talk to be recognizable by the recipient. Speakers then design their turns to perform actions, and with particular response-mobilizing features of turn-design, speakers

can hold recipients more accountable for responding or not. This model of response relevance allows sequential position, action, and turn design to each contribute to response relevance (Drew 2004) and the recipient should provide accounts for responding or not responding to the first pair part (Schegloff 2007; Stivers & Rossano 2010). Therefore, when a question is asked, an answer is conditionally relevant, and the questioned party should provide an account if no response is given (Schegloff 1968; Heritage 1984; Gibbs & Delaney 1987). In promising and other commissive actions, the promisor is accountable for nonperformance of the promised action. This issue becomes evident in promises made to reassure pre-existing obligations, which will also be investigated in Chapter 4.

The problem of accountability is most prominently observable in government-mass communication and accountability interviews (Montgomery 2011). It is widely recognized that government officials have obligations to explain and justify their policies or failures, and citizens can impose sanctions on officials' dissatisfactory performance (Schedler 1999). Government accountability presupposes officials holding positions in the government have pre-established or assumed obligations to serve citizens, which could be understood as an unspoken promise established when they were appointed or during their election campaigns. In democratic societies, journalists have played a watchdog role to hold government officials accountable. Conversation analysts interested in this topic have extensively examined journalists' question design in news interviews and press conferences and professional norms in journalism (neutrality and

adversarialness) (Clayman & Heritage 2002; Clayman et al. 2006). Relatively few studies have examined politicians' responses or initiated actions, among which most have focused on resistance and evasive practices (Bull & Mayer 1993; Clayman 2001; Ekström 2009; Harris 1991; Bull 1994; Bull 1998) Researchers report that politicians in news interviews and press conferences face a dilemma between being cooperative, on the one hand, and avoiding making "on record" responses that may damage the "politician's policy objectives, career prospects, and reputation" (Clayman 2001: 403) on the other. However, government officials do go on record in both initiating positions and response positions, as observed in the current database. It would thus be of interest to learn when and how officials make promises, and how recipients (journalists and citizens) respond to these promises. As will be presented in the following chapters, the current study investigates promises made by local Chinese government officials on a live broadcast television program and compare those to promises made in ordinary conversations.

1.1.5.2.5 Deontic right, deontic stance, and deontic status

Continuing the line of research on social structure and rights, Stevanovic (2011; 2018) and Stevanovic and Peräkylä (2012) proposes the notion of deontic rights, which refers to the speaker's capacity to determine action (2018) and provides a broader framework for the analysis of power negotiation in various social actions.

Unlike entitlement, which has mainly been discussed in request sequences where two speakers have an asymmetric power relationship and the requestee is the sole agent of the future action, deontic rights are originally discussed in joint actions where both speakers are agents who share a

relatively equal right in determining the future event (Stevanovic 2011). Informed by the distinction between epistemic stance and epistemic status (Heritage 2012), Stevanovic (2011; 2013; 2018) develops the concepts of deontic stance and deontic status to distinguish the speaker's publicly claimed deontic authority in certain domains of action relative to the co-participant and their actual authority as recognized by other participants (Stevanovic & Peräkylä 2014). Like epistemic stance, deontic stance and status can be congruent or incongruent, which is determined by whether the second speaker (the recipient) agrees with the first speaker's deontic stance or not (Stevanovic and Peräkylä 2012). For example, in suggestion sequences, a first speaker claims their deontic authority in determining the joint future action. When the second speaker accepts the first speaker's suggestion, a deontic congruence is achieved as the two speakers agree on the first speaker's allocation of deontic rights – their deontic stance; when the second speaker resists performing the suggested action and disagrees with the allocation of deontic rights, the situation is described as deontic incongruence. In her most recent studies, Stevanovic (2018; 2021) expands the scope of deontic right from “deciding other's action” to “deciding action,” which includes not only joint actions or requests but also the speaker's unilateral actions such as announcements of one's own plans.

The new developments enable the notion of deontic rights to be applied to a wide range of social actions involving power negotiation in social structures. For example, Couper-Kuhlen and Etelämäki (2014) argue that division-of-labor proposals (*(you) do X, I'll Y*) in English and Finnish

transform unilateral requests and offers into biparty joint projects by distributing deontic primacy⁴, agency, and responsibilities more evenly between the participants. Thompson, Fox, and Couper-Kuhlen (2015) find that strong claims to deontic rights in response to remote requests connote high entitlement and low contingency; weak claims to deontic rights indicate low entitlement and high contingency (Thompson, Fox & Couper-Kuhlen 2015). They also point out that a speaker who complies agentively to a request displays stronger deontic rights than one who do not. In their investigation on telescoping responses to unfinished requests, Fox and Heinemann (2019) argue that telescoping responses made by shoetenders in their conversation with customers display both a high deontic right and epistemic right. The most recent application of deontic rights is Thompson, Fox, and Raymond's (2021) study on joint actions. They find a correlation between the deontic strength displayed in the linguistic formats of proposals for joint actions and the recipient's disposition of acceptance, which resonates with Nolen and Maynard's (2013) findings on the speaker's orientation to contingencies in requests when discouraging signals of granting a request have been displayed in the prior turns.

It is noteworthy that conversation analysts investigate social structures such as power relationships by examining actual conversational practices and their associated sequential environments in conversation. This treats social structure as a dynamic (re)evaluation by the participants on a moment-by-moment basis, which should be distinguished from traditional

⁴ Using the term "deontic primacy," which is more commonly referred to as "deontic rights" by Stevanovic (2011, 2018) and others, Couper-Kuhlen and Etelämäki (2014) emphasizes the local design of deontic rights, i.e., conversation internal practices, rather than the real-world social structure.

sociolinguistic approaches (Schegloff 1991) that tend to explain linguistic phenomena using static predetermined ideas in the social structure (e.g., the notion of social distance in Brown and Gilman (1960), “expected roles” in Ervin-Tripp (1976), “social roles” in Parsons (1951) and conventional social identities in Brown and Levinson’s (1987) politeness theory).

The present study takes an innovative approach to this line of research and uses deontic rights as a hypernym term that includes entitlement and obligation across directive-commissive actions. In commissive actions (e.g., offers, proposals for joint actions, announcements of my-side arrangements, grantings of a request, and promises), the issue of deontic rights concerns the speaker’s own future action, hence referring to whether the speaker has the right to or is obligated to perform the nominated future action; in directive actions (e.g., requests, suggestions, and invitations), the issue of deontic rights concerns deciding other’s actions, hence referring to whether the speaker is entitled to make the other participant perform the nominated future action.

Note the notion of “deontic” in “deontic authority” should be distinguished from “deontic modality” in traditional semantic studies. Deontic rights deals with real-world power and authority in social structures (“deontic status”) and the participants’ claims of power in interaction on a moment-by-moment basis (“deontic stance”); deontic modality is a static semantic category that indicates permissions and obligations emanated from an external source or an authority (Palmer 2001).

1.1.5.2.6 Commitment

The dimension of commitment in promising has long been examined in Searle's (1969) discussion on direct and indirect speech acts and the illocutionary force of commissives. Specifically, the *propositional content rule* requires that a promise must be uttered in the context of a sentence (Searle 1969) and *the preparatory rules* indicate that "it is not obvious to both S[peaker] and H[earer] that S [peaker] will do A[ction] in the normal course of events" (Searle 1969, 59). These two rules point out the fundamental difference between future-oriented commissive actions and "here and now matters" as many recruitment actions and their responses: the former requires verbal expression whereas the latter can be performed with non-verbal behaviors (Kendrick & Drew 2016). Similar ideas regarding the requirement of explicit commitments in promises are also proposed by Brandom (1994) and Brown and Levinson (1987).

In a general sense, Brandom (1994) and Clark (1996) emphasize the collaboration between the speaker and the addressee, and especially highlight the agency of the recipient of commitments. Brandom (1994) believes that social practices are games of *discursive commitment* in which participants exhibit and alter their two deontic statuses (commitment and entitlement) through various performances. When a promisor undertakes a commitment, they are also licensing the promisee an entitlement to hold them accountable, including by instituting possible sanctions in cases of nonperformance (Brandom 1994: 164). Clark (1996) proposes the idea of *joint activity*, or *joint commitment*, and treats promising as one type of joint commitment because promises need

to be heard, understood, and recognized by the addressees, otherwise, the action is incomplete and might be treated only as an attempt.

In CA and IL, the few studies that investigate the degree of commitments have been focused on responses to a wide range of directive actions that are referred to as *remote proposals* by Houtkoop (1987, in Maynard (1990)) and Lindström (1999; 2017), *remote requests* by Steensig and Heinemann (2014), and *deferred requests* by Thompson, Fox, and Couper-Kuhlen (2015). Houtkoop (1987) firstly distinguishes remote and immediate proposals based on whether the proposal can be fulfilled on the spot (defining proposal loosely to cover a wide range of request-like actions) and analyzes the different sequential structures of the two types. She argues that proposal-response sequences of immediate events follow a three-turn structure, whereas proposal-response sequences of remote events tend to be expanded with two extra turns so that interactants can display their commitments to the future proposal.

Lindström (1999, 2017) continues this line of research by focusing on remote proposals implemented by *yes-no* interrogative questions and their preferred responses. Lindström (1999) points out that the speaker is expected to display a commitment for the future action in the response to a remote proposal, otherwise the response is treated as insufficient, and the element of commitment will be pursued. Lindström (2017) presents evidence from Swedish conversation that expanded TCUs or turns, instead of an affirmative response token, are necessary to express the speaker's commitment to the future action. In the line of research on grammar and interaction,

Thompson, Fox, and Couper-Kuhlen (2015) also recognized the importance of displaying commitment to future activities, although their main arguments rest on the symmetric relationship between claims of deontic rights and the linguistic formats of requests and their responses.

In a broad sense, the current study takes an inclusive approach to commissive actions by situating various actions as a member of the continuum of commitment, such as minimal compliances to requests, offers, proposals, gratings of requests, and promising. As will be analyzed in Chapter 3, low-commitment actions are expressed with particles, lexical phrases, and modified by illocutionary force modifying devices (IFMDs) such as vague time references (e.g., *xiàcì* ‘next time’), the modal verb *kěyǐ* ‘can,’ and the utterance-final particle *ba*. High-commitment actions are marked by illocutionary force indicating devices (IFIDs) such as the performative verb *chéngnuò* ‘promise,’ the modal verb *huì* and repetition. In a narrow sense, the distinction between remote and immediate proposals made in previous studies illuminates the defining features of promising in this study: promising in second position is a response to remote proposals that is often performed in expanded sequences with a strong commitment.

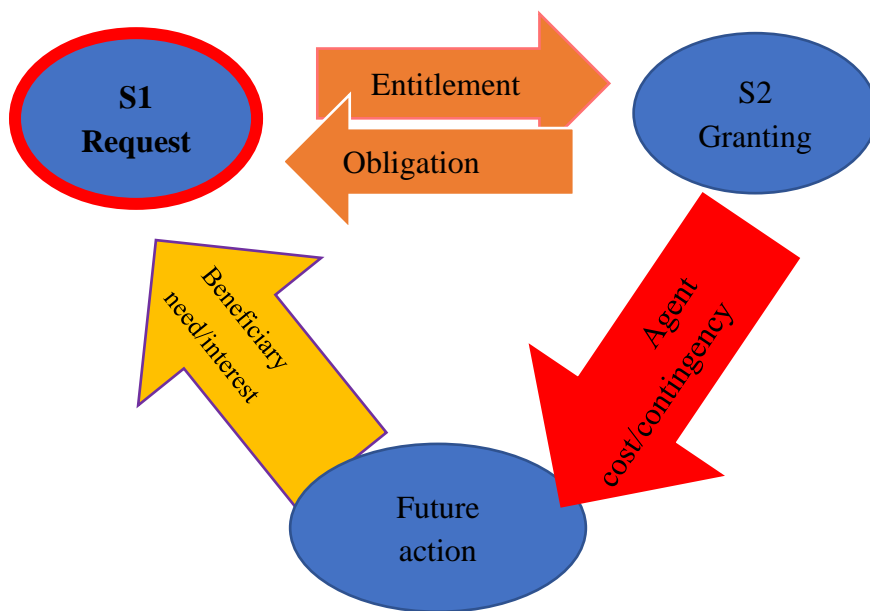
1.2 Analytic framework: A model of the social action triangle

Inspired by previous studies on directive-commissive actions and Du Bois’ (2007) stance triangle, I propose a model of the *social action triangle* to analyze the aforementioned dimensions that affect the formation and ascription of directive-commissive actions in social interaction. The

basic model of the social action triangle for directive-commissive actions consists of three vertices that represent the speaker, the recipient, and the nominated future action, and three directed edges that represent the relationships between the vertices. With some modifications of certain variables, the triangle model can be applied to various actions in the directive-commissive family as they share fundamental features including benefactive relationship, the negotiation of ownership, deontic rights (entitlement and obligation), and accountability. In what follows, I present a diagram for directive actions first, then a diagram for commissive actions.

1.2.1 Social action triangle of directive-commissive actions

Figure 1.1 Model of directive-commissive actions



Taking the request as a prototypical example of a directive action, in Figure 1.1, speaker 1 (S1) is the beneficiary of the requested future action; speaker 2 (S2), is the agent of the future action if the request is granted. By making the request, S1 displays a varying degree of entitlement

to S2. By granting the request, S2 indicates that they are or will be obligated to perform the action in the future.

On the first dimension (the yellow arrow on the left side), the speaker observes their need/interest/preference for the future action or assistance, which they may or may not directly express in the request. In the second dimension, the speaker assesses their deontic right (the entitlement to make the request and the obligation to perform the request/committed action), which could be displayed with various linguistic formats and is generally influenced by their social/institutional roles (the orange arrow on the top). For requests, the entitlement can be indicated by the explicitness of the request; in the case of commissive actions, whether and how S2 is obligated to perform the future action can be displayed by the degrees of their commitment, for example in ‘simple acquiescence’ and ‘agentive commitment’ in Thompson, Fox, and Couper-Kuhlen (2015).

The third dimension considered in requests is the costs and contingencies that affect the recipient’s ability and willingness to grant the request, which also may or may not be articulated in the request. The three dimensions operate separately and are coded with different multimodal resources in a request – one dimension might be foregrounded while the other two are absent⁵, or all of the three dimensions can be present in a more elaborated and complex request. Lastly, as one vertex of the triangle, the nominated future action also plays an important role in action

⁵ This might lead to Curl and Drew’s (2008) observation on the correlation between entitlement and contingency.

formation and ascription, for example, whether the action is a part of joint activity and how severe the consequentiality of the action is, which will be discussed in Chapter 5.

The four dimensions in the triangle originate in the real-world social structure or situational context and are presented in the interactional space with multimodal resources. On the one hand, the consideration of these dimensions contributes to the participants' decisions on *when to make the request* – sequence position – and *how to make the request* – turn design. On the other hand, according to the stance and status contrast found in previous studies on epistemic rights (Heritage 2012), beneficiary relationships (Clayman & Heritage 2014), and deontic rights (Stevanovic 2011; Stevanovic 2018; Stevanovic & Peräkylä 2012), these real-world factors might be presented differently from their actual status to serve the participants' interactional agendas. Moreover, participants may reevaluate these factors on a moment-by-moment basis as they encounter the recipient's discouraging signals (Nolen & Maynard 2013) or other types of disposition towards the prior action (Thompson, Fox and Raymond 2021) through the course of interaction. The triangle model provides an analytic framework for how conversation-external factors – including social structures (e.g., deontic rights) and situational contexts (cost/benefits, contingencies, and the consequentiality of the nominated future action) – and conversation-internal structures, including sequential position and multimodal turn design, are intertwined with each other in the formation and ascription of social actions.

1.2.2 The triangle model of commissive actions

The current study takes an inclusive approach to defining commissive actions, which include a wide range of first- and second-position actions that display a varying degree of commitment to perform a future action, such as offering, proposing, and granting a request weakly or agentively. The triangle model of second-position commissive actions is the same as the one in Figure 1.1 and will not be repeated here. Ex 1.1 is an example of second-position promises.

In this conversation, the father (DAD) firstly requests the older son (OSN) to tell his mother to pay attention to a letter that has been sent to her (lines 01-03). The first second-position commissive action is produced in line 04: the older son grants the request with a minimal lexical item *duì* '(That's) right.' In lines 09 and 10, the father and the younger son (YSN) each make another request to pursue a stronger commitment as they treat the first commitment in line 04 as not sufficient. As a response, in line 11, the older son makes his second commitment with a type-conforming format and a stressed *huì* 'will', indicating his strong commitment.

Ex 1.1 CallHome_0756

- 01 DAD: 我 那 中间, 昨天 寄 一 信 给 她 啊,
wǒ nà zhōngjiān, zuótiān jì yí xìn gěi tā ā,
1sg that middle yesterday send one letter to 3sg PRT
'I sent her a letter yesterday,'
- 02 你 叫 她, °hh 呢:: 注意 一 下 吧 就 行 了 ;
nǐ jiào tā, °hh e:: zhùyì yíxià ba jiù xíng le;
2sg tell 3sg uh pay.attention briefly PRT just fine PRT
'you tell her to pay attention. That's it.'
- 03 免得 她 走掉 还 拿 不到 呢.
miǎnde tā zǒudiào hái ná bú dào ne.
in.case 3sg leave still take NEG-get PRT
'in case she has left by then and can't get (the letter).'

04 OSN: → 对.
duì.
 correct
 `{That's} right.'
 ((Five lines omitted))

09 DAD: 你 跟 她 讲 一 下.
nǐ gēn tā jiǎng yíxià.
 2sg with 3sg tell briefly
 `You tell her.'

10 YSN: 你- 你- 你 跟 她 讲 一 下 吧,
nǐ-nǐ-nǐ gēn tā jiǎng yíxià ba,
 2sg 2sg 2sg with 3sg tell briefly PRT
 `{How about} you tell her.'

11 [好 吧. 哎.]
[hǎo ba. āi.]
 Okay PRT INT
 Okay? Yeah.

12 OSN: → [好. 我 会] 跟 她 讲; 好.
[hǎo. wǒ HUI] gēn tā jiǎng; hǎo.
 Okay 1sg will with 3sg tell Okay
 `Okay. I will tell her. Okay.'

13 (0.2)

14 YSN: 对; 我 们 是 寄 到 东 强 那 个 地 方 的.
duì; wǒmen shì jìdào dōngqiáng nàge dìfāng de.
 Correct 1pl is send-to NAME that place PRT
 `Right. We sent the letter to Dongqiang's.'

15 OSN: 好, 好.
hǎo, hǎo.
 INT INT
 `Okay, okay.'

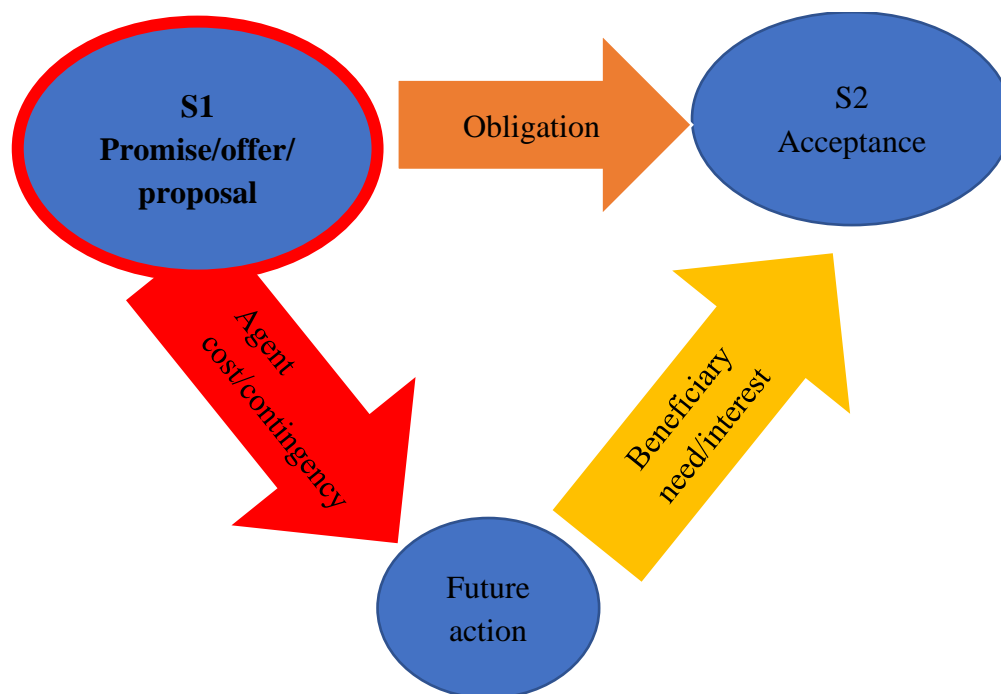
16 YSN: 寄 到 东 强 那 个 单 位 的; 哎.
jìdào dōngqiáng nàge dānwèi de;, āi.
 Send-to NAME that company PRT INT
 `Sent to Dongqiang's company, yeah.'

17 OSN: 可 以 可 以; (...) yeah,
kěyǐ kěyǐ; (...) yeah,
 Okay Okay yeah

'Okay, okay {that works,} yeah.'
 18 YSN: 麻烦 你 跟 她 说 一下,
máfan nǐ gēn tā shuō yíxià,
 bother 2sg with 3sg say briefly
 把 信 收 一下 吧; (.) 好 吧.
bǎ XÌN shōu yíxià ba; (.) hǎo ba.
 BA letter receive briefly PRT okay PRT
 'Please tell her to take the letter, Okay?'
 10 OSN: Yeah, 好, 好;
Yeah, hǎo, hǎo;
 'Yeah, Okay, okay.'

Figure 1.2 is the triangle model of first-position commissive actions. In this model, S1 is the agent of the future action and S2 is the beneficiary. With dimensions remaining the same as in Figure 1.1, this diagram underscores S1's claim of deontic right and obligation in performing the nominated future action, which is crucial to S1's choice of sequential position and the turn design of the commissive action. Typical first-position commissive actions include volunteered promises made to fulfill pre-existing obligations, proposals for joint activities, and offers. The latter two actions are included because they both display an initial commitment to performing the future action, although the actual performance depends on the recipient's acceptance.

Figure 1.2 Model of first-position commissive actions



Ex 1.2 is an example of promising to fulfill unfulfilled pre-existing obligations, which can be seen as the prototype of first-position commissive actions. In this conversation, the parents (MOM and DAD) who live in mainland China and their daughter (DAU) who lives in the U.S. are talking about letter communication among themselves. Two promises are produced by the daughter in this conversation: lines 16 and 17 ‘After you receive my letter, I will send you some photos,’ and line 20 ‘Right, right, right, I- I- will mail it this week for sure.’ The first promise is produced in first position and the second promise in second position.

Ex 1.2 CallHome 0711-0:42

01	MOM:	哦, 你 信	没有	寄,	是 伐;
		ò nǐ ↑xìn	méiyǒu	jì	shì fá;
		PRT 2sg letter	NEG	mail	is Q((dialect))

- 02 DAU: 'Oh, you haven't mailed the letter, is it?'
- 对, 我信 还 没 寄 呢,
duì wǒ xìn hái méi jì ne
 correct 1sg letter yet NEG mail PRT
- 'That's correct, I haven't mailed the letter.'
- 03 挺 忙 的 啊 这阵子 还.
tǐng máng de ā zhèzhènzǐ hái.
 pretty busy PRT PRT this.period.of.time quite
 '{I've been} quite busy recently.'
- 04 MOM: 啊, 没事儿.
ā méishìr
 INT no.problem
 'Ahh, no problem.'
 ((lines omitted))
- 14 DAU: 哎哟, 你们 的 信 我 都 收到 了, 对, 我- 我-
āiyō nǐmen de xìn wǒ dōu shōudào le duì wǒ- wǒ-
 INT 2pl GEN letter 1sg all receive PFV correct 1sg 1sg
 'Ah, I have received your letter, yeah, I- I- '
- 15 DAD: 哦, 好的.
ò hǎode.
 INT okay
 'Oh, okay.'
- 16 DAU: → 对, 反正 我- 我- (这/寄) 信 完 了 收到,
duì fǎnzhèng wǒ- wǒ- (zhè/jì) xìn wán le shōudào.
 Right anyway 1sg 1sg this letter complete PFV receive
 'Anyways after you receive my letter,'
- 17 再 寄 几 张 照片 给 你们 ((xxx)).
zài jì jǐ zhāng zhàopiàn gěi nǐmen ((xxx)).
 then mail few CL photo to 2pl
 '{I will} send you some photos then.'
- 18 DAU: [我们 又] ((xxx))
[wǒmen yòu]
 1pl again
 'We again ((xxx))'
- 19 DAD: [啊], 有空 你 写 信 来 吧,
[ā] yǒukòng nǐ xiě xìn lái ba,
 PRT have.free.time 2sg write letter come PRT
 'Ah, {if you} have time, you {should} write a letter {to us}.'
- 20 DAU: → 对 对 对, 我- 我- 这 周 肯定 寄 出去,

	<i>duì duì duì, wǒ- wǒ- zhè zhōu kěndìng jì chūqù.</i>
	Right right right 1sg 1sg this week definitely mail out
	'Right, right, right, I- I- will mail it this week for sure.'
21	然后 (.) 对, 你们 现在 也 挺 好 的.
	<i>ránhòu(.) duì, nǐmen xiànzài yě tǐng hǎo de.</i>
	DM correct 2pl now also pretty good PRT
	'And then, right, you two are pretty good now...'
22	房子 也 不 能 弄 旧 房子 啊.
	<i>fángzi yě bù néng nòng jiù fángzi ā.</i>
	house also NEG can make old house PRT
	'{in terms of} house, {you} can't just get an old house.'

1.2.3 An example analysis applying the triangle model

The triangle model allows commissive actions to be analyzed comprehensively and is used as the analytic framework in this study. This section takes promises produced in lines 16, 17, and line 20 in Ex 1.2 as examples to demonstrate the application of the model of first-position commissive actions illustrated in Figure 1.2. The daughter is the agent of the committed future action – writing a letter to her parents – and the parents are the beneficiaries of the action.

First, regarding the social relationship among the participants, the parents not only have the emotional needs and interests to know about their daughter's life abroad but also are entitled to receiving a letter from the daughter. With this understanding, the mother in line 01 explicitly points out the daughter's nonperformance of the expected action with a negative declarative sentence followed by a tag question, 'Oh, you haven't mailed the letter, is it?' The father displays his entitlement in line 19 with a request designed with a declarative sentence followed by the suggestive utterance-final particle *ba* (Li & Thompson 1989), 'if you have time, write a letter (to us).' On the other hand, the daughter is obligated to write to her parents as a pre-existing family

obligation. When she fails to do so, she is held accountable by the mother (line 01), then voluntarily provides an account in line 03. In lines 16 and 17, the daughter makes a promise in first position to remedy her nonperformance of the existing obligation.

In terms of costs and contingencies, the daughter explicitly accounts for her nonperformance by stating that ‘I’ve been quite busy recently’ (line 02). The father includes this contingency issue as a preface in his request with an implicit conditional clause *yǒukòng*, ‘(if you) have time.’ Here both entitlement and contingency are present in the same request action. In contrast, benefactive relationship and ownership relationship is not explicitly formulated in his turn design.

Regarding the daughter’s second-position promise in line 20, it is a response to the dad’s request and an upgraded commitment compared to the first-position promise in lines 16 and 17. Multiple linguistic devices are used to assert her commitment and deontic right toward her own future action. For example, the adverb *kěndìng* ‘definitely,’ the exact time reference *zhèzhōu* ‘this week,’ and the multiple saying *duì duì duì* ‘right right right,’ which displays her agreement to the dad’s request and meanwhile indicates that no more pursuits are needed (Stivers 2004).

Lastly, the named action ‘writing a letter’ is considered by the participants as a low-stakes and low-cost action with minor real-world consequences, which increases the possibility of making strong commitments.

In this study, I focus on two particular dimensions of commissive actions in this triangle model: the social relationship and the feature of the committed action. Specifically, I examine 1) how various linguistic and non-linguistic resources are deployed by the speaker to express their

commitment and to negotiate their deontic rights, 2) how the type of obligation shapes the sequence organization of commissive actions, and 3) how the speaker designs their commitment based on their evaluation of the consequence of the committed action.

1.3 Organization of the study

This study investigates commissive actions, especially promising, as social actions in interactions, including their sequential organization and action design. The dissertation consists of five chapters. Chapter 1 provides a review of studies on commissive actions approached by different methodologies and establishes the analytic framework. Chapter 2 introduces the data and methodology used in the study and defines the distinctive features of promising in the context of commissive actions.

Chapter 3 examines the lexico-syntactic design of commissive actions and analyzes how speakers use these linguistic resources to negotiate their deontic rights – to claim the right to determine a future event. Data analysis shows that the most observed form of commissive actions in Mandarin conversation is the simple declarative, referred to as “base form.” Depending on the specific sequential environment, speakers use different illocutionary force indicating devices (IFIDs) to make stronger commitments and illocutionary force mitigating devices (IFMDs) to make relatively weak commitments. Among the many linguistic devices, this chapter discusses the utterance-final particle *ba* and the modal verb *kěyǐ* as examples of IFMDs and the modal verb *huì* and self-repetition as two examples of IFIDs.

Chapter 4 focuses on the sequence organization of commissive actions, particularly in the environment where the speaker makes a promise to perform an unfulfilled pre-existing obligation. The analysis in this chapter starts with an ordinary conversation and shows that promises made in first position are preferred over those made in second position. Moreover, voluntarily acknowledging the nonperformance of the expected action and voluntarily providing accounts are also preferred. In the second part of this chapter, sequence organization and turn design of officials' promises on *Wenzheng* programs are analyzed to provide a full picture of promising in different genres.

Chapter 5 conducts a multimodal analysis of responsive commitment actions and finds speakers follow the principle of proportionality in designing their responsive commitment actions using multimodal resources: big promises are often made to perform future actions with severe consequences, and small commitments are made for future actions without significant consequences. What is noteworthy is that the speaker's evaluation and reevaluation of consequences are not objective or static but subjective and dynamic. This chapter particularly emphasizes the semantic coherence between gesture and speech in interaction, although the two modes of interactional resources may operate across different functions and appear to be contradictory.

Chapter 6 summarizes the findings of this study and discusses the implications and future directions.

2 Data and methodology

2.1 Data

Promising is prevalent in social life, but its frequency differs in different contexts of interaction. For example, previous studies have found that the most explicit promises – those expressed with performative verbs and modal verbs – are more likely to occur in political discourses. To understand promising and other commissive actions in different genres, this study uses both ordinary conversational data and institutional conversation represented by government official-journalist interactions. In terms of the modes of communication, the ordinary conversation dataset includes audio recordings of telephone call conversations and video recordings of face-to-face conversations, and the official-journalist conversation data includes videos extracted from the live broadcast accountability television program *Dianshi Wenzheng* ‘Questioning Officials’ (hereinafter referred to as “*Wenzheng* programs”). Table 2.1 is a summary of the three types of data.

Table 2.1 Overview of data

Data set	Mode of communication	Genre	Duration
CallHome/CallFriend	Audio	Ordinary	42 hours
Summer 2019	Video	Ordinary	12 hours
<i>Wenzheng</i> programs	Broadcast video	Institutional	36 hours

2.1.1 Government official-journalist conversations

Government official-journalist conversations in this study are collected from the live broadcast television program *Dianshi Wenzheng* ‘Questioning Official’ programs (“*Wenzheng* programs”) where local government officials are held accountable by journalists, experts, and

residents for government failures in local affairs such as food safety, environmental pollution, and equality issues in education. *Wenzheng* programs were first launched in 2011 in the central provincial city of Wuhan and have since spread to more than 25 cities across the country as of 2016. It has been recognized as an efficient platform for the so-called *yulun jiandu* ‘public supervision’ and transparent government promoted by the central government and the Chinese Communist Party. Many officials who were held accountable on the live broadcast but later found to not have solved the problems as they promised were punished or removed from their position (Tang 2019).

Figure 2.1 shows the setting of a typical *Wenzheng* programs episode: a host, who is also a journalist (one on the Wuhan *Wenzheng* programs, two on the Xi’an and Nanning editions), facing the camera and standing in the middle of the stage who is also the main questioner; one or more senior officials on the left side with about ten subordinates sitting in the back rows; and experts or commentators sitting on the right side of the stage with about twenty journalist and resident representatives sitting behind the experts. Off the stage sit audience members including ordinary citizens, junior officials, and office staff from different government departments.

Figure 2.1 Stage setting of Nanning *Danshi Wenzheng* 'Questioning Officials on TV'



As Table 2.2 shows, the current dataset consists of 24 episodes (each approximately 1.5 hours long) of *Wenzheng* programs TV program broadcast in three provincial capital cities from 2014 to 2018: Wuhan in central China (ten episodes), Nanning in southwestern China (two episodes), and Xi'an in western China (four episodes). The three cities are selected because of access to the video recordings and their nationwide influence. Based on the results of ethnographic observations made in Xi'an and Zhoushan (a small city on the southeast coast), semi-structured interviews with an official from Hangzhou (a provincial city on the southeast coast) and a producer from Jinan (a provincial city in eastern China), interactions on the *Wenzheng* programs are not pre-scripted or rehearsed. All officials are required to answer questions on the spot. Therefore, these conversations can be justified as naturally occurring conversations.

Table 2.2 Data summary of *Wenzheng* programs

Location	Number of episodes	Year of broadcast	Total duration
Xi'an	4	2016-2018	6 hours
Wuhan	10	2012-2017	15 hours
Nanning	10	2014-2018	15 hours
Total	24		36 hours

2.1.2 Ordinary conversation

Ordinary conversational data in this study include audio-recorded telephone call conversations and video-recorded face-to-face conversations. The telephone call conversations are extracted from the CallHome (approximately 18 hours) and CallFriend corpora (approximately 24 hours, Canavan and Zipperlen 1996) collected in the 1990s and hosted by Linguistics Data Consortium. Participants of the CallHome (140 participants) and CallFriend (35 from mainland China and 60 from Taiwan) corpora are demographically diverse and reside in various locations in mainland China, Taiwan, and United States. Conversations in the dataset cover a wide range of ordinary topics, such as family relationships and arrangements of activities. These factors make the two corpora a balanced conversational dataset suited for the current study.

The video-recorded face-to-face conversation dataset, Summer 2019, consists of 12 hours of conversations with 31 distinct participants collected in the summer of 2019 in mainland China. To ensure that the conversations are naturally occurring, data collection was conducted during participants' regular activities in their residential locations, such as family meals, board games, casual chatting, and in other familiar settings such as their encounters with service personnel in a restaurant. Participants were not instructed to conduct conversations on any specific topics, nor

were they notified about the research topic of this study. To minimize the bias caused by regional dialects and cultures, data was collected in two different cities: Beijing, representing Mandarin spoken in northern China, and Zhoushan, representing Mandarin spoken in southern China. Table 2.3 shows total time of video recordings made in different settings: there are 13.7 hours of conversations among family and friends in a casual setting, 1.7 hours of conversations among children aged 8 to 10 during a board game and a video game, one hour of conversation happened in a restaurant between a participant and a waitress, and 0.6 hours of conversation between a domestic helper and the house owner. The latter two settings are less ordinary compared to others but are still included here because the participants situated themselves in a mode of everyday communication and they are more ordinary compared to the *Wenzheng* programs.

Table 2.3 Settings of the Summer 2019 face-to-face conversation dataset

Ordinary: Family and friends	Ordinary: kids game playing	Ordinary: restaurant service	Ordinary: domestic helper	Total
13.7h	1.7h	1h	0.6	17h

2.2 Methodology

This dissertation adopts conversation analysis, interactional linguistics, and multimodal analysis approaches to investigate speakers' commissive actions in interaction. In addition, quantitative methods are used to identify general patterns.

2.2.1 Conversation analysis

Conversation analysts study social interaction as an orderly phenomenon, examine conversation participants' practices on a moment-by-moment basis, and identify social norms

shared and performed by participants as members of society. This study applies foundational concepts in CA such as *action formation and ascription*, *sequence organization*, and *preference organization*, which are often intertwined in social interaction.

Action formation and ascription refers to the design and recognition of social actions by participants. Conversation analysts approach action formation and ascription with inquiries in two aspects: position and composition, both of which are related to sequence organization and preference organization. The inquiry of position includes the placement of turn constructional units (TCU, Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson 1974; Clayman 2012) – whether a TCU is placed in the initial, middle, or final position of a turn – and the position of a turn in a sequence of talk – whether the turn is produced as an initial turn or as a response. The inquiry of composition includes various interactional resources, including lexico-syntactic, prosodic, and visual-bodily designs of a turn.

Sequence organization is a fundamental locus of CA studies and sequential position is essential to action formation and ascription (e.g., Lerner (1996) and Schegloff (2007a)). According to Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson's (1974) pioneering work on turn-taking, ordinary conversations are organized by the following three rules in an orderly manner: a. the current speaker selects the next speaker, b. the next speaker self-selects, and c. the current speaker continues to talk. Institutional talk such as that on the *Wenzheng programs*, however, has a pre-allocated turn-taking system and participants are expected to only speak when it is their turn (Heritage & Clayman 2010). Participants' talk in their turn is not independent of each other but

should be seen as a “turn-in-a-series” with the potential of being developed into a *sequence* (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson 1974).

Social actions in interaction are naturally constrained by the turn-taking order in a conversation. At the local level, the basic organizational unit of a sequence is an *adjacency pair*, which consists of two orderly components: the *first-pair part* (FPP) and the *second-pair part* (SPP) (Schegloff 2007). An FPP sets the agendas of the sequence and makes a certain type of SPP conditionally relevant; the respondent is constrained to provide a relevant SPP response (Heritage & Raymond 2005). In natural conversations, sequences are often expanded in three ways: pre-expansion lays the preliminary groundwork for the base sequence; insert-expansion addresses issues in the first-position action or solves conditions for the second-position action; post-expansion offers a reaction to the second-position action (sequence-closing third (SCT)) or pursues/invites elaboration or qualification for the second-position action in the base sequence (Stivers 2012). In addition to local level sequence organization, conversations also have an *overall structural organization* (Robinson 2012) where several activities are sequentially ordered as a “big package” (Sacks 1995) or a larger interactional “project” (Levinson 2012).

In this study, promising and other commissive actions are analyzed at both the local level of adjacency pairs and the global level of overall structural organization. As presented in the social action triangle model in Section 1.2, this study distinguishes first-position commissive actions and second-position commissive actions, which is also a crucial defining feature of promising. Chapter

4 will further delve into the issue of sequence organization in promising, especially how it is shaped by the type of obligation involved in conversations.

Preference organization functions in the way that interactants implicitly follow certain preference principles that systematically promote social affiliation and solidarity in producing and recognizing conversational actions (Clayman 2002; Robinson & Bolden 2010; Pomerantz & Heritage 2012). Some common preferences include the preference for recognizable references over unrecognizable ones (Sacks & Schegloff 1979), the preference for agreements over disagreements (Pomerantz 1984) in responding position, the preference for self-correction, and the avoidance of other-correction (Jefferson & Schegloff 1977; Jefferson 1987), advice-giving and other face-threatening actions in initiating position (Pomerantz & Heritage 2012). The position and composition of social action are highly influenced by social preference and interpersonal relationships. For example, dispreferred actions such as requests (“face-threatening actions” in Brown and Levinson (1987) are often delayed and mitigated whereas preferred actions such as offers tend to occur early (Heritage 1984).

Taking the CA approach, my analytic claims of the observed phenomena will be supported by a combination of various data-internal evidence reflecting the participants’ orientation in the conversation. These include participants’ general orientation in the conversation, a recipient’s immediate response in the subsequent turn (“next-turn proof procedure” in Sacks et al. (1974)), deviant cases when a conditionally relevant action is due but is not produced, and participants’

explicit mentioning of the violation of social norms in a subsequent turn. Other types of evidence include those from contextual commonalities such as co-occurring talk and environments, as well as alternative practices with the same sequence environment but different results (Sidnell 2012).

2.2.2 Interactional linguistics

Another important approach adopted in this dissertation is interactional linguistics. The core idea in interactional linguistics is grammar in interaction (Ford, Fox & Thompson 1996), which originates in systematic functional linguistic theories where structures are conceptualized as a source of interaction and their functions are studied in real-life discourse (Couper-Kuhlen & Selting 2017). Interactional Linguistics (IL) has incorporated methods in CA, discourse-functional linguistics, and the approach of contextualized language use in anthropological linguistics (Gumperz 1982) to examine how linguistic resources and bodily-visual behaviors are used in and shaped by interactional environments on a moment-by-moment basis (Fox et al. 2012; Couper-Kuhlen & Selting 2017).

In this study, I follow CA and IL conventions, from collecting video recordings of naturally occurring conversations, compiling data collection of commissive actions and promising, and transcribing them, to noticing relevant phenomena and conducting line-by-line empirical analysis.

2.2.3 Multimodal analysis of action in social interaction

Social action in human interaction is believed to be a laminated structure with multiple layers of semiotic fields, and action ascription is accomplished with all different types of them (Goodwin 2000; Goodwin 2013; Kendon 2004; Enfield 2009). The development of video-recording

technologies has benefited the study of human interaction in CA and IL, as scholars have started analyzing conversations in multiple modalities, including speech, prosody, gaze, gestures, and other bodily movements that cooperatively construct human interaction (Stivers & Sidnell 2005). The present study follows this research line and investigates multimodal resources speakers adopt in promising and other commissive actions. Specifically, I use the speech analysis software Praat (Boersma & Weenink 2022) to examine prosodic features such as pitch, duration, and intensity of sounds, and the multimodal transcribing program ELAN (Version 6.3) (ELAN (Version 6.3) [Computer software] 2022) to segment and annotate video-recorded conversations.

2.2.4 Transcript

Among the datasets, transcripts of the CallHome/CallFriend ordinary conversations and some episodes of the *Wenzheng* programs were downloaded from their official websites and manually revised. Recordings of face-to-face interactions are manually transcribed. The transcribing program ELAN (Version 6.3) is used to annotate the speaker's gaze, gestures, and other visual-bodily behaviors.

In terms of transcription conventions, I adopt Li's (2019) approach to transcribing Mandarin conversations. Specifically, a four-line transcription including lexical tone marks is provided to represent spoken Mandarin. Prosodic production such as unit-final pitch movements is transcribed following the GAT-2 system (Selting et al. 2009) rather than the more common CA transcription system developed by Jefferson (Jefferson 2004). The major consideration is that GAT-2 allows a more elaborate representation of prosodic features that may have pragmatic functions in Mandarin

conversation, such as speech rate and turn-final prosody. For example, the turn final falling pitch movement represented by “.” in Jefferson’s (2004) system is further categorized into low fall, represented by “;” and high fall, represented by “:” in GAT-2 (see a more comprehensive discussion in Li (2019)). In Chapter 5, where multimodal analysis is conducted, hand and head movements are transcribed following Kendon’s (2004) system, and gaze and other visual behaviors are transcribed with commentary. In addition, a horizontal layout transcript consists of ELAN annotation, and images are provided to represent the visual behaviors of the target lines in the analysis.

2.3 Defining commissive actions and promising

2.3.1 Commissive actions

As discussed in earlier sections, this study treats commissive actions as existing along a continuum of commitments. Based on their sequence position, commissive actions are classified into *initiative commitment* and *responsive commitment*. Initiative commitment is those made in first position such as offering and proposing. Line 03 in Ex 2.1 is an example of offering in first position. Responsive commitments are those produced in second position such as minimal compliances, acceptances of a proposal, and grantings of a request. Line 03 in Ex 2.2 is an example of minimal compliance in second position, and line 04 in Ex 2.3 is an example of agentive granting or promising in second position. An exception is promising, which can be made in both second-

position as in line 04, Ex 2.3 or in first-position as in lines 16 and 17, Ex 2.4. Promising will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

Ex 2.1 Summer_2019_GH030250

01 MIN: 庞大 的 身躯 在 这里。
pángdà de shēnqū zài zhèlǐ.
huge NOMbody at here
'(His) huge body {will} appear here {on the screen}'
02 (1.0)
03 BEL:→ 我 可以 帮 你 改 小 一点。
wǒ kěyǐ bāng nǐ gǎi xiǎo yī.diǎn.
1sg can help 2sg modify small a.bit
'I can help you modify {it} to {a} smaller {size}.'
04 MIN: ((laughter))

Ex 2.2 Summer_2019_0822_00025_0107

01 MAN: 这 什么 鬼, hahaha
zhè shénme guǐ, hahaha
this what ghost
'What is this? ((slang, similar to "what the heck"))'
02 LEL: 这 个 用 好 给 我 啊-
zhè ge yòng hǎo gěi wǒ ā-
this CL use finish give 1sg PRT
'Give this back to me after you finish using.'
03 MAN: <<p>哦;>
<<p> ò;>
'Okay.'

Ex 2.3 CallHome_0756

01 DAD: 你 跟 她 讲 一下。
nǐ gēn tā jiǎng yíxià.
2sg with 3sg tell briefly
'{Could} you tell her?'
02 YSN: 你 你- 你 跟 她 讲 一下 吧,
nǐ nǐ- nǐ gēn tā jiǎng yíxià ba,
2sg 2sg 2sg with 3sg tell briefly PRT
'{Could} you tell her? Okay?'

03 [好 吧, 哎.]
 [hǎo ba, āi.]
 Okay PRT INJ
 'Okay?'

04 OSN: → 好, 我会] 跟她讲, 好.
 [hǎo, wǒ huì] gēn tā jiǎng, hǎo.
 Okay 1sg HUÌ with 3sg tell Okay
 'Okay, I will tell her, Okay.'

05 (0.2)

Ex 2.4 CallHome_0711

01 MOM: 哦, 你信没有寄, 是伐.
 ò nǐ xìn méiyǒu jì shì fá.
 PRT 2sg letter NEG mail is PRT
 'Oh, you haven't mailed the letter, is it?'

02 DAU: 对, 我信还没寄呢.
 duì wǒ xìn hái méi jì ne.
 correct 1sg letter yet NEG mail PRT
 'That's correct, I haven't mailed the letter.'

03 挺忙的啊 这阵子 还.
 tǐng máng de ā zhèzhènzǐ hái.
 pretty busy PRT PRT this.period.of.time quite
 'I've been quite busy recently.'

04 MOM: 啊, 没事儿.
 áh, méishìr.
 INT no.problem
 'Ah, no problem.'
 ((Lines omitted))

14 DAU: 哎哟, 你们的信我都收到了. 对; 我- 我-
 āiyō nǐmen de xìn wǒ dōu shōudào le. duì; wǒ- wǒ-
 INT 2pl NOM letter 1sg all receive PFV correct 1sg 1sg
 'Aiyō, I have received your letter, yeah, I- I- '

15 DAD: 哦, 好的.
 ò hǎode.
 INT okay
 'Oh, okay.'

16 DAU: → 对, 反正我-我- (这/寄) 信完了 收到;
 duì fǎnzhèng wǒ- wǒ- (zhè/jì) xìn wán le shōudào;

Right anyway 1sg 1sg this letter complete CRS receive
 'Anyways after you receive my letter,'
 17 → 再 寄 几 张 照片 给 你们 ((xxx)).
 zài jì jǐ zhāng zhàopiàn gěi nǐmen ((xxx)).
 then mail few CL photo to 2pl
 'I- I will send you some photos then.'

Based on this inclusive definition of commissive actions, 120 segments are identified in the CallHome/CallFriend corpora, 73 segments in the Summer 2019 face-to-face conversations, and 154 (all promises) in the *Wenzheng* program corpus. Table 2.4 is a summary of the two types of commissive actions accomplished in the three subsets of data, which do not show a significant distributional difference.

Table 2.4 Distribution of two types of commissive actions in the three datasets

Datasets	First-position	Second-position	Total
CallHome/CallFriend telephone conversation	71	49	120
	59%	41%	100%
Summer 2019 Face-to-face conversations	35	38	73
	46.6%	53.4%	100%
<i>Wenzheng</i> program	86	68	154
	55.8%	44.2%	100%

2.3.2 Promising

Based on Searles's (1969) classic definition and other studies, promising in this study is defined as a social action accomplished by verbal expressions of a strong and explicit commitment to a future action that the hearer wishes for and expects. This section discusses promising as a prototype action of commitment to future activities in terms of its explicitness and strong degree of commitment compared to other commissive actions that are less explicit or committed.

Dimensions that distinguish promising from other commissive actions include temporality, sequential position, the degree of the commitment, benefactive relationship, the type of obligation, deontic authority, the requirement of verbal expression, and common linguistic formats. Table 2.5 is an illustration of the features of common commissive actions.

Table 2.5 Features of commissive actions

Action Features	Promising	Offering	Granting a request	Proposing	Accepting a proposal
Time of acting	Remote	Remote and immediate	Remote or immediate	Remote or immediate	Remote and immediate
Sequential position	First and second	First	Second	First	Second
The degree of commitment	High	Low or high	Low or high	Low or high	Low or high
Beneficiary (stance)	Recipient, or speaker/third-party	Recipient or third-party	Recipient	Both parties	Both parties
Pre-existing obligation	Obligated or not	Unobligated	Unobligated	Unobligated	Unobligated
Deontic right (status)	High	Low or high	Low or high	Low or high	Low or high
Verbal expression	Verbal	Verbal or nonverbal	Verbal or nonverbal	Verbal	Verbal

First of all, activities being promised will be performed remotely as discussed earlier, whereas activities in other types of commissive actions can be performed both immediately and remotely (“granting remote requests” in Steensig and Heinemann (2014) and Lindström (2017)). Secondly, promising can be done in both first-position and second-position as shown in the previous examples. Thirdly, promising involves a high degree of commitment, which might be indicated by

illocutionary indicating devices including verbal and nonverbal resources. Therefore, agentive granting of a remote request can be considered a promise if the speaker expresses a high degree of commitment, but offers formulated with interrogatives (e.g., *do you want a ride?*) or other illocutionary force modifying devices (e.g., *maybe I can give you a ride.*) and grantings of a request with minimal compliance such as freestanding particles *okay* and *alright* (Thompson, Fox, & Couper-Kuhlen 2015:224-238) are excluded from the current definition of promising. Additionally, the dimension of commitment also distinguishes promising from assertions (e.g., *I promise this is true*) since the latter does not commit to performing a future action.

In terms of the beneficiary relationship, Searles (1969) and Brown and Levinson's (1987) classic works both points out that the hearer of a promise prefers the speaker doing the future action over not doing it and that the speaker understands the hearer's wants. This condition distinguishes promising from threatening and unsuccessful invitations and offers that are rejected or not responded to by the hearer.

The fifth dimension concerns the type of obligation involved in the commitment: a promise might be made to address an unfulfilled pre-existing obligation or to meet the needs of the recipient educated in the current conversation (Gibbs and Delaney 1987), whereas speakers of other commissive actions are not obligated to perform the future action.

Relevant to obligation and commitment is the dimension of deontic authority: promising is asserted with the speaker's "agency" and a deontic authority regarding who has the right "to say

what will be done in the future” (Sidnell 2011; Thompson, Fox & Couper-Kuhlen 2015; Stevanovic & Peräkylä 2012), whereas other commissive actions can display a low or high level of deontic authority depending on the formulation in different sequential environments. Lastly, as discussed earlier, promises must be produced with verbal expressions since the promised action will be performed at a future time.

Lines 16-17 in Ex 2.4. and line 04 in Ex 2.3 and are prototypical examples of first-position and second-position promising in ordinary conversations that meet the above conditions, and more data analyses of promising will be presented in other chapters. Commitments made by government officials on the *Wenzheng* programs are all considered promises given the high degree of commitment and the fact that officials' promises are made to address their existing obligations.

3 Lexico-syntactic design of commitments to future actions

3.1 Introduction

As discussed in Chapter 2, commitment to future actions in this study is treated as a continuum that consists of commissive actions with varying degrees of commitment formulated by different verbal and non-verbal resources in interaction. This chapter identifies common lexico-syntactic devices used in commissive actions and analyzes their sequential environments and interactional functions in the context of social action formats (Goodwin & Goodwin 1992; Fox 2007). Based on the degree of commitment they indicate; linguistic devices are categorized into two groups: illocutionary force modifying devices (IFMDs) that downgrade the degree of commitment and illocutionary force indicating devices (IFIDs) that upgrade the degree of commitment.

Section 3.2 presents data and methods, including the categorization of linguistic devices and examples of each category. Section 3.3 introduces general patterns and registral differences of commissive actions in everyday conversations and government officials' commitments on the *Wenzheng* programs. Focusing on everyday conversation, Sections 3.4 and 3.5 present the analyses of IFMDs and IFIDs that operate on lexical, clausal, and supra-clausal levels. Section 3.6 provides some concluding remarks.

3.2 Data and methodology

This chapter focuses on linguistic devices used in everyday conversation and mainly analyzes the two ordinary conversation subsets – Summer 2019 face-to-face video-recorded conversations and CallHome/CallFriend telephone conversations. The *Wenzheng* conversations will be briefly discussed in this section as a reference to explain the registral differences of commissive actions.

In terms of methods, this chapter investigates linguistic devices in the contexts of social action formats – linguistic formats that are recurrently used to perform a certain type of action (Goodwin & Goodwin 1992; Fox 2007) that is recognizable to the recipient as opposed to other action types (Couper-Kuhlen 2014). This idea of recurrent formats in action formation is in line with previous linguistic notions such as constructions in construction grammar (Fillmore 1988) and formulaic expressions in usage-based functional grammar (Bybee & Hopper 2001). What distinguishes social action formats from others is that they are contingent on the sequential environment and prior turns, and meanwhile set constraints to the subsequent turn of talk (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson 1974). For example, Couper-Kuhlen (2014) investigates directive-commissive action formats in English and finds that turn-initiating actions including proposals, offers, requests, and suggestions are implemented with distinctive formats that vary in subjecthood, interrogativity, conditionality, modality, and imperativity (e.g., *I will X*, *you should X*, and *I could X*). Thompson, Fox, and Raymond's (2021) recent study find that speakers of English use three recurrent grammatical formats for proposals in joint activities based on the recipient's disposition to accept the proposal. This chapter examines linguistic devices as components of a social action format and analyzes their sequential environments and interactional functions.

3.2.1 Categorizing linguistic devices

The first noticeable pattern of commissive actions in Mandarin conversation is that, unlike English speakers who are most likely to use polar interrogatives in initiative actions such as offers,

proposals, and invitations (Couper-Kuhlen 2014), Mandarin speakers mainly use simple declarative sentences with first-person pronouns and action verbs in initiative commissive actions. Based on the foundation of a simple declarative sentence, various devices can be added to upgrade or downgrade the degree of commitment. Adapting a simplified version of Thompson, Fox, and Couper-Kuhlen’s (2015) typology, this study identifies two groups of syntactic structures of commissive actions in the dataset: declarative sentence and single-utterance participles (e.g., *ào* ‘oh,’ *en* ‘mm,’ *xíng* ‘okay’ and *hǎo* ‘okay’) or lexical phrases (e.g., *méiwèntí* ‘no problem’).⁶

As shown in Table 3.1, commissive actions across the three subsets of data are predominantly formulated with declarative sentences, and face-to-face conversations have more cases of particles and lexical phrases.

Table 3.1 Syntactic features across the datasets

	Single-utterance particles or lexical phrases	Declarative sentence	Total
<i>Wenzheng</i> programs	4 (2.6 %)	150 (97.4%)	154
CallHome/CallFriend Telephone calls	10 (8.3%)	110 (91.7%)	120
Summer 2019 video recordings	23 (30.3%)	50 (69.7%)	76

Given such a distribution, this chapter focuses on linguistic devices used in declarative sentences to mark the degrees of commitment and categorizes them into two groups:

1. Linguistic categories that mitigate the speaker’s commitment, such as vague time references, the modal verb *kěyǐ* ‘can,’ the utterance-final particle *ba*, conditional structure *If X, then Y*, and question tags, are referred to as Illocutionary Force Mitigating Devices (IFMDs) (see

⁶ This is distinguished from repetition of particles or lexical items, which will be discussed as IFIDs in Section 3.5.

related notions of “indicator of illocutionary force” in Searle (Searle 1969: 31) and “strengtheners” and “weakeners” in Brown and Levinson (1983, 147)). The following examples are extracted from the current database.

Ex 3.1 IFMD: vague time reference (CallHome_0711)

我 以后 再 给 你们 打。
wǒ yǐhòu zài gěi nǐmen dǎ.
1sg future again to 2pl call
'I will call you again in the future.'

Ex 3.2 IFMD: modal verb *kěyǐ* 'can' (CallFriend 4257_2421)

你 先 到 费城, 我们 可以 一块儿 去 纽约 玩。
nǐ xiān dào Fèichéng, wǒmen kěyǐ yíkuàir qù Niǔyuē wán
2sg first arrive Philadelphia 1pl can together go NYC play.
'You come to Philadelphia first, and we can travel in NYC together'

Ex 3.3 IFMD: utterance-final particle *ba* (CallHome_1307_line39)

我 寄 张 照片 给 你 吧。
wǒ jì zhāng zhàopiàn gěi nǐ ba.
1sg mail CL photo to 2sg PRT
'Let me mail you a photo.'

Ex 3.4 IFMD: Conditional clause (CallHome_0110_0432)

他 要是 想 做 的话,
tā yàoshi xiǎng zuò dehuà,
3sg if want do PRT(if)
'If he wants to do this,'
当然 就是 我们 可以 一块 做一做 .
dāngrán jiùshì wǒmen kěyǐ yíkuài zuò.yí.zuò
of.course DM 1pl can together try.to.do
'of course, we can try it together.'

Ex 3.5 IFMD: Tag question (CallHome_0626_0849)

我 有空 我 就 回去 婷婷, 好不好
wǒ yǒukòng wǒ jiù huíqù Tíngtíng, hǎobuhǎo
1sg have-time 1sg as.soon.as return NAME good-NEG-good
'As soon as I have time, I will go back, Tingting, is it okay?'

2. Linguistic devices that are often used to upgrade the speaker's commitment, such as exact time references, performative verbs, intensifiers such as *kěndìng* 'definitely,' benefactive structures with *gěi* and other prepositions, the modal verbs *huì* 'will' and *bìxū* 'must,'⁷ and repetition, are referred to as Illocutionary Force Indicating Devices (IFIDs).

Ex 3.6 IFID: exact time reference (CallHome_0716_03_20)

我 今天 下午, 我 去 看, 去 看 她。
wǒ jīntiān xiàwǔ, wǒ qù kàn, qù kàn tā.
 1sg today afternoon 1sg go visit go visit 3sg
 I will visit her this afternoon.

Ex 3.7 IFID: Performative verb(Summer_2019_GH040250)

我 知道 得 太 多 了. 保证 不 说 出去。
wǒ zhīdào de tài duō le. bǎozhèng bù shuō chūqù.
 1sg know COMP too many PRT promise NEG say out
 'I know too much. {I}promise {I} won't spread {the word.}'

Ex 3.8 IFID: intensifier (CallHome_0711)

对 对 对. 我 我- 这 周 肯定 寄 出去。
duì duì duì. wǒ wǒ- zhè zhōu kěndìng jì chūqù.
 Right right right 1sg 1sg this week definitely mail out
 'Right, right, right, I- I- will mail it this week for sure.'

Ex 3.9 IFID: benefactive structure (Summer_2019_00007/GH010016_00_06)

微单 可以; 我 给 你们 买。
wēi-dān kěyǐ; wǒ gěi nǐmen mǎi.
 micro-lens can 1sg for 2pl buy
 'The micro lens camera is good. {Let} ME buy it for you.'

Ex 3.10 IFID: modal verb *huì* (Summer2019_00071_0945)

我 会 给 你们 活- 多 活 几 个 回合 的。
wǒ huì gěi nǐmen huó- duō huó jǐ gè huíhé de.
 1sg will let 2pl live- more live a.few CL round PRT
 'I will let you survive a few more rounds.'

⁷ Modal verbs are categorized as IFIDs or IFMDs based on their functions. Modal verbs such as *huì* 'will' and *bìxū* 'must' that indicate a high degree of commitment to future actions are categorized as IFIDs, whereas modal verbs like *kěyǐ* 'can' and *kěnéng* 'maybe' are categorized as IFMDs as they downgrade the speaker's commitment compared to the base form declarative sentences without any IFMDs or IFIDs.

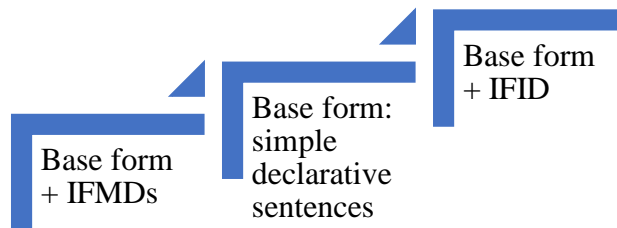
Ex 3.11 IFID: repetition (CallHome_1539_36)

A: 一模一样 的东西; 反正 呢 照样画葫芦地
yímúyíyàng de dōngxi; fǎnzhèng è zhàoyànghuàhúlu
 same NOM thing anyway uh follow.the.original-adv
 这样 上 [去 就 可以 了.]
zhèyàng shàng [qù jiù kěyǐ le.]
 like.this up just can CRS
 'Exactly the same thing, just follow the original (pattern) and it will be fine.'

B: → [↑啊::] 好, 可以; 可以.
 [↑ā::] *hǎo, kěyǐ; kěyǐ.*
 INJ good can can
 'Ahh, that works, that works/I can do that.'

Figure 3.1 summarizes the two sets of linguistic categories on the scale of commitment to future actions. Note that this categorization intends to present the general scale of the illocutionary force the linguistic devices indicate, and the specific functions of each IFMD and IFID will be discussed in the next few sections.

Figure 3.1 Linguistic categories on the continuum of commitment to future actions



In some cases, an IFMD and an IFID are observed to co-occur in the same utterance, which might cause confusion about the degree of the commitment displayed in the utterance. However, these devices operate on different syntactic and semantic levels. For example, in example (12), the exact time reference ‘after the 20ths’ is an IFID functioning within the predicate, but the IFMD,

the utterance-final particle *ba* functions to mitigate the predicate as a whole unit (Chao 1968), which determines the main social action of the utterance.

Ex 3.12 IFMD+IFID: multiple devices (CallHome_0718)

20号 以后 回来 妈妈 给你寄 吧; 哈。
 èrshíhào yǐhòu huílai mama gěi nǐ jì ba; hà.
 the.20th after return mom for 2sg mail PRT PRT
 'After {I}come back on the 20th, {I/mom} will send to you, {how about that?} {Is that} okay?'

3.3 General observations and registral differences

A general survey of the linguistic devices observed in the three datasets shows that IFMDs and IFIDs are used very differently in different registers of communications. Table 3.3 and Table 3.2 summarize the distribution of IFMDs and IFIDs in the three datasets⁸, respectively. The first noticeable pattern is that officials in the *Wenzheng* programs use significantly more IFIDs and fewer IFMDs compared to ordinary people.

Specifically, government officials tend to use vague time references in their promises, whereas ordinary speakers use a more diverse group of devices to downgrade their commitments, among which the modal verb *kěyǐ* ‘can’ and the utterance-final particle *ba* will be investigated in detail in Section 3.4.

Table 3.2 Registral differences of IFMDs

	Modal verbs	Utterance-final particle <i>ba</i>	Tag questions	Conditional structure	Vague time reference	Total
Examples	<i>kěyǐ</i> ‘can’	<i>ba</i>	<i>hǎoma</i> ‘is it okay’	<i>yàoshi</i> ‘if... {then}’	<i>xiàcì</i> ‘next time’	

⁸ Note that every occurrence of the IFIDs is counted as one token in this table, regardless of the co-occurrences of multiple devices in the single utterance like example (6) discussed earlier. The same method is adopted for IFMDs.

<i>Wenzheng</i> programs	4 (10.8%)	0	0	5 (13.5%)	28 (75.7%)	37 (100%)
CallHome / CallFriend	10 (15.6%)	7 (10.9%)	11 (17.2%)	19 (29.7%)	17 (26.6%)	64 (100%)
Summer 2019 Face-face	3 (13.6%)	3 (13.6%)	4 (18.2%)	2 (9.1%)	10 (45.5%)	22 (100%)

In terms of IFIDs, performative verbs such as *chéngnuò* ‘promise’ are only observed in the officials’ commissive actions, which is consistent with previous findings. Other IFIDs that are used significantly more frequently by officials include modal verbs such as *huì*, exact time references such as *míngtiān* ‘tomorrow,’ and intensifiers such as *mǎshàng* ‘immediately.’ Benefactive structures and self-repetition of particles are more common in ordinary conversations, which will be investigated in Section 3.5.

Table 3.3 Registral differences of IFIDs

	Performative verbs	Modal verbs	Exact time reference	Intensifier	Benefactive structure	Self-repetition of particles	Total
Examples		<i>huì</i> ‘will,’ <i>bìxū</i> ‘must’	<i>míngtiān</i> ‘tomorrow’	<i>mǎshàng</i> ‘immediately,’ <i>kěndìng</i> ‘certainly/definitely’	<i>gěi</i> as in [<i>wǒ gěi nǐ do X</i>] ‘I will do X for you’	<i>hǎo, hǎo</i> ‘Okay, okay’	
<i>Wenzheng</i> programs	5 (2.3%)	103 (47.2%)	30 (13.8%)	80 (36.7%)	4 (1.8%)	0	218 (100%)
CallHome/CallFriend	0	12 (24.5%)	5 (10.2%)	9 (18.4%)	15 (30.6%)	7 (14.3%)	49 (100%)
Summer 2019	1 (3.1%)	4 (12.5%)	4 (12.5%)	1 (3.1%)	19 (59.4%)	3 (9.4%)	32 (100%)

3.4 Analysis of illocutionary force modifying devices

Major IFMDs identified in the current datasets include the following categories: modal verbs (e.g., *kěyǐ* ‘can’), utterance-final particles (e.g., *ba*), tag questions (e.g., *hǎoma* ‘is it okay’),

conditional clauses (*yàoshi*... or implicit conditional clauses), and vague time references (e.g., *xiàcì* ‘next time’). Except for vague time references that are not grammaticalized devices, the rest of the IFMDs are observed in the following common social action formats:

- (1) [Pronoun + *kěyǐ* ‘can’+ VP⁹]
- (2) [Pronoun + VP + *ba*]
- (3) [Pronoun + VP, tag question]
- (4) [Conditional clause, pronoun + VP]

This section begins with a short analysis of how vague time references operate as IFMDs, then focuses on the analyses of the modal verb *kěyǐ* and the utterance-final particle *ba*.

3.4.1 Vague time references in pre-closing conventional promises

In everyday conversation, vague time references¹⁰ are frequently observed in pre-closing sequences where the speaker makes a “conventional promise” to a future gathering or chatting before ending the conversation¹¹. Speakers in these cases initiate a closing sequence with a promise that tends to be unserious or vague to maintain the social relationship. Recipients of such promises also recognize them as conventional, instead of serious promises that require a higher degree of commitment. For example, both line 05 in Ex 3.13, ‘I’ll call you later,’ and line 08 in Ex 3.14, ‘Call you next time,’ are initiated as the first pair part of a pre-closing sequence with a vague time

⁹ “VP” refers to “Verbal Phrases” in the format.

¹⁰ The vague time references observed in the current dataset also seem to have been conventionalized with fixed expressions, such as *xiàcì* ‘next time’, *yǐhòu* ‘in the future’, *huítóu* ‘next time we meet.’

¹¹ See more about the categorization of obligations in Chapter 4.

reference. Initial observations show that such pre-closing conventional promises are common in many languages, but the specific parameters of these promises vary across languages and cultures, which might lead to misunderstandings in cross-cultural communication. This topic will be examined in future studies.

Ex 3.13 CallHome_0711

- 03 DAD: 我 上班 去 了 哦。
wǒ shàngbān qù le ò.
 1sg go.to.work go CRS PRT
 'I'm going to work.'
- 04 DAU: 哦 好, °hh 就 这样,
ò hǎo, °hh jiù zhèyàng,
 INT Okay just this
 'Oh. Okay, that's it.'
- 05 → 我 以后 再 给 你们 打。
wǒ yǐhòu zài gěi nǐmen dǎ.
 1sg future again to 2pl call
 'I will call you again in the future.'
- 06 大概 也 快 完 了, hahaha.
dàgài yě kuài wán le, hahaha.
 probably also almost finished CRS
 '(The free-call time is) probably also almost up.'
- 07 DAD: ((xx)) 哦, 我 走 了 哦。
 ((XX)) ò wǒ zǒu le ò.
 INT 1sg leave CRS PRT
 'Oh. I'm leaving now.'

Ex 3.14 CallHome_0876

- 04 A: 那个 问 奶奶, 还有 那个 任敏 任中 叔 啊,
nàge wèn nǎinai háiyou nàge Rènmin Rènzhōng shū ā,
 that ask grandma, and DM NAME NAME uncle PRT
 大伯 他们 好 啊。
dàbó tāmen hǎo ā.
 old-uncle 3pl good PRT
 'Send me greetings to grandma, and Uncle Ren Minzhong, and my oldest uncle!'

05 B: 哦:
ò:
INT
'Oh,'

06 A: 还有 姑姑.
háiyǒu gūgu.
and aunt
'and aunt.'

07 B: 感谢 感谢 感谢, 再见.
gǎnxiè gǎnxiè gǎnxiè zàijiàn.
gratitude gratitude gratitude good.bye
'Thank you so much. Goodbye.'

08 A: → 好, 再见 啦, 下次 再 打,
hǎo zàijiàn lā xiàcì zài dǎ,
INT good.bye PRT next-time again call
'Okay. Bye. {I'll} call {you} again next time.'

09 A: 再见, 爸.
zàijiàn, bà.
bye dad
'Bye, dad.'

10 B2: 哦, 再见 了 啊.
ò, zàijiàn le ā.
INT bye CRS PRT
'Oh, goodbye.'

3.4.2 Modifying initial commitment with the modal verb *kěyǐ*

The modal verb *kěyǐ* expresses permission and ability (吕 1984) in the realm of deontic possibility (Palmer 2001). *Kěyǐ* is frequently observed in two environments in commissive actions: when the speaker is not obligated to perform the action, *kěyǐ* occurs in the format [Pronoun + *kěyǐ* 'can'+ VP] in first-position as an offer, invitation, or proposal; in responding position, *kěyǐ* appears as an independent lexical response (sometimes repeated, as discussed in 3.5.4) to a request or proposal. This section focuses on the first-position *kěyǐ*. Compared to base-form commissive

actions, the meaning of deontic possibility conveyed by *kěyǐ* mitigates the illocutionary force of these actions and makes the possible rejection less face-threatening. Actions performed by this format are mainly distinguished by the pronoun used in the format, which encode different benefactive relationships (Clayman & Heritage 2014): proposals of joint activities such as in line 04 in Ex 3.18 are mutually beneficial and are designed with first-person plural pronoun [*Wǒmen + kěyǐ + VP*] ‘We can VP’; offers and invitations that benefit the recipient are designed with first-person and second-person singular pronouns ([*Wǒ/nǐ + kěyǐ + VP*] ‘I/you can VP.’) The linguistic designs of the actions sometimes do not match the actual actions in conversation to maximize the possibility of acceptance. For example, an offer might be designed as a proposal that also benefits the speaker so that the recipient is more likely to accept it.

3.4.2.1 Offering with ‘I can VP’

The following two extracts are examples of the ‘I can’ type of offers where a first-person pronoun is used. In Ex 3.15, the participants are discussing how they will appear in the recorded video, and Min (MIN) is mocking her husband Don (DON)’s body shape. In line 01, Min describes the husband as ‘a huge body,’ which leads to one second of silence. The guest, Bella (BEL), initiates an offer in line 03, ‘I can help you make it smaller.’ This nominated action is not requested, and the guest/researcher is not obliged to do so¹². In Ex 3.16, the son (SON) is discussing with his

¹²Indeed, as the researcher who was collecting data, the guest might have had the intention to minimize the inconvenience or negative impact on the participants. However, this problem of “image” in this segment is a part of the wife’s complaints about her husband’s appearance, which is not relevant to the data collection process.

mother (MOM) his plan to return to his hometown from the United States. The mother initiates an offer in line 02 with a first-person plural pronoun, *wǒmen*, referring to herself and the dad.

Ex 3.15 Summer_2019_GH030250

- 01 MIN: 庞大 的 身躯 在 这里。
pángdà de shēnqū zài zhèlǐ.
 huge NOM body at here
 '(His) huge body {will} appear here {on the screen}'
- 02 (1.0)
- 03 BEL:→ 我 可以 帮 你 改 小 一点。
wǒ kěyǐ bāng nǐ gǎi xiǎo yīdiǎn.
 1sg can help 2sg modify small a.bit
 'I can help you modify {the body} to a smaller {size}.'
- 04 MIN: ((laughter))
- 05 DON: 修 一下 哦?
xiū yíxià ò?
 modify a.bit PRT
 'Fix it a bit, huh?'
- 06 MIN: ((laughter))
- 07 BEL: 恩, 没有 人 看 的,
ēn, méiyǒu rén kàn de,
 INJ NEG-have people watch PRT
 'Yeah. No one {will} watch {it},'
- 08 只有 我 看。
zhǐyǒu wǒ kàn.
 only 1sg watch
 'only I {will} watch {it}.'

Ex 3.16 CallHome_0848_1108

- 01 MOM: 我 告诉 你 啊, 呃::
wǒ gàosu nǐ ā, ē::
 1sg tell 2sg PRT uh
 'Let me tell you, uh,'
- 02 → 那个 我们 可以 去 接 你 哎,
nàge wǒmen kěyǐ qù jiē nǐ āi,
 DM 1pl can go pick.up 2sg PRT
 'We can go pick you up,'
- 03 我 都, 呃:

wǒ dōu ē:
 1sg even uh
 我 都 把 车 都 联系 好 了。
 wǒ dōu bǎ chē dōu liánxi hǎo le.
 1sg even BA car all contact good CRS
 'I even, uh, I have contacted a driver and arranged a car.'
 04 SON: 多 麻烦, 现在 不用。
 duō máfan, xiànzài bú yòng.
 so troublesome now NEG need.
 '{That's}too troublesome. No need for now.'

3.4.2.2 Offering with 'You can VP'

The following example Ex 3.17Ex 3.17 is an example of a 'you can' type offer (including invitation). A and B are old friends who have not seen each other for seven or eight years. The two participants have just completed a sequence on B's choice of transportation for her trip to the east coast. In line 01, A initiates her offer 'you can stay in our living room.' B does not accept the offer immediately, instead, treats the offer simply as a piece of new information ('oh' in line 02). After an inserted sequence (lines 04-09) regarding the availability of A's space, A redoes her offer with the same grammatical format except that the subject is changed to the inanimate "living room," which highlights the availability of her space as a piece of information. B in the subsequent turn registers the information with *ao* 'oh' and confirms it with "*dui dui dui.*" (Wang et al. 2010).

Ex 3.17 CallFriend_4257_1954

01 A: 可以, 你-你 这 段 时间 来,
 kěyǐ nǐ-nǐ zhè duàn shíjiān lái,
 okay 2sg 2sg this period time come
 → 可以 住 我们 living room.
 kěyǐ zhù wǒmen living room.
 can live 1pl living room
 'That's Okay. You can stay in our living room for the time of your stay.'

02 B: 噢:
ō:
INJ
Oh.

03 A: 嗯.
ēn.
INJ
'Mm'

04 B: 哎, 你们 现在 怎么样;
āi, nǐmen xiànzài zěnmeyàng;
PRT 2pl now how.is.it
'How are you doing,'

05 不是 roommate 搬走 了 吗,
búshi roommate bānzǒu le ma,
NEG-is roommate move-away CRS Q
'isn't it that your roommate moved out?'

06 A: 嗯. roommates 呀;
ēn. roommates ya;
INJ roommates PRT.
'Mm, {regarding}roommates,'

07 B: 嗯.
en.
INJ
'Mm'

08 A: 搬走 了, 他们 不是 sublet 出去 嘛,
bānzǒu le tāmen búshi sublet chūqù ma,
move-away CRS 3pl NEG-is sublet out PRT
'{They} moved out? Weren't they (planning to) sublet {it}?'

09 B: 噢, 又 搬进 新人 住 进来.
ō, yòu bānjìn xīnrén zhù jìnlái.
INJ again move-in new.people live in.come
'Oh, so someone new moved in?'

10 A: 对, 然后:: 反正 这- 这-
duì, ránhòu:: fǎnzhèng zhè- zhè-
right DM anyway this this
'Right, and: anyway, this- this'

11 A: → 然后 我们 还有 个 living room 嘛,
ránhòu wǒmen hái yǒu gè living room ma,
DM 1pl still-have CL living room PRT

- 'and we still have a living room,'
- 12 A: → living room 可以 住 嘛, [是 吧,]
living room kěyǐ zhù ma, [shì ba,]
 living room can live PRT is PRT
 'Living room is available to stay, right?'
- 13 B: [噢:] <<dim> 对, 对, 对.>
 [ō:] <<dim> duì, duì duì. >
 INJ right right right
 'Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.'
- 14 A: 没关系.
méiguānxi.
 No.problem
 'No problem.'

3.4.2.3 Proposing and offering with 'We can VP'

Unlike 'I can VP' and 'You can VP' types of offering or inviting that involves one agent of the future action, the 'We can VP' format is syntactically designed for bilateral proposals that involve both participants performing the future actions (Rossi 2012). Because the nominated action is framed as mutually beneficial, the 'We can VP' format displays a higher degree of commitment and is often used to prompt the recipient to accept the benefit. In other words, what is framed as a proposal is actually an offer (including an invitation). The following two extracts show the trajectory from a unilateral design of offers to a bilateral design of proposals.

In the same conversation as Ex 3.17, the two speakers in Ex 3.18 have just completed another topic. In line 01, A returns to the topic of B's travel plan by inviting A to visit her in Philadelphia first, but it is not accepted by B. B gives a non-answer response followed by an account that her sister will plan the most (convenient) route for her. In line 03, A initiates a proposal for a joint trip to New York City, 'You come to Philadelphia first, and we can have a trip to NYC together.' B

again does not accept the proposal but initiates an inserted sequence asking if A has been to NYC. A's clarification in line 11 finally prompts B's acceptance. The overlap of B's 'Okay' and the onset of A's last TCU in line 11 shows that B's earlier delays (the gaps in lines 02 and 05, the not-knowing response in line 03, as well as the inserted sequence lines 06-11) were due to her concern of causing inconvenience to A. Once A explicitly utters the mutually beneficial aspects of the trip, B accepts the proposal with *xing* 'Okay.'

Ex 3.18 CallFriend 4257_2421

01 A: 反正 你们:: 来 的话 就
fǎnzhèng nǐmen lái dehuà jiù
 anyway 2pl come PRT(if) just
 先: 先 到 费城 嘛.
xiān: xiān dào Fèichéng ma.
 first first arrive Philadelphia PRT
 'Anyways, if you do travel here come to Philadelphia first.'

02 (0.7)

03 B: 我 不 知道,
wǒ bù zhīdào,
 1sg NEG know
 'I don't know.'
 我 姐姐 说 她 要 给 我 设计
wǒ jiějie shuō tā yào gěi wǒ shèjì
 1sg older.sister say 3sg will for 1sg design
 一 个 路线, 怎么 走 最- 最 最 最-
yí gè lùxiàn zěnmē zǒu zuì zuì zuì zuì-
 one CL route how go most most most most
 'My sister said she'll plan a most (convenient) route for me.'

04 A: 你 先 到 费城,
nǐ xiān dào Fèichéng,
 2sg first arrive Philadelphia
 → 我们 可以 一块儿 去 纽约 玩.
wǒmen kěyǐ yíkuàir qù Niǔyuē wán
 1pl can together go NYC play.

'You come to Philadelphia first, and we can have a trip to NEW York City together'

05 (0.2)

06 B: 你们 [去 过] 纽约,
nǐmen [qù guò] Niǔyuē,
2pl go-EXP New York City
'You have been to NYC?'

06 A: [然后-]
[ránhòu-]

07 A: 啊?
ā?
INJ
what?

08 B: 你们 去过 纽约 没有;
nǐmen qùguò Niǔyuē méiyǒu;
2pl go-EXP NYC NEG-have
'Have you been to New York City?'

09 A: 我们 去过.
wǒmen qùguò.
1pl go-EXP
'We have been there,'

10 B: uh huh,
INJ
'Uh huh,'

11 A: 已经去 过: 两 三 次 嘛;
yǐjīng qù guò liǎng sān cì ma;
already go EXP two three time PRT
'{We} have been there two or three times,'
<<all>但是 都> 没 [有::] 好好 玩 好.
<<all>dànshì dōu> méi[yǒu.] hǎohǎo wán hǎo.
but all NEG-have well have.fun well
'but {we} didn't really get to enjoy our time there,'

12 B: [玩 好.]
[wán hǎo].
have.fun well
'have fun'

13 A: [那边] ((xx)) 很多 嘛.
[nàbian] ((xx)) hěnduō ma.
there ((xx)) many PRT

'There are a lot of ((xx)) {in NYC}.'

14 B: [行 啊.]
 [xíng ā.]
 Okay PRT
 'That works.'

14 A: → 我们 可以 一块儿 去 玩,
 wǒmen kěyǐ yíkuàir qù wán,
 1pl can together go have.fun
 'We can go to {NYC} together and have fun.'

15 B: 嗯.
 ēn.
 INJ
 mm.

16 A: °hh 然后 我们 这边 离 那个 Atlantic City 很 近,
 °hh ránhòu wǒmen zhèbiān lí nàge Atlantic City hěn jìn,
 and 1pl here from DM NAME very close
 'and we are very close to Atlantic City,'
 一 个 多 小 时 就 到 了。
 yī gè duō xiǎoshí jiù dào le.
 one CL more hour just arrive CRS
 '{It} just takes a little more than one hour.'

In the following example, Ex 3.19, the speaker also clearly shifts from a unilateral design of offering to a bilateral format of the proposal. In this conversation, B has just told A that her partner, who is also A's friend, was considering quitting his job to start an international trade business with the possibility of collaborating with A. In line 01, A initiates an offer with the 'he can' format and elaborates on the details through line 07. A upgrades her commitment from line 09 as she shifts her offer to the 'I can' type although the pronoun subject is omitted, '{I} can do some research here (in the U.S. and Canada).' B gives a receipt token 'en' in line 06 and 'That's Okay' in line 09. In line 11, A's commitment is further upgraded by transforming the unilateral event into a bilateral activity with a 'we can' proposal.

Ex 3.19 CallHome_0110_0432

- 01 A: °hhh 锋波 那个: 他 可以 把 那个,
 °hhh Fēngbō nàge: tā kěyǐ bǎ nàge,
 uh huh NAME DM 3sg can BA that
 'About Fengbo, he can take the,'
- 02 就 比如说
 jiù bǐrúshuō
 just for.example
 'just for example,'
 要是 有 客户 需要 什么 仪器 的话,
 yàoshi yǒu kèhù xūyào shénme yíqì dehuà,
 if there.is client need what equipment PRT(if)
 'if there is a client needs any equipment,'
- 03 他 可以- 就是 给 我 发 传真;
 tā kěyǐ- jiùshì gěi wǒ fā chuánzhēn;
 3sg can DM give 1sg send fax
 'he can send me a fax.'
- 04 因为 我- 你- 你 可能
 yīnwèi wǒ- nǐ- nǐ kěnéng
 because 1sg 2sg 2sg maybe
 过几天 就 会 收到 我 的 信.
 guòjǐtiān jiù huì shōudào wǒ de xìn.
 over.A.few.days just will receive 1sg GEN letter
 'Because I- you- you might receive my letter in a few days.'
- 05 A: °hh 然后 就 那个 传真 号 什么,
 °hh ránhòu jiù nàge chuánzhēn hào shénme,
 DM just DM fax number DM
 那个 美国 的 加拿大 的 传真 都 有,
 nàge Měiguó de Jiānádà de chuánzhēn dōu yǒu,
 DM U.S. ASS Canada ASS fax all have
 然后 那个:: 通讯 地址 也 都 有.
 ránhòu nàge tōngxùn dìzhǐ yě dōu yǒu.
 and DM contact address also all have.
 'I have included my fax numbers in the letter, both the Canadian and
 American ones, also my addresses.'
- 06 B: 嗯.
 ēn.
 INJ
 'Mm.'

- 07 A: °hh 然后- 都 可以 给 我 发 过来,
 °hh *ránhòu dōu kěyǐ gěi wǒ fā guòlái,*
 and all can to 1sg send over
 或者是: 寄 过来, 都 可以.
huòzhěshì jì guòlái dōu kěyǐ.
 or mail over all okay
 'He can send me a fax or mail it to me, both are fine.'
- 08 (1.0)
- 09 A: 然后 到 [时候 可以] 在 这边 看一看, 对.
ránhòu dào [shíhou kěyǐ] zài zhèbiān kànyikàn, duì.
 DM by.then can at here take.a.look INJ
 'and then {I} can take a look here, yeah.'
- 10 B: [那 好 吧.]
[nà hǎo ba.]
 DM Okay PRT
 'Okay then.'
- 11 A: 他 要是 想 做 的话,
tā yàoshi xiǎng zuò dehuà,
 3sg if want do PRT(if)
 'If he wants to do this,'
 → 当然 就是 我们 可以 一块 做一做 .
dāngrán jiùshì wǒmen kěyǐ yíkuài zuòyízuò.
 of.course DM 1pl can together try.it
 'of course, we can try it together.'
- 12 B: → 行;
Xíng;
 INJ
 'Okay.{/That works.}'

In both Ex 3.18 and Ex 3.19, the recipient responds to the speaker's 'we can' proposal with a monosyllabic particle *xíng* 'Okay.' Lu (2000) argues that the response token *xíng* is often used by speakers in a higher social status to grant permission or express feasibility of a request made by their subordinators. In the current study, *xíng* is observed most frequently in agreements to a proposal or arrangement made by the other party, for both joint activities and one-party events.

Xing is not necessarily uttered by a superior speaker but does claim a degree of deontic authority in evaluating the feasibility of the proposal in the second position. Using *xing* in Ex 3.18 and Ex 3.19, both recipients show their recognition of the prior utterances as proposals, instead of offers.

3.4.2.4 Summary

Data analysis shows that [Pronoun + *kěyǐ* + VP] is a common format for initiating a commitment to future actions in Mandarin conversation. By changing the subject of the format, the speaker can express different degrees of commitment and agency, a move that could be recognized by the recipient as doing different types of action: the ‘I can’ type (Ex 3.15 and Ex 3.16) highlights the speaker’s availability for the future action that benefits the recipient, and these are designed and treated as offers by the participants (line 04 Ex 3.16, ‘{That’s} too troublesome. No need for now.’); the ‘you can’ type is recognized more as an invitation and suggestion as it foregrounds the steps that the recipient can take; the ‘we can’ type underscores the jointness in proposals but is often used as a concealed offer to prompt the recipient’s acceptance.

Analysis in this section also indicates that when the speaker is not obligated to perform the future action and the recipient has not explicitly demonstrated needs and preferences, it is socially preferred to display possibility/willingness, rather than a strong full commitment, to performing the future action. By providing the using modal verb *kěyǐ*, which indicates “possibility,” the speaker invites the recipient to a cooperative discussion of the future event as the conversation develops, rather than unilaterally making decisions like those in base-form commitment.

3.4.3 Modifying commitment with utterance-final particle *ba*

Another common IFMD Mandarin speakers use to mitigate their commitments is the utterance-final particle *ba* used with imperative sentences, represented by the format [Pronoun + VP + *ba*] (*Wǒ/wǒmen/nǐ* + VP + *ba*, ‘let me VP/Let’s VP/How about you VP’). As with *kěyǐ*, the format with *ba* also most frequently occurs in first position.

Ba in Chinese linguistic studies has been described as a sentence-final particle used to solicit approval or agreement (Simpson 2014; Li & Thompson 1989) with an advisative meaning (Chao 1968). Recent studies identify its function of mitigating the illocutionary force of speech acts (Lee-Wong 1998; Deng 2015; Fang & Hengeveld 2020), especially imperatives. The few existing conversation analytic studies on *ba* have focused on its function of expressing epistemic uncertainty in declarative sentences (Kendrick 2010).

A recent study on the Korean particle *-ca* finds that when used in imperative sentences with a first-person singular pronoun, *-ca* performs a special type of imperative modality – speaker hortative (Kim & Kwon 2020a; Kim & Kwon 2020b; Rhee 2020), which refers to the situation when the utterance is formulated as a proposal or an invitation to solving a bilateral problem/participating a joint activity, but in reality, the speaker is the sole performer of the focal action. Ex 3.20 is a Korean example.

Ex 3.20 Speaker-hortative marker *-ca* in Korean (Kim & Kwon 2020b)

yay-ya mal com mwul-epo-ca.
this.child-voc word a.bit ask-try-hort

'Hey kid, let me ask you a question.'

Similar phenomena are observed in other languages, for example, the *let me...* structure in English. In Mandarin, one of the equivalent formats would be [*Wǒ + VP + ba*] 'let me VP'. Informed by the concept of deontic authority in interactional linguistics (Stevanovic & Peräkylä 2012; Thompson, Fox & Couper-Kuhlen 2015) – the right to determine actions – and the notion of speaker-hortative in semantics (Kim & Kwon 2020a; Kim & Kwon 2020b), this section analyzes how *ba* functions as an IFMD to mitigate the illocutionary force of the speaker's commitment and achieve or maintain social solidarity.

The following section presents examples of *ba* with a first-person singular pronoun [*Wǒ + VP + ba*] in three sequential environments: Ex 3.21 illustrates this format in initiating position where the speaker offers a solution to a problem, after which further discussion ensues; Ex 3.22 and Ex 3.23 are examples where the speaker initiates a closing sequence of the current discussion, and Ex 3.24 and Ex 3.25 are cases where *ba* is used in a responding position to assert agency. The analyses show that *ba* in the initiating environment enables the speaker to mitigate their commitment by performing a pseudo proposal and mobilizing an affiliative response from the recipient.

3.4.3.1 Offering a solution to an emergent problem

The first common sequential environment of [*Wǒ + VP + ba*] is when the speaker offers a solution or an alternative solution to the problem that emerged in the prior talk. In the following example Ex 3.21, A and B are old friends who have not seen each other for a long time. In prior turns, B has mentioned missing A when she saw girls with short hair. A corrects that she has long

hair now, and B seeks confirmation in line 02. After a quick confirming token *en*, A initiates an offering of sending B a photo of her but is overlapped with B's second confirmation-seeking question, 'long hair?' This question, as well as her laughter and her first question in line 36, display her trouble associating long hair with her old friend. A's offering in line 39, therefore, is highly relevant to help solve the problem, and it is accepted by B in line 40 'that works.' *Ba* mitigates A's commitment and decreases the imposition on B to accept the proposal by inviting B's agreement.

Ex 3.21 CallHome_1307_line39.

- 35 A: 我 现在 头发 长 了。
wǒ xiànzài tóufa cháng le.
 1sg now hair long CRS
 'My hair has grown long now.'
- 36 B: (0.7)
 ((laughter)) 是 吗?
shì ma?
 is Q
 'Has it?'
- 37 A: 嗯, [我 寄 张-]
ēn [wǒ jì zhāng-]
 INT 1sg mail CL
 'Mm. I {will} mail a'
- 38 B: [长 头发.]
[cháng tóufā].
 'Long hair.'
- 39 A:→我 寄 张 照片 给 你 吧。
wǒ jì zhāng zhàopiàn gěi nǐ ba.
 1sg mail CL photo to 2sg PRT
 'Let me mail you a photo.'
- 40 B: (0.4) 可以 啊。
kěyǐ ā.
 Okay PRT
 '{Sure/That works}.'
- 41 A: ((laughter)).
- 42 B: 我 到时候 也 寄 张 照片 给 你。

wǒ dào shí hòu yě jì zhāng zhào piàn gěi nǐ.
1sg by.then also mail CL photo to 2pl.
'I {will} also mail a photo to you by then.'

43 A: 嗯.
ēn.
INT
'Mm.'

3.4.3.2 Closing the current topic

[*Wǒ* + VP + *ba*] is also recurrently observed in the initiating position of closing sequences. Unlike the offering cases where the solution is proposed for the first time, the conversation participants in Ex 3.22 have reached an initial agreement in the prior talk. Utterance-final particle *ba* not only invites a confirmation of the nominated action but also mobilizes the recipient's agreement to bring the current topic to closure. This observation adds to the collection of common turn types that initiate sequence-closing, such as returning to the start of the topic (Drew & Holt 1998), summaries, and assessments (Schegloff 2007).

In Ex 3.22, the son (SON) has requested that his mother (MOM) print out and mail him some photos, but the mother happens to be on a business trip. After a preliminary question-answer sequence about whether the son is in urgent need of the photos, in line 06, the mother proposes a date to mail the photo, 'Will it is too late if I send it to you when I return home? I'll be back on the 20th,' and the son agrees in line 08, 'no problem, no problem.' The format with *ba* in line 20, 'I will send to you after I return home on the 20th, okay?' functions as an invitation to confirm the

arrangement and orients to the closure of the current discussion. The son quickly produces an agreement token *xing* 'Okay.'

Ex 3.22 CallHome_0718_lilne391

- 03 MOM: =°hh 我 走 了,
=°hh wǒ zǒu le,
1sg leave CRS
'I'm leaving,'
<<all>你 这↑ 照片 急用 不 急用.>
<<all>nǐ zhè zhàopiàn jíyòng bù jíyòng.>
2sg this photo rush.use NEG rush.use
'Do you need the photo urgently?'
- 04 SON: 不- 不是 很 着急.
bù- búshi hěn zháojí
NEG NEG-is very rush
'No, not very urgently.'
- 05 (.)
- 06 MOM: 到时候 回来 赶上赶不上, 20号 回来.
dàoshíhòu huílai gǎnshànggǎnbúshàng 20hào huílai
by.then return catch.NEG.catch twentieth return
'Will it be too late if I send it to you when I return? {I'll} be back on the 20th.'
- 07 (.)
- 08 SON: 没问题 没问题.
méiwèntí méiwèntí.
no-problem no-problem
'No problem, no problem.'
- 09 (.)
- 10 MOM:→ 20号 回来 以后 妈妈 给你寄 吧: 哈.
èrshìhào huílai yǐhòu māma gěi nǐ jì ba: hā.
the.twentieth return after mom for 2sg mail BA PRT
'I will send to you after I return on the 20th, okay?'
- 11 SON: 行.
xíng.
INT
'Okay.'

In Ex 3.23, A and B are friends discussing B's travel plan. After a few exchanges to confirm B's schedule, B initiates a closing turn in lines 06 and 08 'Anyway, I will call you by then.' Studies have shown that both Mandarin *fǎnzhèng* 'anyway' and its English counterpart *anyway* are often used in closing sequences to mitigate the negative valence of communicative impasses resulting from the action of closing the current course of action (Gao & Tao 2021; Park 2010). *Ba* in this environment contributes to the mitigating function with a pseudo invitation to make the arrangement. In line 09, A response with a minimal agreement token *xíng*, 'Okay.'

Ex 3.23 CallHome_4257_line 612

- 01 A: 你们 大概 是 什么-
 nǐmen dàgài shì shénme-
 2pl approximately is what
 会 什么 时候 来 Philadelphia 呢.
 huì shénme shíhou lái Philadelphia ne.
 will what time come NAME Q
 'When would you come to Philadelphia probably?'
- 02 B: 唔, 我 现在 没 定 啊,
 wú wǒ xiànzài méi dìng ā,
 INT 1pl now NEG decide PRT
 'hmm, I haven't decided now yet.'
- 03 我 就是 可能 是 五-
 wǒ jiùshì kěnéng shì wǔ-
 1sg DM maybe is five
 'I might just {go} on the fifth.'
- 04 B: 五月 十五号 到 九月 一号 之前, 啊 就.
 wǔyuè shíwǔhào dào jiǔyuè yíhào zhīqián ā jiù.
 May fifteenth to September.first before PRT DM
 'between May the fifteenth and September first.'
- 05 A: 八月 十五号.
 bāyuè shíwǔhào.
 August fifteenth
 'August fifteenth.'
- 06 B: 就是- 啊 八月 十五号.

jiùshì- ā bāyuè shíwǔhào.
 DM INT August fifteenth
 '{Yeah} it is August fifteenth.'
 07 B: 反正 到时候 我我我-
 fǎnzhèng dàoshíhou wǒ wǒ wǒ-
 anyway by.then 1sg 1sg 1sg
 'Anyways, by then, I'
 08 A: 嗯.
 ěn.
 INT
 'Mm'
 08 B:→ 我 给 你 打电话 吧.
 wǒ gěi nǐ dǎdiànhuà ba.
 1sg to 2sg make.phonecall PRT
 'Let me call you.'
 09 A: 行.
 xíng.
 INT
 'Okay/{that works}.'

3.4.3.3 Claiming authority in responding position

The [*Wǒ* + VP + *ba*] format is relatively less common in responding position. When it does appear in responding position, *ba* is found used to 1) redo an original proposal or 2) propose an alternative solution. In both situations, the speaker uses this format to assert deontic authority over the original proposer and transforms their responses into an initiating action.

Ex 3.24 is an example of the first situation where the *ba* format is used to redo an original proposal. In the prior turns, the son (SON) initiates the topic of the broken camera that he brought home before, and he starts responding to the dad's (DAD) question regarding the condition of the camera. In this segment, in line 04, the son offers to let the father (DAD) use the camera since the

father indicates the camera is still usable, ‘you (can) try to use it. It’s yours now.’ The dad, in his responding turn, produces an agreement token, *haode* ‘Okay’ followed by a modified repeat (Stivers 2010) of the original offer: modified from ‘you can just try to use it’ to ‘let me use it.’ In addition to the change from second-person pronoun imperative to first-person pronoun hortative, the father makes two other modifications: adverb *jiu*, ‘just’ is replaced by *lai* ‘come’ – often used to indicate the speaker’s initiatives and willingness to perform an action (Chen 2010) – and the utterance-final particle *ma* is replaced by *ba*. As mentioned before, speaker-hortative *ba* is a pseudo invitation marker that recurrently occurs in initiating position to mitigate the commitment displayed in offering a solution or proposing a conversation closing. The pseudo invitation presumes the speaker’s deontic authority over the recipient. Used in a responding position, *ba* format, along with the initiative marker *lai* and the modified repeat (Stivers 2005), allows the father in this turn to assert authority and agency over the proposal/solution, which also makes the original first speaker, the son, produce an agreement token responding position, in line 06 (*haode* ‘Okay’).

Ex 3.24 CallHome_0755_line 153

01 DAD: 噢, 你 你 就是 电池 放不进;
ō, nǐ nǐ jiùshì diànchí fangbújìn;
 INT 2sg 2sg DM battery put-NEG-in
 ‘Oh, so it’s just that the battery won’t fit in?’
 关- 关不起来 啊.
guān guānbùqǐlai ā.
 close close-NEG-up PRT
 ‘The battery door won’t close?’
 02 SON: 关不起来 唉; 所以 它-
guān-bù-qǐlai āi, suǒyǐ tā-

close-NEG-up PRT so 3sg
 \{It\ won't close. So it-'
 我- 我 就 不 能 拍 嘛 就- 好像。
 wǒ- wǒ jiù bù néng pāi ma jiù- hǎoxiàng.
 1sg 1sg just NEG can shoot PRT DM seems.like
 \It seems like I can't take photos {with this camera}.'

03 DAD: 那 你 就 把 胶布 胶一胶 嘛。
 nà nǐ jiù bǎ jiāobù jiāo-yì-jiāo ma.
 DM 2sg just BA tape tape.try PRT
 就 好 了。
 jiù hǎo le.
 Just good CRS
 \Use tape then. That should keep the door closed.'

04 SON: 唉 你 就 用用看 嘛；
 āi nǐ jiù yòngyòngkàn ma;
 INT 2sg just use.try PRT
 \You just try it,'
 这 给 你 用 了； 算了。
 zhè gěi nǐ yòng le, suànle.
 this to 2sg use CRS whatever
 \{I'll\ let you use it, whatever.'

05 DAD:→ 好的，我 来 用用看 吧。
 hǎode, wǒ lái yòngyòngkàn ba.
 okay 1sg come use.try PRT
 \Okay, let me use it.'

06 SON: 好的。
 hǎode.
 okay
 \Okay.'

07 DAD: 嗯。
 ěn.
 INJ
 \Mm.'

In Ex 3.25, the daughter (DAU) offers an alternative solution to the original proposal made by the father (DAD). The father who lives in the U.S. has asked the daughter to buy a clothing item and ship it to him. The two participants are discussing the color of the clothing in this segment.

In line 01, the daughter asks the color preference of her father who proposes coffee color in line 02, and seeks the daughter's agreement using a tag question 'is it Okay?' The one-second gap projects a dispreferred response from the daughter. In line 04, instead of responding to the dad's question, the daughter offers a different solution, 'Then let me decide for you BA.' The main clause displays a strong deontic authority with a benefactive structure and the lexical choice of *zuòzhǔ* 'in charge of.' Speaker-hortative particle *ba* here helps mitigate her authority and the disaffiliation by inviting an agreement. The father agrees in the next turn with a type-conforming response 'yeah, just decide it for me.'

Ex 3.25 CallHome_0799_line138

- 01 DAU: 什么 颜色, 哎,
shénme yánsè, āi,
 what color PRT
 'What color?'
- 02 DAD: 颜色 呢, (.) 还是 以 咖啡 一类 吧, 好不好.
yánsè ne(.) hái shì yǐ kāfēi yí lèi ba, hǎo bu hǎo.
 color PRT still as coffee one.category PRT good-NEG-good
 'Regarding color, something like coffee, okay?'
- 03 (1.0)
- 04 DAU:→ 嗯:: †那 我 给 你 作主 吧.
ēn:: †nà wǒ gěi nǐ zuòzhǔ ba.
 INT DM 1sg for 2sg make.decision PRT
 'Mm, then let me decide it for you.'
- 05 DAD: 哎, 你 给 我 作[主 好了].
āi, nǐ gěi wǒ zuò[zhǔ hǎo le.]
 INT 2sg for 1sg make.decision good-CRS
 'Yeah, you {just} decide it for me. {That would be good.}'
- 06 DAU: [好 伐,]
 [hǎo fá,]
 Okay PRT
 Okay?
- 07 DAD: 我 跟 [你 讲,]

	wǒ	gēn	[nǐ	jiǎng,]	
	1sg	with	2sg	talk	
	'Let me tell you.'				
08 DAT:		[嗯,]	嗯.	
		[ēn,]	ēn.	
		INT		INT	
		'Mm mm.'			

3.4.3.4 Summary of [Wǒ + VP+ ba]

Ba formats are observed when the speaker is not obligated to perform the future action but proposes to perform it by inviting the recipient's agreement on the proposal. Data analyses in this section show that the function of *ba* differs in different sequential environments.

In initiating position, the format [Wǒ + VP+ *ba*] is used to offer a solution to a problem that emerged in the prior conversation, and *ba* mitigates the speaker's commitment to the offer with a pseudo invitation that frames the offer as a proposal and avoids imposition on the recipient. The format with *ba* is also recurrently used to initiate a closing sequence where the speaker orients to bring the current discussion of arrangement-making to closure before moving to the next agenda or topic. *Ba* in this position has dual functions: it's a pseudo invitation to both the arrangement and the closing of the current topic. When used in a responding position where the prior turn has made a response relevant, the format with *ba* asserts the speaker's agency and transforms the response into an initiating action.

In the above environments, the speaker-hortative marker *ba* is used to mitigate the speaker's commitment to the proposed action by sharing his or her deontic authority with the interlocutor,

but the invitation to participate is a pseudo one and presupposes the speaker's agency. The speaker is initiating their commitment to the nominated action to the extent that they will perform it anyway regardless of the recipient's agreement.

3.4.4 Summary of IFMDs

This section examines three IFMDs, vague time references, the modal verb *kěyǐ* used in the format [*Pronoun* + *kěyǐ* + VP] and the utterance-final particle *ba* used in [*Pronoun* + VP + *ba*]. The latter two formats mitigate the speaker's commitment to future actions but operate on different levels and appear in different positions.

Kěyǐ as a modal verb that indicates deontic possibility and is used with different pronouns to perform initiating actions including offering ('I can'), suggestions and invitations ('you can'), and proposals ('we can'). Speakers are also often found to conceal their offers and invitations as proposals to prompt the recipient's acceptance. In these environments, the *kěyǐ* provides options to the recipient without asserting the speaker's deontic authority.

Utterance-final particle *ba* can also be used with different pronouns, although the current study focuses on its speaker-hortative use with a first-person singular pronoun. *Ba* in general mitigates the speaker's commitment by framing the action as a proposal that pseudo-shares their deontic authority with the interlocutor, but actually presupposes the speaker's own authority. In initiating actions, the format with *ba* offers a solution to an emerging problem or initiates a closing sequence to the current talk; in responding position, the format with *ba* is used to assert the speaker's deontic authority over the named action and transforms the response to an initiating action.

3.5 Analysis of illocutionary force indicating devices

Illocutionary force intensifying devices (IFIDs) enables the speaker to upgrade their commitment to future actions in various aspects. Unlike IFMDs, which are more likely to occur in first-position commissive actions, IFIDs can appear in first position if the speaker has a pre-existing obligation and in second position when a stronger commitment is requested or pursued by the interlocutor.

In this study, various IFIDs are categorized into two groups: clausal and supra-clausal operations. Clausal devices are syntactic lexical items such as explicit performative verbs (e.g., *bǎozhèng*, *chéngnuò*, ‘promise’), modal verbs (e.g., *huì* ‘will,’ *bìxū* ‘must,’ and *yīnggāi* ‘should’), intensifiers (e.g., *yídìng*, *kěndìng* ‘definitely’), extreme case formulations (e.g., *quán* ‘all of,’ *bùguǎn*, *wúlùn*, ‘no matter,’ *měi* ‘every’), exact time references (e.g., *míngtiān* ‘tomorrow’), benefactive structures (e.g., *gěi* ‘for’ structure), and resultative expressions (e.g., BA structure and resultative complements). Supra-clausal devices operate in turns with multiple TCUs, such as the multi-unit multi-action design in the officials’ promises (see Section 4.4 in Chapter 4), and repetitions (e.g., ‘Okay, okay’ and ‘No problem, no problem’).

This section first presents example cases of exact time references, then focuses on the benefactive structure and the modal verb *huì* as examples of clausal devices, and lastly analyzes self-repetition of particles as an example of supra-clausal operations. Prosodic features will be discussed in the cases of *huì* and self-repetition as an important element in distinguishing different social action formats. Other devices will be examined in future studies.

3.5.1 Exact time references in a my-side arrangement of a pre-established event

Exact time references are observed in the environment where there is a pre-established future event, and the speaker informs the arrangement of the named future events on their side. Borrowing Pomerantz's (1980) term of "my-side telling," such arrangement is referred to as a my-side arrangement, which highlights the speaker's unilateral plan of the established-future arrangement. The following example Ex 3.26 is such a case where taking care of the mother is a pre-established bilateral obligation for the father (DAD) and the daughter (DAU) the daughter who lives abroad. The father starts by reporting to his daughter about the mom's condition (line 01). After the updates, in line 05, the father informs her of his plan to visit the mother in the hospital in the afternoon. The daughter's continuer tokens 'eh' throughout the segment show the recipient's receipts of the information and agreement with the arrangement.

Ex 3.26 CallHome_0716_03_20_line 40_44

01 DAD: 呃:: 妈妈 已经(.) 这- 这-
è :: māma yǐjīng(.) zhè- zhè-
'uh mom already here here'
呃 在 医院 住 了 一 个 星 期 了。
è zài yīyuàn zhù le yī gè xīngqī le.
uh at hospital live PFV one CL week CSR
'Uh, {your} mom has been in the hospital for a week.'

02 DAU: 嗯。
ēn.
INJ
'Mm.'

03 DAD: 呃 我 来 了 以后 啊,
è wǒ lái le yǐhòu ā,
uh Isg come CRS after PRT
'Uh, after I came,'
我 昨天 晚上 到 的。
wǒ zuótiān wǎnshang dào de,

1sg yesterday last.night arrive PRT
 'I arrived last night.'

04 DAU: 嗯.
 ēn.
 INJ
 'Mm.'

05 DAD:→ 我 今天 下午, 我 去 看,
 wǒ jīntiān xiàwǔ, wǒ qù kàn,
 1sg today afternoon 1sg go visit
 去 看 她.
 qù kàn tā.
 go visit 3sg
 'I will visit her this afternoon.'

06 DAU: 嗯.
 ēn
 'mm.'

Similarly, in Ex 3.27, a common friend has just arrived in the U.S., and the two speakers are in a joint effort to help him settle down. After reporting the recent updates, speaker B informs A about his next-step plan in line 11, 'I'll visit and check on him again tomorrow.'

Ex 3.27 CallHome_0920_11_50

01 A: 那个 贡庄 怎么样.
 nàge Gòngzhuāng zěnmeyàng.
 DM NAME how
 '{By the way} how is Gongzhuang doing?'

02 B: 贡庄 挺 好 的,
 Gòngzhuāng tǐng hǎo de,
 NAME pretty good PRT
 我 把 你 地址 给 他 了.
 wǒ bǎ nǐ dìzhǐ gěi tā le.
 1sg BA 2sg address give him CRS
 'Gongzhuang is pretty good. I gave him your address.'

03 A: 哦.
 ò
 INJ
 'Oh.'

- 04 B: [嗯,]
[ēn]
INJ
'Mm,'
- 05 A: [他 说], 他- [他 说],
[tā shuō] tā- [tā shuō,]
3sg say 3sg 3sg say
'He said, he said,'
- 06 B: [把 地]址 给 他 了。
[bǎ dì]zhǐ gěi tā le.
BA address give 3sg CRS
'{I} gave {your} address to him.'
- 07 A: 他 说 来 信 吗。
tā shuō lái xìn ma.
3sg say come letter Q
'Did he say he {could write to us}?'
- 08 B: (0.7) °hh 那个 他 说 给 你 写 信。
°hh nàge tā shuō gěi nǐ xiě xìn,
DM DM 3sg say give 2sg write letter
'Yeah, he said he would write to you.'
- 09 A: 哦:, (.) 行。
ò: xíng.
oh INT
'Oh, okay.'
- 10 B: 嗯, 他 说 给 你 写 信。
ēn, tā shuō gěi nǐ xiě xìn,
INJ 3sg say give 2sg write letter
'Mm, he said he would write to you.'
- 11 B: → 明天 我 再 到 他 那 看 一 眼。
míngtiān wǒ zài dào tā nà kàn.yì.yǎn.
Tomorrow 1sg again go 3sg there take.a.look
'Tomorrow I will go to his place again to take a look.'
- 12 A: 具体 的 事 儿 不 要 说 了。
jùtǐ de shìr búyào shuō le.
detailed NOM thing don't talk CRS
'Don't mention the details {here on the phone}.'
- 13 B: 嗯 嗯, 我 知 道 了。
ēn ēn wǒ zhīdào le.
Mm mm 1sg know CRS

`Mm, mm, I got it.'

It is important to note that exact time references can be used in various sequential environments to display a high commitment to a future action. The above examples in this section show one of the environments: the committed future action is a part of a pre-established joint effort to benefit a third party (the obligation of taking care of a family member in Ex 3.26 and helping a mutual friend in Ex 3.27).

3.5.2 Benefactive structures in offering

Benefactive structures, also found in other Asian languages (Hermann 1979), are typically marked by a benefactive coverb (or preposition) (Stevanovic and Peräkylä 2012)¹³ preceding a noun phrase as the benefactor, which can be presented in the format [Agent + Coverb + benefactor + VP]. Benefactive markers observed in the current dataset include *gěi* 'for,' *dài* 'to take,' *bang* 'to help', and *péi* 'to accompany.' See the following examples Ex 3.28 to Ex 3.31 extracted from the dataset. Cases in which *gěi* acts as an action verb (Ex 3.32) or indirect object marker (dative, see Ex 3.33 and Ex 3.34) (Li & Thompson 1989; Huang & Ahrens 1999; Liu 2006) are excluded in this collection.

Ex 3.28 Benefactive marker *gěi* 'for' (Summer_2019_0804_00007)

微单	可以,	我	给	你们	买.
<i>wēi-dān</i>	<i>kěyǐ</i>	<i>wǒ</i>	<i>gěi</i>	<i>nǐmen</i>	<i>mǎi.</i>
micro-lens	can	1sg	for	2pl	buy

¹³ “Coverb” refers to the group of morphemes such as *gěi* ‘for’ and *gēn* ‘with’ in Mandarin that introduces noun phrases and modify the main verb of the sentence. Coverbs can function partially as prepositions, and partially as verbs, as they were grammaticalized or being grammaticalized from verbs. See a detailed discussion on coverbs in Li and Thompson (1989). This study uses the term “coverb” to include not only prepositions but also less grammaticalized elements such as *dài* ‘to take’ and *péi* ‘to accompany.’

'The microlens camera is good. I {will} buy {it} for you.'

Ex 3.29 Benefactive marker *dài* 'to take' (Summer_2019_00029)

明天 5点 起床 我带 你去练。
míngtiān diǎn qǐchuáng wǒ dài nǐ qù liàn.
tomorrow five.o'clock get.up 1sg take 2sg go practice
'Get up at 5 am tomorrow, and I'll take you to practice.'

Ex 3.30 Benefactive marker *bāng* 'to help' (Summer_2019_0827_GH030250)

我 可以 帮 你 改 小 一点。
wǒ kěyǐ bāng nǐ gǎi xiǎo yī.diǎn.
1sg can help 2sg modify small a.bit
'I can help modify your {body} to a smaller {size}.'

Ex 3.31 Benefactive marker *péi* 'to accompany' (CallHome_0626)

之后 我 陪 你-
zhīhòu wǒ péi nǐ-
Afterward 1sg accompany 2sg
我 看 带 你- 陪 你 玩玩, 好不好?
wǒ kàn dài nǐ- péi nǐ wánwán hǎobuhǎo?
1sg look take 2sg accompany 2sg play good-NEG-good
'Afterwards, I'll accompany you- I'll take you- {I'll} accompany you to have fun. Is {that} okay?'

Ex 3.32 *Gěi* as an action verb (CallHome 0881)

到时候 我 会 给 你 的 就是了, 是 吧。
dào shíhòu wǒ huì gěi nǐ de jiùshìle, shì ba.
by.then 1sg HUI give 2sg PRT that's.it is PRT
'Later I will give you (another fabric), alright?'

Ex 3.33 *Gěi* as an indirect object marker following the main verb (CallHome_0799)

完了 以后 寄 给- 寄 给 你 看 啊。
wán.le yǐhòu jì gěi- jì gěi nǐ kàn, a.
complete after sent to send to 2sg look PRT
After {this},{I} will send- {I will} send (it) to you to take a look.

Ex 3.34 *Gěi* as an indirect object marker preceding the main verb (CallHome_0735)

我 会 给 你 们 打-电话。

wǒ huì gěi nǐmen dǎdiànhuà.
 1sg HUI to 2pl make-phonecall
 'I will call you.'

Benefactive structures are not prominent in officials' promises (see Table 3.4) but are one of the most common IFIDs observed in everyday conversation (15 occurrences in CallHome/CallFriend corpora and 19 occurrences in Summer 2019 face-to-face conversations). Moreover, as shown in Table 3.5, benefactive structures are most likely to be used in first-position actions, more specifically, offering. This section takes the coverb *gěi* in the format [*Wǒ* + *gěi* + *nǐ/nǐmen* + VP] as an example of a benefactive structure and investigates the sequential environments and functions of this structure.

Table 3.4 Distribution of the *gěi* benefactive structure in commissive actions in ordinary conversation

	Frequency of <i>gěi</i> benefactive structure	First position	Second position
CallHome/CallFriend	15/120 (12.5%)	13/15 (86.7%)	2/15 (13.3%)
Summer 2019 Face-to-face	19/73 (26.0%)	16/19 (84.2%)	3/19 (15.8%)

In Ex 3.35, the family is reviewing photos of the young couple's wedding. Jay's (JAY) mother (MOM) proposes to buy a microlens camera (line 01), which is addressed to her husband. Jay self-selects with an offer ('I will {buy it} for you' in line 04 before his father responds. The turn initial repair with a partial repetition in line 06 as well as the 0.7-second gap preceding the mom's turn displays the unusualness and unexpectedness of Jay's offer. Mom then makes a request using an implicit conditional structure 'buy a good one if you are buying for us,' which is contingent on the

validity of Jay’s offer. Indeed, Jay corrects his offer in line 07 by replacing the verb *mai* ‘to buy’ with *xuan* ‘to pick.’

Ex 3.35 Summer_2019_00007/GH010016_00_06

- 01 MOM: 那 下次 我们 买 一个 那个: 微单.
nà xiàcì wǒmen mǎi yí gè nàge wēidān.
 DM next.time 1pl buy a CL that micro-lens
 ‘Let’s buy a micro lens {camera} next time.’
- 02 (1.0)
- 03 MOM: 爸爸, 我们 买 一个 微单.
bàba wǒmen mǎi yí gè wēidān.
 Dad 1pl buy a CL micro-lens
 ‘Dad ((addressing her husband)), let’s buy a microlens camera.’
- 04 JAY:→ 微单 可以, 我 给 你们 买.
wēi-dān kěyǐ wǒ gěi nǐmen mǎi.
 micro-lens okay 1sg for 2pl buy
 ‘The micro lens camera is good. I {will} buy {it} for you.’
- 05 (0.7)
- 06 MOM: 你 给 我们 买? 买- [买 要 买 好 的.]
nǐ gěi wǒmen mǎi? mǎi- [mǎi yào mǎi hǎo de
 2sg for 1pl buy buy buy need buy good NOM
 ‘You buy it for us? You got to buy a good one {if that’s the case}.’
- 07 JAY:→ = [我 给 你 选::,]
 = [wǒ gěi nǐ xuǎn::,]
 1sg for 2sg pick
 ‘I {will} pick for you.’
- 08 MOM: ((laughter))

Ex 3.36 is another extreme example where the benefactive structure is used to upgrade commitment to a future action. In this conversation, the father (DAD) initiates the topic of “going back home” by referring to a letter that he had written to the son (SON). Lines 06 to 08 are designed as a suggestion with a second-person pronoun (Couper-Kuhlen 2014) and the utterance-final particle *ba* (Li and Thompson 1989). The son’s receipt token in line 09, ‘Mm-hmm’ treats the

dad's turn as new information or a suggestion. In line 11 the son makes a commitment to a future action 'Anyway, I will go back as soon as possible' with the second syllable of *fanzheng* being deleted. Note TCU-initial *fan(zheng)* 'anyway' has been found often used to mitigate the speaker's resistance to a presupposition made in the interlocutor's prior turn (Gao & Tao 2021). The son's turn shows his understanding that the father has a presupposition that the son would 'prioritize his job.' In line 13, the commitment is upgraded by deleting turn-initial *fanzheng* and inserting a benefactive structure, 'I will go back (for you) as soon as possible,' which explicates the benefactive relationship.

It is noteworthy that the *gěi* structure is inserted in an unnatural or less grammatical position here – preceding with the modal verb *huì*¹⁴, indicating that the speaker sacrifices grammatical rules to prioritize this social dimension in real-time interaction. In the following turns, the father acknowledges his beneficiary status with an account of his wishes and physical condition.

Ex 3.36 CallHome_0848

05 DAD: 发了 封 信 呢
fā le fēng xìn ne
 send PFV CL letter PRT(topic)
 跟 你 说了说, 就是:
gēn nǐ shuōleshuō, jiùshì:
 with 2sg talk.about DM
 'I sent {you} a letter {where I} talked about'

06 DAD: °h 哎 回家 的 事.=
 °h āi huíjiā de shì.=
 INT return.home ASS thing
 'about coming back home,'

¹⁴ The most grammatical word order would be: 我会尽快给您回去一趟的'I will as soon as possible for you return once.' Linguistic judgement is made by the author and 10 other native speakers without a linguistic background.

- 07 DAD: =回家 事 的话, 你看你自己:
 =*huíjiā shì dehuà, nǐ kàn ni nǐzìjǐ*:
 return.home thing DM(topic) 2sg see 2sg self
 'Regarding coming back home, you should decide for yourself.'
- 08 DAD: °h 哎; 以你工作 为主 吧 .
 °h *āi; yǐ nǐ gōngzuò wéizhǔ ba*.
 INJ as 2sg work as.priority PRT
 'Uh, you should prioritize your job.'
- 09 SON: 嗯嗯.
 mm-hmm.
 INT INT
 'Mm-hmm.'
- 10 DAD: [啊?]
 [ā?]
 INT
 'What?'
- 11 SON: [反 我:] 尽快 会: 回去 一趟 ,
 [*fǎn wǒ*], *jǐnkuài huì huíqu yìtàng*,
 Anyway 1sg as.soon.as.possible HUÌ return one.visit
 'Anyway, I will go back home as soon as possible.'
- 12 你们 放心吧 ,
nǐmen fàngxīn ba,
 2pl no.worry PRT
 'You should not worry.'
- 13 → [我 尽] 快 给您 [会 回] 去的,
 [*wǒ jǐn*] *kuài gěi nín [huì huí]qu de*.
 1sg as.soon.as.possible for 2sg HUÌ return PRT
 'I will go back for you as soon as possible.'
- 14 DAD: [哎] , [对 对,]
 [*āi*] [*duì duì*,]
 INJ right right,
 'Yeah. Right right.'
- 15 DAD: 哎.
āi
 INJ
 'Yeah.'
- 16 SON: [到时候.]
 [*Dàoshíhòu*]
 By then

- 17 DAD: `By then,`
 [因为] 我 呢,
 [yīnwèi] wǒ ne
 Because 1sg PRT (topic)
 `Because I,`
- 18 就 反正 因为: 人 老 了, 生病 了.
 jiù fǎnzhèng yīnwèi rén lǎo le shēngbìng le.
 just anyway because person old CRS get.sick CRS
 `Just, {it's} because {I'm} old and sick now,`

3.5.3 Upgrading commitment with the modal verb *huì* and intensifying stress

The modal verb *huì* in the format [*wǒ + huì + X (de)*] is a common IFID that is especially prevalent in the telephone call dataset. *Huì* has two widely recognized meanings: 1) expressing ability (Ex 3.37) and 2) indicating possibility (Ex 3.38). Other less recognized meanings of *huì* discussed in previous studies include marking future tense (Wang, 1947/2014; Chen, 2020), marking a habitual practice or phenomenon with a certain condition (Lamarre, 2016; Fan, 2016), and promising (Ex 3.39) that conveys the speaker's voluntary obligation to perform a future action (Xie 2002; Peng 2007; Chen 2020). This section adopts CA and IL approaches to investigate the sequential environments and interactional functions of *huì* in the format [*wǒ + huì + X (de)*] and discuss how the speaker negotiates deontic rights while displaying commitment.

Ex 3.37 Ability (dynamic modality) (Lv 1979)

你 会不会 唱 这 个 歌.
 nǐ huìbùhuì chàng zhè ge gē.
 2sg can-NEG-can sing this CL song
 `Can you sing this song?`

Ex 3.38 Possibility (epistemic modality) (Peng 2007)

将来 总厂 选拔 肯定 会有你.
 jiānglái zǒngchǎng xuǎnbá, kěndìng huì yǒu nǐ.
 future general selection, definitely will exist 2sg

'You will be selected in the future general selection for sure.'

Ex 3.39 Promise use (Huang 1999, as cited in Peng 2007)

你 等 着 吧, 我 们 会 考 第 一 名 的。
nǐ děng zhe ba, wǒmen huì kǎo dìyī míng de.
2sg wait PRG PRT 1pl will test the.first PRT
'Just wait. We will get the first place in the exam.'

The data analysis identifies two variations of this format based on whether *huì* has prosodic stress or not. Section 3.5.3.1 investigates the variation with unstressed *huì* which is found used to offer an expected commitment to a future action or to inform about the arrangement of an established future event; Section 3.5.3.2 examines the variation with stressed *huì* which is applied to reassure someone of a commitment to a granted request or a pre-existing obligation that has not been fulfilled. In some cases, the stressed *huì* is also observed to claim agency over a self-benefiting future action in the responding position.

3.5.3.1 Unstressed *huì*

The format [*wǒ* + *huì* + *X* (*de*)] with unstressed *huì* is predominantly found in initiating actions where the speaker commits to a future action unilaterally without an explicit input of preferences or needs from the interlocutor. Two subtypes of the sequential environment are observed: offering an expected commitment and informing someone of an arrangement.

3.5.3.1.1 Offering an expected commitment

The first environment of the format with unstressed *huì* is an offering in which the promisor assumes that the promisee prefers and expects the promisor to perform the future action although no explicit requests have been made. Compared to the other formats of offering, [*wǒ* + *huì* + *VP*

(*de*)] externalizes the promisor's assumption of the promisee's needs and expectations, which indirectly displays the promisor's authority in determining the future activity.

In Ex 3.40, four kids are playing a board game. Lele plays a dominant role in the group's daily interactions¹⁵ and has been winning this game for a few rounds. This extract starts at the beginning of a new round of the game when everyone has just received their cards. While others are busy organizing their cards, Lele initiates a promise in line 05 without a request from anyone, 'I will let you survive a few more rounds,' which can also be seen as an announcement of his unilateral decision. Although this promise is not responded to by anyone, it is also not rejected or challenged. By making the promise, Lele displays his understanding that other players prefer surviving more rounds in the game and expect him to kindly keep them alive. The understanding presupposes his dominant status and power in this game, which is also demonstrated in the small group's daily activity as shown by ethnographic observations. The [*wǒ*+ *huì* + VP (*de*)] format upgrades his deontic stance by claiming his authority in determining everyone else's "fate," not only in the previous games but also in future events.

Ex 3.40 Summer_2019_00071_0945

01 LEL: 啊 呀呀呀呀。
á *yayayaya*
INJ INJ INJ INJ INJ (surprised)
'Oh {oh oh oh}.'

02 MAN: [(我 这 次 没 看见.)]
wǒ zhè cì méi kànjiàn.
1sg this time NEG see
'I didn't see {it} this time.'

¹⁵ Ethnographic observation conducted by the author.

- 03 ZIL/LEL: 一 二 三 四 五. ((counting the cards)
 yī èr sān sì wǔ.
 'One two three four five.'
- 04 MAN: 其实 我 自己 也 不 知道 自己 是 什么 牌.
 qíshí wǒ zìjǐ yě bù zhīdào zìjǐ shì shénme pái.
 actually 1sg self also NEG know self is what card
 'Actually, I don't know what cards I have either.'
- 05 LEL: →我 会 给 你们 活- 多 活 几 个 回合 的.
 wǒ huì gěi nǐmen huó- duō huó jǐ gè huíhé de.
 1sg HUI let 2pl live- more live several CL round de
 'I will let you survive more rounds.'

Ex 3.41 is another example where speaker A (an older sister who lives in the U.S.) and B2 (the younger sister who lives in mainland China with the rest of the family) are talking about a fabric that A has given to B2. Prior to this extract, speaker B2 complains that the fabric was taken by their mom, and in lines, 01-04 she tries to validate the mom's behavior ('We don't have money to buy anything for her... that means, of course, we have to give {that} to her respectfully, right?') The older sister, A, agrees with this validation ('Exactly') and suggests her sister give up the fabric (line 05). In compensation, A offers to give B2 another piece of fabric ('Later I will give you {more fabric}, right?') With the modal verb *huì*, A externalizes her understanding and assumption that B2 prefers to have the fabric although B2 does not request it, which simultaneously asserts A's deontic authority in determining the future event. However, just like in Ex 3.40, this offer is not taken up in B2's following turn. After a one-second-long silence, B2 initiates her turn with a high pitch 'Oh,' a common device used to indicate epistemic independence of the second speaker (Heritage 2002), followed by a statement that their mother rarely asks for things from the daughter – a fact shared by both speakers but not relevant to speaker A's suggestion and offer in the prior

turns. Therefore B2's turn is not a response to A's offer in line 06 but a continuation of her own speech in lines 01-04 – a second account she gives to validate her mother's behavior. B2's orientation to her own activity of validating the mom's behavior shows her resistance to A's offer and the indicated distribution of deontic rights in A's action.

Ex 3.41 CallHome_0881_0312

- 01 B2: 你说 我 咱 现在 也 没 钱 没 法 替 她 买 哈=
nǐshuō wǒ zán xiànzài yě méi qián méi fǎ tì tā mǎi hā,
 DM 1sg 1pl now also no money no method for 3sg buy PRT
 'We don't have money now and cannot buy (anything) for her'
- 02 A: [哎].
[āi].
 INJ
 'Yeah'
- 03 B2: =[人家] 看上 东西,
[rénjiā] kànshàng dōngxi,
 3sg like thing
 '{When} she likes something (from us),'
- 04 B2: 就是说, °hh 咱 当然 得 拱手相让 啦 嚟.=
jiùshishuō, °hh zán dāngrán děi gǒngshǒuxiāngràng lā hāo.=
 DM 1pl of.course have.to respectful.give PRT PRT
 'That means, of course, we need to give {that} to her respectfully, right?'
- 05 A: =对 啊, 你 就 割 了 吧,
=duì ā, nǐ jiù gē le ba,
 right PRT 2sg just give.up PFV PRT
 Right. You {should} just give up (and let her have it).
- 06 → 到时候 我 会 给 你 就是了, 是吧.
dàoshíhòu wǒ huì gěi nǐ jiùshìle, shì ba.
 by.then 1sg will give 2sg that's.it is PRT
 'Later I will give you (more fabric), alright?'
- 07 (1.0)
- 08 B2: †哦:, 你说 人家 难得 开 一次 口 嚟?
 †ò:, *nǐshuō rénjiā nándé kāi yī.cì kǒu hāo?*
 INJ DM 3sg rarely open once mouth PRT
 'Oh. She rarely asks.'

- 09 A: 对 呀。
 duì ya.
 correct PRT
 '{That's} correct/Exactly!'
- 10 B2: 哎哟 就 那 裤子 也 穿 得 特 合适。
 āiyō jiù nà kùzi yě chuān de tè héshì.
 INJ DM that pants also wear PRT very suitable
 'The pants also fit her super well.'

In the above examples, the speaker offers a high commitment to performing the future action with the understanding that the recipient prefers the favor and expects the promisor to perform the named action. In other words, such an offering functions to confirm the recipient's unspoken expectation, and encodes a strong deontic authority in determining the future event relevant to the recipient. Recipients in both examples, however, do not respond – either with acceptance of the promise/offer or rejection, which indicates a resistance to the displayed distribution of deontic rights.

3.5.3.1.2 Informing about the arrangement of an established future activity

When there is an established joint future activity, the speaker often uses the format [*wǒ* + *huì* + *VP*] to inform the interlocutor about the arrangement on their side with resources like time references, and to alert the recipient to be prepared. In terms of turn design, particle *de* is dropped in these situations, and emphasis is added to the informational focus (Ladd 2008) of the utterance – the details of the arrangement.

Ex 3.42 is an example of arrangement-informing action using the [*wǒ* + *huì* + *VP*] format. In this example, the daughter (DAU) is telling her mother (MOM) about her summer schedule. In

line 02, she informs the mother ‘I will call you on that weekend.’ However, the mother does not respond until a after one-second-long silence, which signals problems in the prior turn and projects dispreferred actions. Noticing the silence, in lines 05-06, the daughter provides an account for the arrangement, ‘because Leinuo has not called for a while.’ In line 08, the mother agrees with the arrangement (‘Uh, okay okay okay, no problem.’) The two participants then expand the sequence to confirm the arrangements.

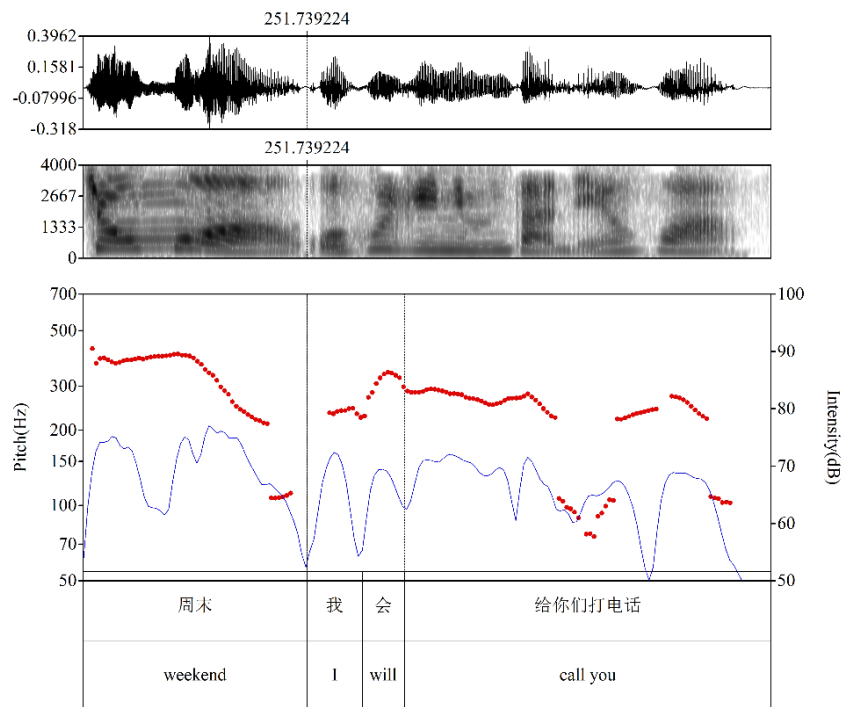
Ex 3.42 CallHome_0735

- 01 DAU: 然后 我 在 那儿 再-
ránhòu wǒ zài nàr zài-
 Then 1sg at there again
 ‘And then I {may} {stay} there more-
 呃: 可能 是 下 下 个 星期,
uh: kěnéng shì xià xià gè xīngqī,
 Uh maybe is next next CL week
 ‘Uh maybe in the week after next week, I will again-’
- 02 DAU: 中间 那 个 week- 那 个:: ↑周末,
zhōngjiān nà ge week- nà ge zhōumò,
 middle that CL week that CL weekend
 → 我 会 给 你们 打电话。
wǒ huì gěi nǐmen dǎdiànhuà
 1sg HUI to 2pl make-phonecall
 ‘On the weekend of that week in the middle ((of the month)), I will call you.’
- 03 (1.0)
- 04 MOM: 呃, [下 下 个-]
uh, [xià xià gè-]
 uh next next CL
 Uh, next next-
- 05 DAU: [因为 那时候] 雷-
yīnwèi nàshíhou léi-
 ‘because at that time, Lei-’
- 06 DAU: 因为 雷洛 好[久 没 打] 电话 了。
yīnwèi léiluò hǎo[jiǔ méi dǎ] diànhuà le.

yīnwèi léliluò hǎo[jiǔ méi dǎ] diànhuà le.
 Because NAME long.time NEG make phonecall CRS
 'Because Leiluo hasn't called for a while.'
 07 MOM: [嗯, 所以,]
 [ēn suǒyǐ,]
 INJ so
 'Mm, so,'
 08 MOM: 呃 行, 行, 行, 没事.
 uh xíng xíng xíng méishì
 uh Okay Okay Okay no.problem
 'Uh, Okay, okay, okay, no problem.'
 09 (0.8)
 10 DAU: [行 吗].
 [xíng ma.]
 Okay Q
 '{Is that} Okay?'
 11 MOM: [呃],
 [uh]
 uh
 'Uh,'
 12 DAU: 下 个 周 [末.
 xià gè zhōu[mò.
 Next CL weekend.
 'Next weekend.'
 13 MOM: [行], 行, 行.
 [xíng] xíng xíng
 'Okay Okay Okay.'
 'Okay, okay, okay.'
 14 (0.2)
 15 DAU: 行 [吗].
 Xíng [ma].
 Okay Q
 '{Is that} okay?'
 06 MOM: [哎], 可以.
 [āi] kěyǐ.
 INJ Okay.
 'Yeah, {that} works.'

The daughter's orientation to informing her arrangement is also displayed in the prosodic design of her turn in line 02. As shown in Figure 3.2, the prosodic prominence of this line is placed on *zhōumò* 'weekend,' rather than the modal verb *huì*. The time expression is the pitch peak (423Hz) of the utterance with a wider pitch range (316.2Hz), a darker color in the spectrogram, higher intensity value (66.1 dB mean-energy intensity), and longer duration (588ms) compared to other parts of the utterance (the highest and lowest pitch of *wǒ huì gěi nǐmen dǎdiànhuà* 'I will call you' are 340.5Hz and 73Hz, the mean-energy intensity is 61.7db, and the speech rate 128ms per syllable). *huì* is not produced with audibly prominent stress whas an average time duration (128ms), and its mean intensity is lower than that of the whole clause (60.4 dB).

Figure 3.2 Waveform, spectrogram, pitch contour, and intensity of line 02 in Ex 3.42



3.5.3.2 Stressed *huì*

Unlike previous examples where the speaker initiates a promise without a request, [*wǒ* + *huì* + *X* (*de*)] with stressed *huì* is used to reassure the recipient of the speaker's commitment when the request has been granted but a higher degree of commitment is pursued. In cases where the speaker is obliged to perform the future action regardless of the requests, the speaker takes the initiative to promise voluntarily. In both situations, the speaker claims their deontic authority in performing the future actions and meanwhile indicates that no more pursuits are necessary.

3.5.3.2.1 Reassuring the recipient of a commitment to a granted request

Note the requests made by DAD and YSN both display a strong entitlement (Curl & Drew, 2008). Line 09 is a directive sentence ('you tell her'), with the compliment *yíxià* 'a little bit, briefly' indicating that the requested action only takes a short duration of time and is easy to complete (Jiang 2015), which minimizes the requestee's cost and contingency (Clayman & Heritage 2014). In line 10, YSN modifies DAD's request by adding a suggestive sentence-final particle *ba* (Li & Thompson 1989), which shows a relatively lower authority compared to the dad's request in line 01 but still displays a high entitlement. In line 12, OSN grants the request with an agreement token *hǎo* followed by a full-clause response with a stressed *huì* and another agreement token *hǎo*, 'Okay, I will tell her. Okay.' The complement *yíxià* 'briefly' is also dropped. Thompson, Fox, and Couper-Kuhlen (2015) find that request formats with higher entitlement project responses with lower agency – particles and minimal clausal responses (e.g., *I will*) – whereas requests with lower entitlement lead to higher agency in responses – full clause responses and upgraded full clause

responses. The current extract shows the opposite situation – OSN responds to a high-entitlement request with a high-agency promise. Although the English type of minimal clausal response format *I will* is not available in Mandarin grammar, a particle or a simple declarative without *hui* could be an alternative to the speaker’s current design in this environment. By designing his promise in the current format, OSN reassures the other two of his commitment to the future action and resists the high entitlement displayed in the requests. Subsequently, YSN provides an account (line 08) to his prior request and redoes his request with a downgraded entitlement (lines 18-19).

Ex 3.43 is an example of a commitment made as a response to a pursuit of a higher degree of commitment when the speaker has granted the request. In this conversation, the father (DAD) firstly requests the older son (OSN) to tell the mother to pay attention to a letter sent to her (lines 01-03), which is granted by OSN in line 04 with the particle *duì* ‘(That’s) right.’ However, *duì* functions as a confirmation or agreement token and is treated as not sufficient by the recipients. In lines 09 and 10, DAD and YSN each make another request to pursue a stronger commitment. In line 11, OSN makes a promise with stressed *hui*. As shown in Figure 3.3, *hui* in line 04 is stressed with a longer duration (133.4ms) compared to the preceding syllable (*wǒ* 77ms), and the following ones (*gēn tā jiǎng* ‘tell her’ is produced with a speed of 109ms per syllable), a stronger intensity (71.77 dB mean-energy intensity and 74.65 dB maximum intensity) compared to the mean energy of the whole utterance (71.35 dB) and the mean-energy of the following segment (*gēn tā jiǎng* ‘tell her,’ 68.44 dB). It is also the pitch peak of the clause (167.6Hz at the peak with a mean pitch of 161Hz and a range of 8.8Hz).

The request and promise formats in this extract demonstrate a negotiation of deontic authority over the future event. Note the requests made by DAD and YSN both display a strong entitlement (Curl & Drew, 2008). Line 09 is a directive sentence (‘you tell her’), with the compliment *yíxià* ‘a little bit, briefly’ indicating that the requested action only takes a short duration of time and is easy to complete (Jiang 2015), which minimizes the requestee’s cost and contingency (Clayman & Heritage 2014). In line 10, YSN modifies DAD’s request by adding a suggestive sentence-final particle *ba* (Li & Thompson 1989), which shows a relatively lower authority compared to the dad’s request in line 01 but still displays a high entitlement. In line 12, OSN grants the request with an agreement token *hǎo* followed by a full-clause response with a stressed *huì* and another agreement token *hǎo*, ‘Okay, I will tell her. Okay.’ The complement *yíxià* ‘briefly’ is also dropped. Thompson, Fox, and Couper-Kuhlen (2015) find that request formats with higher entitlement project responses with lower agency – particles and minimal clausal responses (e.g., *I will*) – whereas requests with lower entitlement lead to higher agency in responses – full clause responses and upgraded full clause responses. The current extract shows the opposite situation – OSN responds to a high-entitlement request with a high-agency promise. Although the English type of minimal clausal response format *I will* is not available in Mandarin grammar, a particle or a simple declarative without *huì* could be an alternative to the speaker’s current design in this environment. By designing his promise in the current format, OSN reassures the other two of his commitment to the future action and resists the high entitlement displayed in the requests. Subsequently, YSN

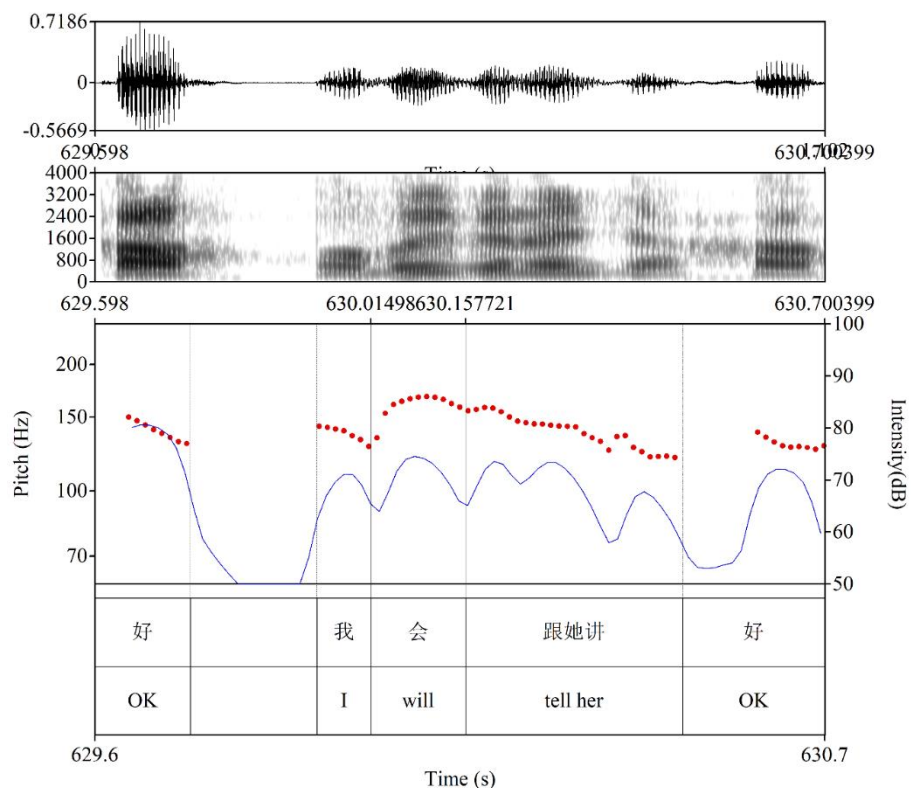
provides an account (line 08) to his prior request and redoes his request with a downgraded entitlement (lines 18-19).

Ex 3.43 CallHome_0756

- 01 DAD: 我 那 中间, 昨天 寄 一 信 给 她 啊,
wǒ nà zhōngjiān, zuótiān jì yí xìn gěi tā ā,
1sg that middle yesterday send one letter to 3sg PRT
'I sent her a letter yesterday.'
- 02 你 叫 她, °hh 呢:: 注意 一 下 吧 就 行 了 ;
nǐ jiào tā, °hh e:: zhùyì yíxià ba jiù xíng le;
2sg tell 3sg uh pay.attention briefly PRT just fine PRT
'you tell her to pay attention. That's it.'
- 03 免得 她 走掉 还 拿 不到 呢。
miǎnde tā zǒudiào hái ná bú dào ne.
in.case 3sg leave still take NEG-get PRT
'In case she has left by then and can't get {the letter}.'
- 04 OSN: → 对。
duì.
correct
'{That's} right.'
(Five lines omitted)
- 09 DAD: 你 跟 她 讲 一 下。
nǐ gēn tā jiǎng yíxià.
2sg with 3sg tell briefly
'You tell her.'
- 10 YSN: 你- 你- 你 跟 她 讲 一 下 吧,
nǐ-nǐ-nǐ gēn tā jiǎng yíxià ba,
2sg 2sg 2sg with 3sg tell briefly PRT
'{How about} you tell her.'
- 11 [好 吧. 哎.]
[hǎo ba. āi.]
Okay PRT INT
'Okay? Yeah.'
- 12 OSN: → [好. 我 会] 跟 她 讲; 好。
[hǎo. wǒ HUI] gēn tā jiǎng; hǎo.

Okay 1sg will with 3sg tell Okay
 'Okay, I will tell her. Okay.'
 13 (0.2)
 14 YSN: 对; 我们 是 寄到 东强 那个 地方 的。
duì; wǒmen shì jìdào dōngqiáng nàge dìfāng de.
 Correct 1pl is send-to NAME that place PRT
 'Right, we sent the letter to Dongqiang's place.'
 15 OSN: 好, 好。
hǎo, hǎo.
 INT INT
 'Okay, okay.'
 16 YSN: 寄到 东强 那个 单位 的; 哎。
jìdào dōngqiáng nàge dānwèi de; āi.
 Send-to NAME that company PRT INT
 'Yeah, we sent (it) to Dongqiang's place, sent to Dongqiang's
 company.'
 17 OSN: 可以 可以; (...) yeah,
kěyǐ kěyǐ; (...) yeah,
 Okay Okay yeah
 'Okay, okay{/That works, that works,} yeah.'
 18 YSN: 麻烦 你 跟 她 说 一下,
máfan nǐ gēn tā shuō yíxià,
 bother 2sg with 3sg say briefly
 把 信 收 一下 吧; (.) 好 吧。
bǎ XÌN shōu yíxià ba; (.) hǎo ba.
 BA letter receive briefly PRT okay PRT
 'Please tell her to take the letter, Okay?'
 19 OSN: Yeah, 好, 好;
Yeah, hǎo, hǎo;
 yeah INT INT
 'Yeah, Okay, okay.'

Figure 3.3 Waveform, spectrogram, pitch contour, and intensity of line 04 in Ex 3.43



3.5.3.2.2 Reassuring the recipient of a commitment to a pre-existing obligation

Stressed *huì* is more common in a responding action, but it also occurs recurrently in a sequence of first-position promises when the speaker has not fulfilled a pre-existing obligation and the interlocutor shows an understanding that the action is not likely to happen in the future. In these situations, the speaker initiates a promise with stressed *huì* to convince the recipient of the future event. In the following Ex 3.44 (the same segment as Ex 3.36), the son (SON) has been living in the United States for many years without visiting his parents back in China, let alone taking care of them, which violates the traditional value of so-called “filial piety” in Chinese

culture. In lines 01-06, the father launches a pre-sequence telling regarding the content of a letter he has sent to the son, which is a discussion on the son's availability to visit the parents. In lines 07- 08, the father informs the son that he does not need to go back home if occupied with work. The dad's practice in these two lines can be seen as an account he offers to the son for his unavailability, 'You should prioritize your job.' This account not only shows his current understanding that the son is not likely to go back home but also licenses the son to disregard the existing family obligation. In line 11, the son initiates a promise to visit his parents, 'I will go back as soon as possible,' which is partially repeated in line 13 with an additional utterance-final particle *de*. As shown in

Figure 3.4, the first occurrence of *hui* is noticeably stressed with a longer duration (269 ms) and higher pitch range (45Hz) than the surrounding syllables. The son's promise here rejects the account offered by the father and reassures him of his commitment to fulfilling the existing family obligation. The dad's response in lines 14 and 15, *dui dui* 'Right, right' is a positive assessment of the son's promises, indicating his actual preference of having the son back home. The reasons for the preference are further explained in lines 17-18.

In cases like Ex 3.44, the speaker is obliged to perform the named future action due to their social role or previous failure, rather than explicit requests made in the current talk. By initiating a promise with stressed *hui* accompanied by other resources, the speaker orients to reassure the

recipient of their commitment to the future action despite the previous nonperformance, which may have damaged their credibility.

Ex 3.44 CallHome_0848

- 05 DAD: 发了封信呢跟你说了说, 就是:
fā le fēng xìn ne gēn nǐ shuōleshuō, jiùshì:
 send PFV CL letter PRT(topic) with 2sg talk.about DM
 'I sent (you) a letter (where I) talked about'
- 06 DAD: °h 哎 回家 的事. =
 °h *āi huíjiā de shì.=*
 INT return.home ASS thing
 'about coming back home,'
- 07 DAD: =回家 事 的话, 你看你自己:
 =*huíjiā shì dehuà, nǐ kàn ni nǐzìjǐ:*
 return.home thing DM 2sg see 2sg self
 'Regarding coming back home, you should decide for yourself,'
- 08 DAD: °h 哎; 以你工作为主吧.
 °h *āi; yǐ nǐ gōngzuò wéizhǔ ba.*
 INJ as 2sg work as.priority PRT
 'Uh, you should prioritize your job.'
- 09 SON: 嗯嗯.
 mm-hmm.
 INT INT
 'Mm-hmm.'
- 10 DAD: [啊?]
 [ā?]
 INT
 'What?'
- 11 SON:→ [反我:] 尽快 会: 回去一趟,
 [*fǎn wǒ], jǐnkuài huì huíqu yìtàng,*
 Anyway 1sg as.soon.as.possible HUÌ return one.visit
 'Anyway, I will go back home as soon as possible.'
- 12 你们放心吧,
nǐmen fàngxīn ba,
 2pl no.worry PRT
 'You should not worry.'
- 13 → [我尽]快 给您 [会回]去的,
 [*wǒ jǐn]kuài gěi nín [huì huí]qu de,*

1sg as.soon.as.possible for 2sg HUI return PRT
 'I will go back for you as soon as possible.'

14 DAD: [哎,] [对 对,]
 [āi] [duì duì,]
 INJ right right,
 'Yeah. Right right,'

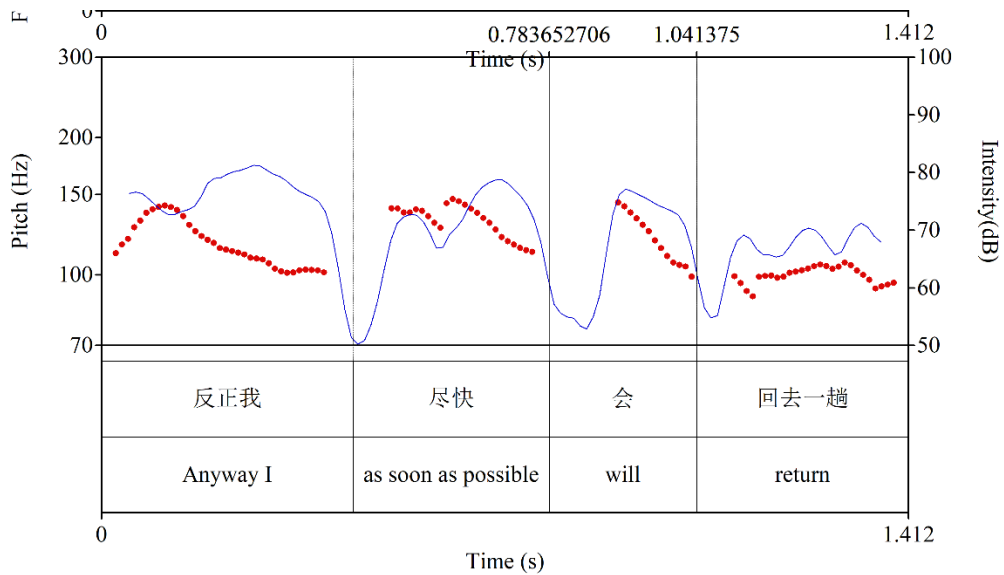
15 DAD: 哎.
 āi
 INJ
 'Yeah.'

16 SON: [到时候.]
 [Dàoshíhòu]
 By then
 'By then,'

17 DAD: [因为] 我 呢,
 [yīnwèi] wǒ ne
 Because 1sg PRT (topic)

18 就 反正 因为: 人 老 了, 生病 了.
 jiù fǎnzhèng yīnwèi: rén lǎo le, shēngbìng le.
 just anyway because person old CRS get.sick CRS
 'Because I'm old and get sick,'

Figure 3.4 Pitch contour, duration, and intensity of the second half of line 011 Ex 3.44



3.5.3.3 Claiming agency over a self-benefiting future action in responding position

A special type of commitment observed in everyday conversation is where a commitment is made to the recipient, but it benefits the speaker themselves. The variation of the [*wǒ + huì + X(de)*] format with stressed *huì* is used in these cases to mark the speaker's agency over the future action. In the following example, Ex 3.45, the son (SON) just had a heated discussion with his mother about his wife prior to the segment. The mother disapproves of her daughter-in-law's behavior and requests the son to "educate" his wife. In the current extract, the father (DAD) just took over the telephone and starts talking to the son. In line 02, the father proposes to change the topic '(we can) talk about (that) later,' but the son insists on continuing the current topic with the preface, 'I just (want to) tell you' in lines 03 and 04, and makes a promise using the [*wǒ + huì + X(de)*] format with stressed *huì*, "I will tell (her)" (line 08). The following turn constructional unit (TCU), *wǒ yǒu shù* 'I know (what's going on),' asserts his primary knowledge of the matter and provides an account for the preceding promise. Stevanovic (2021) finds that epistemic authority can be a resource for deontic authority – the right to decide each other's future actions – in joint decision-making activities. In the current conversation, the son integrates his epistemic primacy to claim agency over his own action and displays resistance to the parents' interference in his relationship with his wife.

Ex 3.45 CallHome_0913

- 01 DAD: 不要紧 哎,
 Búyàojǐn āi,
 doesn't .matter PRT
 'It doesn't matter,'
- 02 DAD: [以后 再 讲.]

[yǐhòu zài jiǎng.]
 later again talk
 '{We can} talk about {that} later.'

03 SON: [我 就 跟 你 讲-]
 [wǒ jiù gēn nǐ jiǎng-]
 1sg just with 2sg talk
 'Let me just tell you-'

04 SON: 我 [就] 跟 你 讲, 这个 她 啊,
 wǒ [jiù] gēn nǐ jiǎng, zhège tā ā,
 1sg just with 2sg talk this 3sg PRT
 'Let me tell you, she,'

05 DAD: [哎.]
 [āi.]
 INT
 'Yeah?'

06 SON: 张怡 这个 事情 我 这边 [[((有-))]
 Zhāngyì zhè shìqing wǒ zhèbiān [((yǒu-))]
 NAME this thing 1sg here have
 'Regarding issues with Zhangyi, I-'

07 DAD: [哎.]
 [āi.]
 INT
 'Yeah?'

08 SON:→ 我 会 讲, 我 有 数.
 wǒ ↑huì jiǎng, wǒ yǒu[shù].
 1sg HUI talk 1sg has-idea
 'I will talk {to her about the issues}. I know {what's going on.}'

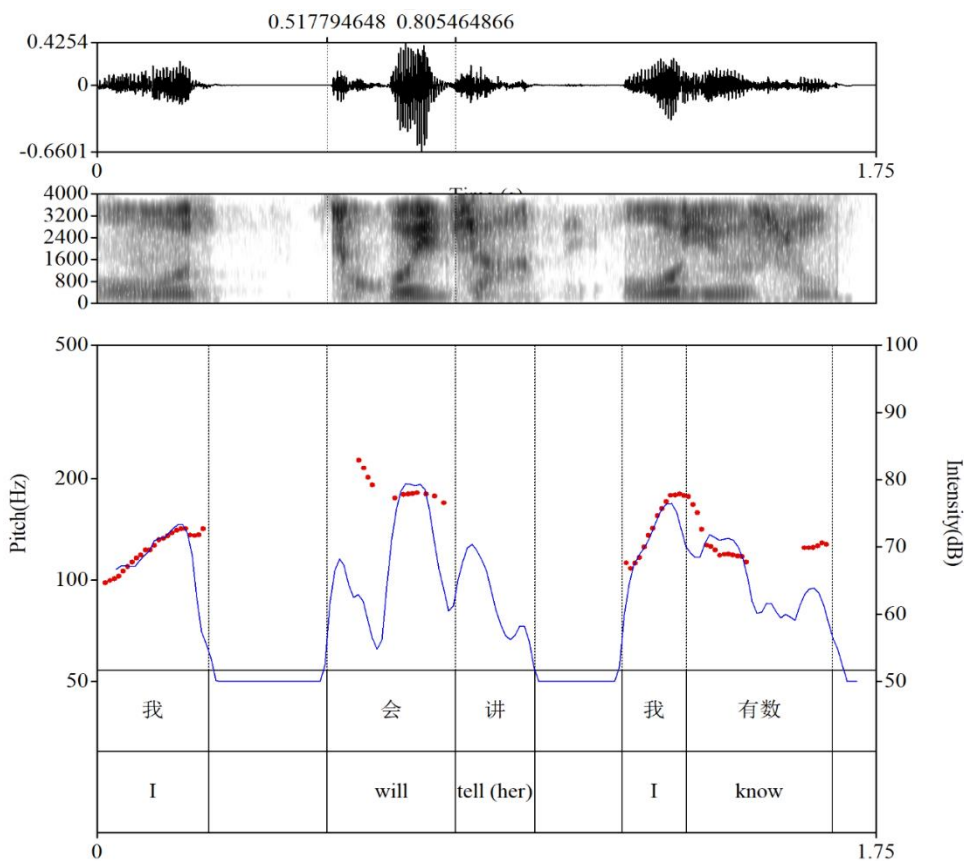
09 DAD: 呃, 好 好 好 好.
 è hǎo hǎo hǎo hǎo.
 uh good good good good
 'Uh, {that's} good, {that's} good.'

Figure 3.5 shows that the modal verb *huì* is produced with prosodic prominence as the pitch peak of this turn constructional unit¹⁶ (notice the pitch step up at the onset of *huì* with a maximum

¹⁶ The pitch trace preceding *huì* is caused by the cut-off and the ensuing glottal stop after *wǒ* in the same line and is unintelligible.

pitch value of 420.3Hz), a wider pitch range (32.2Hz, compared to 9.6Hz in the following syllable, *jiǎng*). *Huì* is also produced with a higher intensity value (maximum intensity 79.5dB and mean-energy intensity 76.6dB) as demonstrated by the dark area of the spectrogram compared to the surrounding syllables (the following syllable *jiǎng* has a maximum intensity value of 70.5dB and a mean-energy intensity value of 67.2dB).

Figure 3.5 Waveform, spectrogram, pitch contour, and intensity of line 08 in Ex 3.45



The [*wǒ + huì + X (de)*] format with stressed *huì*, in general, is used to reassure the recipient of an existing commitment. It is observed in environments where the speaker has an unfulfilled pre-existing obligation or when the recipient has explicitly pursued a higher degree of commitment

to the requested future action. In both situations, the recipient enters the current stage of conversation with an understanding that the speaker is unlikely to perform the desired future action. Such an understanding is displayed in the interactional space through direct and indirect requests and accounts. Given this context, the speaker orients to reassure the recipient that they are fully committed to the named action, therefore no further pursuits are necessary. In addition, the format with stressed *huì* is used to resist the recipient's interference in the speaker's own business and to claim agency and deontic rights towards their future activities.

3.5.3.4 Summary and discussion on *huì*

The current study examined how the two variations of THE promising format [*wǒ + huì + VP (de)*] – with and without stress on modal verb *huì* – are applied in different sequential environments.

As illustrated in Table 3.5 below, this section investigates how two variations of the format are observed in different sequential environments: the format with unstressed *huì* is recurrently observed in offering to confirm an expected commitment to a future action and to inform the interlocutor about speaker's arrangement of an established future activity; the format with stressed *huì* is often used to reassure the recipient of the speaker's commitment to a future action, either in responding position where a higher degree of commitment to a granted request is pursued by the recipient, or in initiating position due to a pre-existing obligation (in which case the promise is considered as a responsive commitment¹⁷). Additionally, the format with stressed *huì* functions to

¹⁷ See the discussion on initiative commitment and responsive commitment in Section 1.2 of Chapters 1 and Section 2.3 of Chapter 2.

claim the speaker's agency over a self-benefiting future action when the recipient has intruded on the speaker's autonomy.

Table 3.5 Distribution of stressed and unstressed *hui* in different sequential environments

	Initiating position	Responding position
Unstressed <i>hui</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offering to confirm an expected but unrequested commitment • Informing about the my-side arrangement of an established future activity 	
Stressed <i>hui</i>	Reassuring the recipient of the speaker's commitment to a pre-existing obligation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reassuring the recipient of the speaker's commitment to a granted request • Claiming agency over a self-benefiting future action

Both variations of the promising format display the speaker's strong commitment to the future action and assert deontic authority over the future event, but the two variations operate on different dimensions and demonstrate different ways of deontic negotiation in interaction.

In initiating a position where *hui* is not stressed, the speaker claims deontic authority in determining the future event (the initial decision in the first environment of offering and the details of the arrangement in the second environment of informing) based on their own conditions and their assumptions of the recipient's preference. The promise, to a certain extent, functions as an announcement of the speaker's unilateral decision regarding the future action, which would determine both interactants' future if it were to be performed. Although this demonstrates an intention to benefit the recipient, this type of initiative promise is at risk of provoking resistance due to a misinterpretation of the recipient's needs or the recipient's disagreement with the allocation of deontic rights.

In responsive promises where *hui* is stressed, the promisor rejects the interlocutor's assumption that the future action might not be performed without pursuits. At the same time, the promisor claims a deontic authority over the future events by intensifying their autonomy and certainty towards their own future action. Committing oneself to a future action not only determines the promisor's own future action but also influences the beneficiaries' future. Such a bilateral relationship makes it unavoidable for interactants to negotiate deontic authority – who has the right to determine the collective future (Stevanovic & Peräkylä 2012; Stevanovic 2018; Stevanovic 2021) – while progressing to a mutual understanding and a cooperative project. The promise format with modal verb *hui* is a grammatical encoding of such a competitive cooperation relationship. Findings in this section also show that prosodic features might be a crucial component of social action formats that speakers mobilize in different sequential environments.

3.5.4 Upgrading commitment with self-repetition

IFIDs operate not only on lexical and clausal levels as in the previous examples, but also on supra-clausal structures. Self-repetition within the same turn is an example of this. Self-repetition, also known as reduplication (Keevallik 2010) has been discussed in previous studies as a device marking intensity and emphasis (Haiman 1980; Botha 1988; Keevallik 2010; Müller 1996) with its iconic nature (Edith A Moravcsik 1978; Lakoff & Johnson 1980; Haiman 1980). Scholars of social interaction also find that self-repetition displays various interactional functions in different sequential environments, such as enhancing social engagement (Lindstrom 1999:59) and positive politeness (Brown & Levinson 1987).

Self-repetition is distinguished from multiple saying, which is produced as a single intonation contour, such as “no no no,” and used to indicate that the in-progress course of action is unnecessary and should be halted (Stivers 2004). CA scholars have identified the practice of multiple sayings in other languages (Golato & Fagyal 2008; Persson 2020; Kuroshima et al. 2021) with the focus on question-answer sequences and the epistemic primacy displayed by multiple sayings.

This study returns to the intensifying function of self-repetition but applies CA and IL methods to investigate its functions as an IFID in responsive commissive actions. The social actions and sequential environments involved in this study are distinctive from those of multiple sayings in the previous studies and might contribute to the discussion on the two closely related practices in conversations.

3.5.4.1 Self-repetition in granting a request

The first common environment of self-repetition is granting a request. In Ex 3.46, A (who lives in the U.S.) and B (who lives in mainland China) are in a business relationship, and A requests that B ship some sample items to a customer. In this segment, the primary activity is the description and recognition of the item that needs to be shipped. After a few overlapped turns, in line 08, speaker B indicates her recognition of the aforementioned item with a high pitch information receipt token ‘Ahh’ followed by a multiple saying, *ā hǎode hǎode hǎode* ‘Okay okay okay,’ which not only grants speaker A’s request but indicates that A’s on-going course of action – description of the item – can be halted (Stivers 2004). However, the activity is treated as incomplete by speaker

A whose turn is overlapped and cut off by B's utterance. Speaker A restarts his earlier TCU in line 07 'exactly same thing' and makes a more specific requests 'just follow the original pattern and it will be fine.' In line 10, speaker B again starts her response with a high pitch 'Ahh' overlapping the end of A's final TCU. This time, what follows 'Ahh' is an interjection *hǎo* followed by a discretely produced repetition *kěyǐ, kěyǐ* 'okay, okay'. The same turn initial 'Ahh' registers A's completed description in his request in line 09, and the rest of line 10 is a redoing of her granting in line 08 but with an upgraded commitment and deontic stance. The upgrading operates on two levels: from multiple saying to self-repetition and from *hǎode* – a more submissive agreement token – to *kěyǐ* – a more agentive token with a higher degree of deontic authority that approves the feasibility of a proposal. After a 0.5 second silence where speaker B does not take up A's response, A upgrades her granting again in line 12 using an adverbial intensifier, *kěyǐ, juédùì méiwèntí de* 'Okay, definitely no problem.' In line 14, speaker B shifts to a new topic, indicating that he treats the current activity as completed.

Figure 3.6 and

Figure 3.7 show the different prosodic features of the two reiterations: *hǎode hǎode hǎode* in line 08 is produced at a fast pace compared to *kěyǐ, kěyǐ* in line 10 (three repetitions in 0.76 seconds versus two repetitions in 0.73 seconds); *hǎode hǎode hǎode* is produced without a phonation break between the tokens whereas *kěyǐ, kěyǐ* has a noticeable gap between the two tokens.

Ex 3.46 CallHome_1539_36

01 A: 只要 把 你 现在 这个: =
 zhǐyào bǎ nǐ xiànzài zhège:=

- as.long.as BA 2sg now this
 'As long as take {what} you {have} now'
- 02 B: =对, [有的, 手上 有的.]
 duì [yǒude shǒushàng yǒu de.]
 correct have NOM in.hand have NOM
 'Yeah, [I] have [it],[I] have it [with me].'
- 03 A: [就- 就- 就- 就-]
 [jiù- jiù- jiù- jiù-]
 just just just just
 'just'
- 04 (.)
- 05 A: 手上 呃=
 shǒushàng è=
 in.hand uh=
 'with me'
- 06 B: =我 给 你 的, 他 需不需要;
 wǒ gěi nǐ de tā xūbùxūyào;
 1sg give 2sg NOM 3sg need-NEG-need
 'Does he need the one I gave to you?'
- 07 A: 对, 就是- 就是 这 个,
 duì jiùshì jiùshì zhè ge,
 correct just.is just.it this CL
 'Right, exactly this one,'
 一模一样 [的 东西, 你 就] 照着-
 yímúyíyàng [de dōngxi nǐ jiù] zhàozhe-
 same NOM thing 2sg just follow
 'Exactly same thing, you just follow'
- 08 B:→ [↑啊, 好的 好的 好的.]
 ↑ā hǎode hǎode hǎode.]
 INJ okay okay okay
 'Ahh, okay okay okay.'
- 09 A: 一模一样 的 东西, 反正 呃 照样画葫芦地
 yímúyíyàng de dōngxi fǎnzhèng è zhàoyàng huà hú lú de
 same NOM thing anyway uh copy.the.original-adv
 这样 上[去 就 可以 了.]
 zhèyàng shàng[qù jiù kěyǐ le.]
 like.this up just okay CRS
 'Exactly same thing, just follow the original (pattern) and it would
 be fine.'

10 B:→ [↑啊: : .] 好; 可以; 可以.
 [ā:: .] hǎo, kěyǐ; kěyǐ.
 INJ Good; okay okay
 'Ahh, yeah, okay, okay.'

11 (0.5)

12 B:→ 可以, [绝对] 没问题 的.
 kěyǐ [juéduì] méiwèntí de.
 Okay absolutely no-problem PRT
 'Okay, absolutely no problem.'

13 A: [我想-]
 [wǒ xiǎng-]
 1sg think
 'I think-'

14 (0.4)

15 A: 那 小金 的 电话 是 多少;
 nà xiǎojīn de diànhuà shì duōshǎo;
 DM NAME GEN phone is what
 'So what's Xiaojin's phone number?'

Figure 3.6 CallHome_1539 line 08

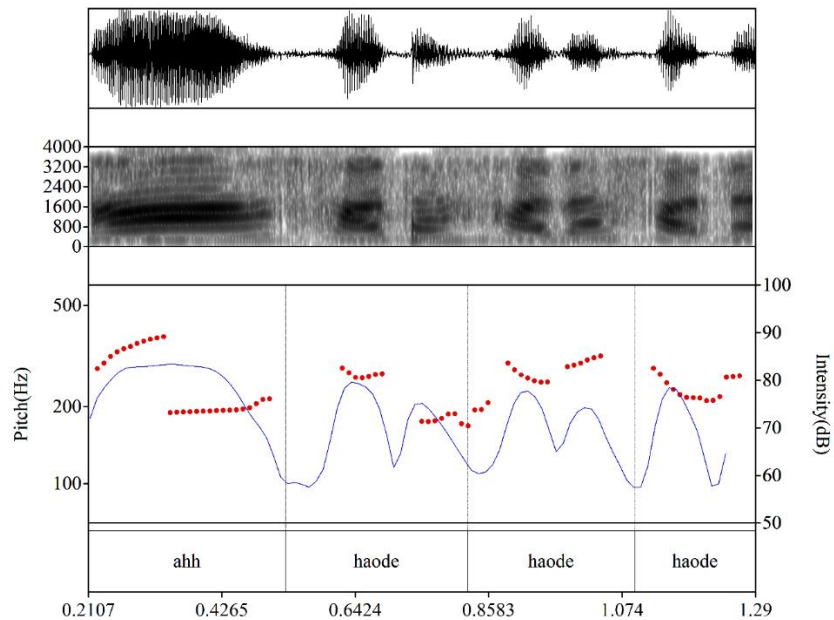
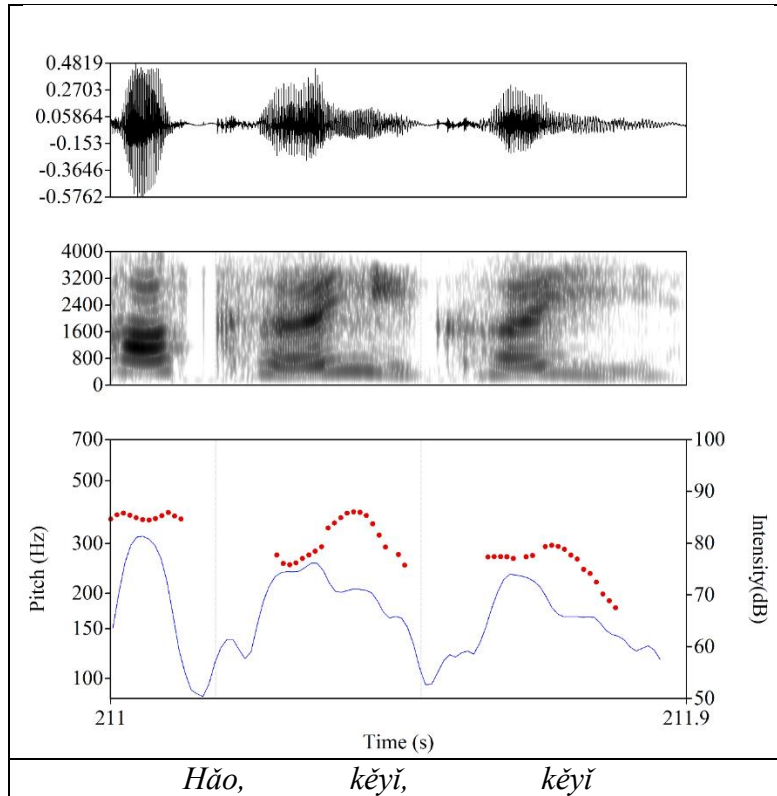


Figure 3.7 CallHome_1539 line 10



3.5.4.2 Self-repetition of particles in accepting a proposal

Ex 3.47 is an example of self-repetition used in accepting a proposal. In this segment, the son (SON) who lives in the U.S. and the father (DAD) who lives in mainland China are arranging their next international phone call. The son has proposed 9:00 am in his prior turn and here the two speakers are confirming the time. In line 01, the son initiates the question (first pair part) to double-check with his dad, ‘Is 9 o’clock early?’ Lines 3 to 12 are an inserted sequence where the two confirm the date and the day. The dad’s second pair part response to line 01 comes in line 13 where he confirms his commitment to the phone call at 9:00 am with the discretely produced repetition, *kěyǐ, kěyǐ* ‘Okay, okay.’ In the subsequent turn, the son produces a third-position agreement token,

Xíng a, ‘Okay,’ which treats the dad’s prior response as sufficient and orients to the closure of the sequence. In line 15, instead of cooperatively ending this topic, the father re-opens the conversation, ‘It’s also okay to be even earlier,’ which is confirmed by the son in line 16. The father further expands the sequence in line 19 by requesting ‘You just call on the 31st.’ The dad’s practices in this segment show his active engagement with the arrangement-making activity and his upgrading commitment to the joint activity. Compared to single token particle responses, the repetition in line 13, as well as the dad’s later practices, displays a higher degree of commitment and asserts his agency in a responding position.

Ex 3.47 CallHome_0716

- 01 A: 九 点 早不早.
jiǔ diǎn zǎo-bù-zǎo.
 nine o'clock earlier-NEG-early
 ‘Is nine o’clock early?’
- 02 (0.2)
- 03 B: 呃::: ((xx))三十一号, 是 吧.
è sānshíyī-hào shì ba.
 uh 31st is PRT
 ‘Uh, the thirty first, is it?’
- 04 A: 嗯.
ēn.
 Mm.
- 05 (0.2)
- 06 B: 三十一号 早上 九 点,
sānshíyī-hào zǎoshang jiǔ diǎn.
 31-st morning nine o’clock
 ‘Nine am on the thirty first.’
- 07 A: 嗯.
ēn
 ‘Mm.’
- 08 (0.8)

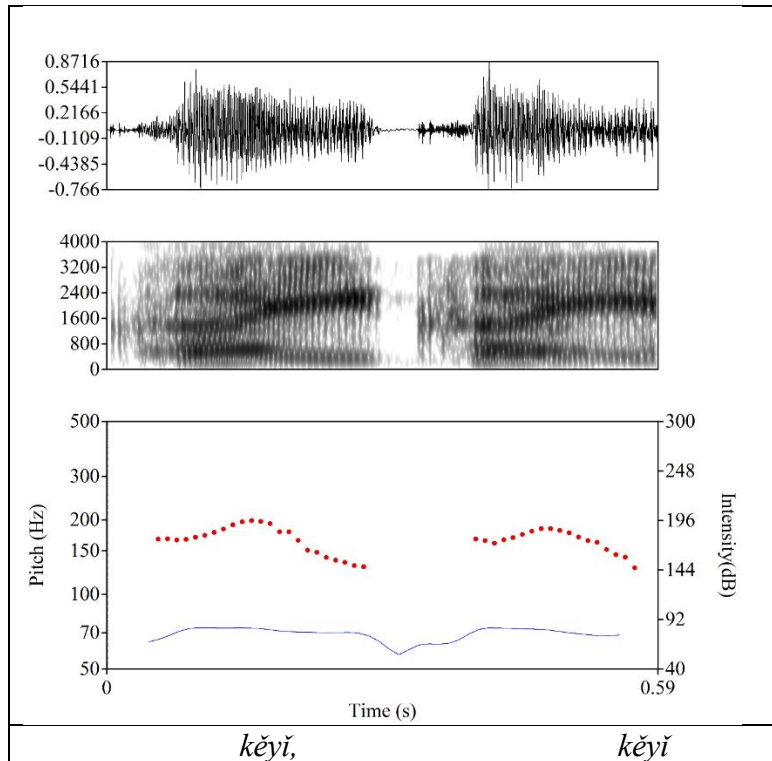
- 09 B: [我 想 一 下,] 三 十 一 号 早 上 九,
 wǒ xiǎng yíxià sānshíyī-hào zǎoshang jiǔ,
 1sg think a.bit 31-st morning nine
 'Let me think, the thirty first, nine o'clock'
- 10 A: [星 期 天 哎.]\
 [xīngqītiān āi.]
 Sunday INJ
 'Sunday, right.'
- 11 B: 啊?
 ā?
 INJ
 'What?'
- 12 A: 星 期 天 [哎.]
 xīngqītiān [āi.]
 Sunday INT
 'Sunday, yeah.'
- 13 B:→ [可 以;] 可 以.
 [kěyǐ;] kěyǐ.
 'Okay, okay.'
- 14 A: 行 [哈.]
 xíng [hā.]
 INJ PRT
 'Okay.'
- 15 B: [再 早] 也 可 以.
 [zài zǎo] yě kěyǐ.
 even early also okay
 'It's also okay to be even earlier.'
- 16 A: 行 行 行, [星 期 天,
 xíng xíng xíng [xīngqītiān,
 INJ INJ INJ sunday
 'Okay Okay Okay. Sunday.'
- 17 B: [啊? 啊?
 [ā? ā?
 'Yeah, yeah.'
- 18 A: [9 点 .]
 [jiǔ diǎn.]
 nine o'clock
 'Nine o'clock'
- 19 B: [你 就] 三 十 一 号 打 来 吧.

[nǐ jiù] sānshíyī-hào dǎ-lái ba.
 2sg just 31-st call-come PRT
 'You just call on the 31st.'
 20 A: 好, 好, 打 个 [电话,
 hǎo hǎo dǎ gè [diànhuà,
 INJ INJ make CL phonecall
 'Okay, Okay, make a phonecall,'
 21 B: [好吧.
 [hǎo ba.
 Okay PRT
 ' Okay?'
 22 A: 行.
 xíng.
 INJ
 'Okay.'
 23 B: 好; 行 行 行.
 hǎo; xíng xíng xíng.
 INJ INJ INJ INJ
 'Good, okay okay okay.'
 23A: 哎, 哎:
 āi āi:
 INJ INJ
 'Yeah, yeah.'

The phonetic features of the repetition in line 13 are consistent with the earlier description. As the spectrogram and waveform in Figure 3.8 show, there is a noticeable phonation break between the two tokens. Each token of *kěyǐ* is produced with a relatively long time duration (296ms and 294ms). In both tokens, the vowel [i] is fully pronounced without compression, which is different from multiple sayings. Even more noteworthy in this example is that the loudness and intensity value of the second token *kěyǐ* is not reduced, as shown by the size of its waveform and the intensity contour. These phonetic characteristics contribute to the dad's display of upgraded commitment in line 13 and enable the son to recognize the commitment. Such a phonetic design is significantly

different from B's multiple saying in line 23, which are geared more towards closing the conversation.

Figure 3.8 Waveform, spectrogram, pitch and intensity contours of line 13 in Ex 3.47



3.5.4.3 Summary of self-repetition

This section presents examples of self-repetition functioning as IFIDs in responsive commissive actions, specifically, granting a request and accepting a proposal. The data analysis shows that Mandarin speakers often use self-repetition in these environments to upgrade their agency and commitment to future actions, and the recipient (the first speaker) recognizes such upgrading as the participants' orientation to reaching a common ground about the future action. This study also provides evidence to support the differences between self-repetition and multiple

sayings in addition to their different intonation contours: multiple sayings in previous studies are often observed in responses to questions where the speaker orients to curtail the ongoing course of action due to epistemic authority (Stivers 2004; Kuroshima et al. 2021); whereas self-repetition in the current study on Mandarin conversations is often used in responsive commissive actions to upgrade the speaker's commitment to performing a future action. Future studies may investigate the two practices observed in the same environment and the same practice used in different environments to further understand the commonalities and differences between self-repetition and multiple saying.

3.5.5 Summary of IFIDs

This section presents examples of IFIDs including exact time references used to inform the interlocutor about speaker's my-side arrangement of a pre-established event, benefactive structures used in offerings, self-repetition in responsive commissive actions, and the modal verb *huì* with two variations. For the modal verb *huì*, unstressed *huì* is observed in initiating position offering and arrangement-informing actions to indicate the speaker's commitment to the pre-established future action; stressed *huì* is observed to reassure the recipient of the speaker's commitment to an existing obligation, either in response to a pursuit for a higher degree of commitment when a request has been granted, or in a first-position promise to fulfill pre-existing obligations.

3.6 Discussion and conclusion

This chapter studies the lexico-syntactic resources of commitment to future actions and identifies common IFMDs and IFIDs in the context of social action formats that are often used to display the speakers' commitment. IFMDs investigated in this chapter include vague time references, the modal verb *kěyǐ* in the formats [*wǒ/nǐ/wǒmen* + *kěyǐ* + VP], and the utterance-final particle *ba* in [*wǒ* + VP + *ba*]. IFIDs observed in this study include exact time references, the benefactive structure, the modal verb *huì* in [*wǒ* + *huì* + VP (*de*)] with and without stress on *huì*, and self-repetition in responsive commissive actions.

Commissive actions formulated with various linguistic devices all display a certain degree of commitment to performing the named future action. Since making a commitment to a future action is fundamentally a joint activity between participants (Clark 1996; Brandom 1994), these linguistic devices also indicate the speaker's deontic stance during the cooperation – their attitude towards the distribution of authority in determining the future action (Stevanovic & Peräkylä 2012). However, these linguistic devices operate in different ways to mitigate or upgrade the speaker's commitment and deontic authority.

As an IFMD, vague time references express a low degree of commitment and deontic authority (sometimes even insincere commitment as with those in pre-closing sequences) through ambiguity and uncertainty towards the future event; the modal verb *kěyǐ* downgrades the speaker's deontic authority by offering options to the recipient and letting the recipient decide the future action; the utterance-final particle *ba* mitigates the speaker's deontic authority by performing a proposal of

the future action – a pseudo invitation to the recipient to participate in the future activity and share the deontic right.

For IFIDs, an exact time reference upgrades commitment by providing the concreteness and specificity of when the promised action will be performed; benefactive structures explicate the benefactive relationship between the agent and the benefactor, which is often presumed and invisible in the utterance; the modal verb *hui* without stress expresses the speaker's deontic authority by confirming the recipient's expectation, and *hui* with stress assures the interlocutor of commitment by displaying certainty towards the performance of the promised future action; self-repetition of particles expresses the speaker's commitment and deontic right in the subordinative responding position.

Findings on various linguistic devices generated in the data analysis also lead to a significant understanding regarding the preference organization of displaying degrees of commitment in different positions: It is socially preferred that the speaker makes a lower degree of commitment modified by IFMDs in the initiating position if the recipient has not explicitly indicated their needs; in contrast, a strong commitment marked by IFIDs is preferred when responding to a request/proposal or when the speaker has a pre-existing obligation. The analysis of participants' orientation and the recipient's next-turn action shows that initiative commissive actions without an existing obligation (e.g., offerings) but designed with a relatively higher degree of commitment are more likely to be rejected by the recipient and that responsive commissive actions designed

with a lower degree of commitment are often followed by pursuits of an upgraded commitment in expanded sequences.

In conclusion, this chapter investigates lexico-syntactic devices in formulating commissive actions with varying degrees of commitment and sheds light on the sequence organization of different commissive actions. The following chapter will continue the discussion on sequence organization by delving into a particular commissive action: promising with a pre-existing obligation. The current chapter also touches upon the prosodic design of IFIDs and highlights the role of prosody in distinguishing between variations of the same social action format. Chapter 5 will conduct a comprehensive analysis of how prosodic and visual resources are orchestrated with speech – the lexico-syntactic resources examined in the current chapter - in performing commissive actions.

4 Obligation and sequence organization

4.1 Introduction

Social actions in interaction are sequentially organized, and the consideration of sequential position is essential to understanding action formation and ascription (Schegloff 2007). On the one hand, the study of the internal structure of conversation is a fundamental component of conversation analysis. On the other hand, external sociological factors such as power relationships and social roles are also found to be crucial in action formation and ascription. On the continuum of commitment, first-position action offering have found to be preferred over requests (Lerner 1996; Lindström 2005; Schegloff 2007; Kendrick & Drew 2014). Evidence of this argument includes findings that requests are often mitigated, delayed, accounted for, or disguised as other actions (Heritage 1984); requests are also uttered later than offerings in a conversation; by offering first, the speaker considers the interlocutor's needs in advance and avoids threatening the interlocutor's face, which maximizes affiliation and solidarity. Another important study on offering and its position is Curl's (2006) analysis of different linguistic formats in different positions. It is reported that a conditional *if* clause is often used to make offers at the beginning of a phone call conversation and the format *do you want me to VP* is used when the problem is educed from the previous talk.

First-position promising appears in the same sequential position as an offering but has a higher degree of commitment than an offering. If an offering is preferred over requesting, is first-position

promising also preferred over second-position promising? Some scholars in behavioral economics have done experimental studies on this issue but the results are not consistent in different studies. Some find that participants in their experiments rate volunteered promises (first-position promises) with a higher level of trustworthiness than other-elicited promises (Charness & Dufwenberg 2010; Belot, Bhaskar & van de Ven 2010), whereas a recent experiment shows that other-elicited promises are more likely to be trusted than those volunteered (Ismayilov & Potters 2017).

Data analysis in this chapter finds that first-position promises are preferred in the environment when the speaker has a pre-existing obligation, which should be distinguished from new obligations (Gibbs & Delaney 1987). Evidence provided to support this analytic claim includes distributional regularities, participants' orientation, and deviant case analysis. In what follows, Section 4.2 introduces data and methods; Section 4.3 presents the analysis of promises with pre-existing obligations in ordinary conversations, including subsections on different kinds of evidence of the preference for first-position promises in this environment. Section 4.4 presents the analysis of government officials' promises and provides evidence that speakers in an institutional setting also prioritize the preference for first-position promises despite the pre-allocated turn-taking rules.

4.2 Data and methodology

This chapter examines whether first-position promises are preferred in the ordinary conversation corpora first, then extends the analysis to institutional promises represented by officials' promises in the *Wenzheng* program conversation dataset.

4.2.1 Four types of obligations

Based on Gibbs and Delaney's (1987) findings, this study distinguishes between four types of obligations involved in commitment made in everyday conversation, including pre-existing obligations, obligations educed in the conversation, and non-obligation in conventional promises, as well as obligations to the speaker their self. Based on the type of obligation and the degree of commitment displayed, the social action performed in the interaction can also vary from offering, weak compliance to a request, agentive granting of a request, or promising, to initiating a pre-closing sequence. The following extracts are examples of different types of obligation in promising.

Pre-existing obligations include those established by promises made in the past and those related to social roles such as filial piety and political obligations. Ex 4.1 is an example of the former. In this conversation between a granddaughter (GRD) and a grandfather (GRF), the granddaughter confesses that she has not responded to a letter from her aunt (line 02) and provides an account in line 03. The granddaughter then makes a first-position promise in line 05 to address this obligation existing prior to this conversation.

Ex 4.1 CallHome_0721-10:38-Letters

- 01 GRD: 我 那个 给 二姑 的 信,
wǒ nàge gěi èrgū de xìn,
1sg DM give second-aunt NOM letter
'In terms of second aunt's letter,'
我 一直 没 回信 呢.
wǒ yìzhí méi huíxìn ne.
1sg always NEG respond-letter PRT
'I haven't responded yet.'
- 02 他, 我 收到 他 两 个 月 了,
tā wǒ shōudào tā liǎng gè yuè le,
3rd 1sg receive 1sg two CL month PFV

- 'It has been two months since I received the letter,'
 我 还 没- 没 时 间 回。
 wǒ hái méi méi shíjiān huí.
 1sg still NEG time respond
 'I haven't found time to reply'
- 03 GRD: 我 一 直 想 回, 就 这 阵 子,
 wǒ yìzhí xiǎng huí, jiù zhèzhènzǐ,
 1sg always want reply just this-period.of.time
 找, 刚 找 的 这 个 工 作, 挺 忙 的。
 zhǎo, gāng zhǎo de zhè gè gōngzuò tǐng máng de.
 look.for just.now look.for NOM this CL job pretty busy PRT
 'I always wanted to reply, {but} I just found a job and have been
 quite busy recently.'
- 04 GRF: 啊, 你 你 不 要 回 的, 没 事 儿。
 ā, nǐ nǐ búyào huí de méishìr.
 PRT 2sg 2sg no-need reply PRT no.problem
 'Ah, you don't need to reply, no worries.'
- 05 GRD:→ 等 我 过 一 阵 子, 等 我,
 děng wǒ guò yízhènzǐ děng wǒ,
 Wait 1sg pass a-while wait 1sg
 'In a short while,'
 等 我 [过]几 天 就 要 回,
 děng wǒ [guo]jǐtiān jiù yào huí,
 wait 1sg pass-few-day PRT will reply
 'I'll reply in just a few days,'
- 06 GRF: [嗯]
 ěn
 'Mm.'
- 07 GRD =我 都 不 好 意 思 [了]。
 wǒ dōu bùhǎoyìsi le.
 1sg almost embraced CRS
 'I feel bad {for that}.'
- 08 GRF: [四]叔 那 孩 子。
 [sì]shū nà hái zi.
 fourth-uncle that kid
 'Your fourth uncle's kid,'
- 09 GRD: 啊?
 ā?
 INT

- 'Ah?'
- 10 GRD: 嗯, 叔叔 那 孩子 [特 好玩儿.]
 èn shūshu nà hái'zi tè hǎowánr.
 en uncle that kid super funny
 'Mm, uncle's kid is very funny.'
- 11 GRF: [四叔 那]孩子,
 sìshū nà hái'zi.
 fourth-uncle that kid
 'Your fourth uncle's kid,'

Some obligations are deduced in the current conversation and established by verbal expression of promises. In

Ex 4.2, the daughter (DAU) who lives in mainland China makes a request to the father (DAD) who lives in the United States to send her a photo in line 01. After an inserted sequence in lines 02 and 03, the father grants the request in 04, which establishes a new obligation of sending the daughter a photo.

Ex 4.2 CallHome_0799_8:52

- 01 DAU: 你↑们 寄 张 照片儿 给 我 看看 好不好,
 nǐ↑men jì zhāng zhàopiànr gěi wǒ kànkàn hǎobuhǎo,
 2pl send CL photo to 1sg look good-NEG-good
 '{Could} you send a photo to me {and} let me take a look, okay?'
- 02 DAD: 啊? 哦; 照片 是 吧;
 ā? ò, zhàopiàn shì ba;
 INT INT photo is PRT
 'What? Oh, photo?'
- 03 DAU: [对.
 [duì.
 correct
 'Yeah.'
- 04 DAD:→ [好, 完了 以后 寄 给? 寄 给 你 看 啊; 好不好?
 [hǎo, wán.le yǐhòu jì gěi? jì gěi nǐ kàn, a; hǎobuhǎo?
 okay complete after sent to send to 2sg look PRT good-not-good

'Okay, {I} will send you later, is {that} Okay?'
 05 DAU: 嗯, 嗯.
 ēn, ēn.
 INT INT
 'Mm mm.'
 06 DAD: 嗯, 你 还 有 什 么 事 啊?
 ēn, nǐ hái yǒu shénme shì ā?
 INT 2sg still have what thing PRT
 'Mm, do you have more things (to discuss)?'

In extracts where the speaker makes a commitment to a specific future action due to their social roles, the committed actions is considered a specifically educed obligation, rather than a pre-existing one. In the following Ex 4.3, the son (SON) who lives in the United States asks his aunt (AUN) who lives in mainland China to help buy an air conditioner for his parents. In line 05, he proposes that he will pay for it. This committed action is considered an educed obligation given the specific context, although he has the general obligation of filial piety.

Ex 4.3 CallHome_0977_11:10

01 AUN: 他们 不 愿意 装;
 tāmen bú yuànyì zhuāng;
 3pl NEG willing install
 'They are not willing to install {an AC}.'
 02 SON: 这- 那个 要不 这样子; 我 就- 可能 最近 就-
 zhè- nàge yàobù zhèyàng wǒ jiù- kěnéng zuìjìn jiù-
 this DM what.if like.this 1sg just maybe recently just
 'Then, how about this, I maybe recently,'
 03 最近 这 一段 可能 不 会 给 他((xx))
 zuìjìn zhè yíduàn kěnéng bú huì gěi tā((xx))
 recently this one.period maybe NEG will give 3sg
 'Recent period of time, maybe {I} will not give him {a call}.'
 04 要不 你说 那个- 你-
 yàobù nǐshuō nàge- nǐ-
 what.if DM DM 2sg
 你 在 那边 帮 他们 买 一 个,

nǐ zài nàbian bāng tāmen mǎi yī gè,
 2sg at there help 3pl buy one CL
 'How about you, you help them buy one there,'
 05 → 然后 我 来 出钱 帮 他们 买 一 个。
ránhòu wǒ lái chūqián bang tāmen mǎi yī gè.
 DM 1sg come pay help 3pl buy one CL
 'and I {will} pay {for it if you} buy them one {AC}.'

Non-obligation conventional promises are those made towards the end of a telephone conversation to initiate a pre-closing sequence. Schegloff and Sacks (1973) discover that certain actions such as assessment, or making arrangements are often used in pre-closing sequences. In Ex 4.4, the two speakers have completed their main discussion, and B asks if A has met his wife. In line 19, A proposes to meet in the future when there is an opportunity. In line 20, B does not accept the proposal, but instead delays the action with “sometime in the future.” After a joint laughter in line 21 and a 1-second-long silence in line 22, A initiates a new sequence and commits to visiting B in Chicago, which is agreed to by B in line 24. B then initiates a closing ‘That’s it, take care,’ which overlaps with A’s closing in line 30 ‘Goodbye.’ The participants’ orientation in this segment indicates that both speakers treat lines 23 and 24 as a pre-closing sequence.

Ex 4.4 CallFriend_4198

18 B : ((xx)) 嫂子 没 见过。
((xx)) sāozi méi jiànguò.
 sister.in.law NEG see-EXP
 '{You} haven't met {my} wife.'
 19 A: 对。 有 机会 [我们 再((xx))].
duì. yǒu jīhuì [wǒmen zài((xx))].
 correct have opportunity 1pl again
 'Yeah, let's ((talk)) again if there's an opportunity.'
 20 B: [什么时候 以后] 再说 吧,

[shénmeshíhou yǐhòu] zàishuō ba,
sometime in.the.future let's.see PRT
'Sometime in the future. We'll
see.'

- 21 AB: ((joint laughter))
- 22 B: °hhh((inbreath then outbreath for 1.0 sec))
- 23 A: → 好。 以后 到 芝加哥 来 找 你 啦 啊。
hǎo. yǐhòu dào Zhījiāgē lái zhǎo nǐ lā ā.
good future arrive Chicago come find 2sg PRT PRT
'Okay. I'll visit you when I come to Chicago in in the future.'
- 24 B: 行, 好 吧, 没事。 [呵呵呵]
xíng, hǎo ba, méishì. [hehehe]
okay alright no.problem
'Okay, alright, no problem.'
- 25 A: [hehehe]
- 26 B: °hh 哎。
°hh āi
'Mm.'
- 27 (0.4)
- 28 A: 好。
hǎo.
'Okay.'
- 29 B: 就 这样, [保重] ↑啊 嗯。
jiù zhèyàng [bǎozhòng] ↑ā ēn.
just like.this take.care PRT INT
'That's it. Take care.'
- 30 A: [再见.]
[zàijiàn.]
'Bye.'
- 32 A: 好: 嘞(.) 再见。
hǎo: lei(.) zàijiàn.
good PRT bye
'Okay. Bye.'
- 33 B: 再见。
zàijiàn.
'Bye'

The last type of obligation is self-benefiting obligation, which is made in the second position as a response to the first speaker's direction or suggestion regarding the promisor's own activities. In Ex 4.5 the grandfather (GRF) asks the granddaughter (GRD) to drive safe, which is within the granddaughter's own territory of actions. Therefore, the promise made in line 02 is categorized as a self-benefiting promise, which is made in second-position as a response to suggestions given by the interlocutor.

Ex 4.5 CallHome_0721_10:00

01	GRF:	开车	多	加意。		
		<i>kāichē</i>	<i>duō</i>	<i>jiāyì.</i>		
		Drive-car	more	pay.attention		
		'Be careful when you drive.'				
02	GRD:	哎：。	会	的；	我们	特别
		<i>āi:.</i>	<i>huì</i>	<i>de;</i>	<i>wǒmen</i>	<i>tèbié</i>
		PRT	HUI	PRT	1pl	particularly
		'Okay, {I} will. We are particularly careful.'				
					小心。	
					<i>xiǎoxīn.</i>	
					careful	

Based on the above criteria, the following section presents the distribution of these different types of obligations in everyday conversations.

4.3 Preference for first-position promises in ordinary conversations

4.3.1 Distributional pattern

The two datasets of ordinary conversations seem to have a relatively equal distribution of first-position and second-position commissive actions as shown in Table 4.1. Given the fact that the telephone conversation datasets were collected in the 1990s, when real-time communication among family members and friends was inconvenient, participants tended to take the opportunity

of the free phonecall to make arrangements and address other issues, which could be the reason why first-position commissive actions are slightly more frequent in the telephone conversations than in face-to-face conversations. However, a closer investigation of the various types of obligations involved in the promises reveals a different distributional pattern.

Table 4.1 Sequence position of commissive actions in everyday conversation

Everyday conversation datasets	First position	Second position	Total
CallHome/CallFriend Telephone conversations	71 (59%)	49 (41%)	120 (100%)
Summer 2019 Face-to-face conversations	35 (46.6%)	38 (53.4%)	73 (100%)

Table 4.2 shows the frequency of the four obligation types involved in the commissive actions. Among the 120 segments of commissive actions extracted from the CallHome/CallFriend corpora, in the majority cases (87), the speaker places him or herself under a new obligation with the utterance of the commitment; in 19 cases, the speaker has a pre-existing obligation; and in 10 cases, commitment is made to close a conversation at the end of a telephone call or gathering, and these are termed as “conventional promises” in this study. Additionally, there are 4 special cases in which an obligation is made to perform self-benefiting actions.

Table 4.2 Sequential position and types of obligations in CallHome/CallFriend telephone conversation

Obligation	First position	Second position	Total
Pre-existing obligation	15 (80%)	4 (20%)	19
Educed obligation	46 (53%)	41(47%)	87
Conventional	10 (100%)		10
Self-benefiting	0	4 (100%)	4
Total			120

A noticeable pattern revealed in Table 4.2 is that 15 (80%) of the 19 commissive action cases in which the speaker has a pre-existing obligation are produced in first position, which is not the case in other obligation types. Given the small sample size, a Fisher's exact test for 2 x 2 contingency is conducted to test the association between the sequence position of commissive actions and the type of obligation – whether the involved obligation is pre-existing or educed. The two-tailed P value equals 0.0430, and the association between the sequence position and the type of obligation is considered to be statistically significant at $p < 0.05$.

This distributional pattern shows a clear preference for first-position promises in the environment of pre-existing obligations. The following sections analyze extracts of first-position and second-position promises and provide evidence from participants' orientation, contextual commonalities, and deviant case analysis.

In face-to-face conversations, however, the majority of commissive actions are made to fulfill obligations educed in the conversation (69 out of 73, see Table 4.3). The only four promises made to reassure the recipient about a pre-existing obligation are all produced in second position, which could be seen as deviant from the pattern observed in telephone conversations. Section 4.3.4. investigates this group of promises closely and accounts for the divergence.

Table 4.3 Sequential position and types of obligations in face-to-face ordinary conversations

Obligation	First position	Second position	Total
Pre-existing obligation	0	4 (20%)	4
Educed obligation	35 (53%)	34(47%)	69
Total			73

4.3.2 Preference for a first-position promise

The preference for first-position promises and dispreference for second-position promises when there is a pre-existing obligation is displayed in multiple ways. First-position promises are more likely to be acknowledged by the recipient and to progress the sequence to a closure. Moreover, first-position promises are often accompanied by volunteered acknowledgments of and volunteered accounts for the speaker's previous failure. In contrast, second-position promises in this environment are dispreferred as they are often treated as inadequate, and the recipient tends to expand the sequence to pursue a higher degree of commitment or accountability if not provided. Another evidence for the dispreference of second-position promises is that the first-position action that solicits a promise is often mitigated.

4.3.2.1 Orientation to sequence closure

Table 4.4 summarizes the next-turn actions of obligation-reassuring promises observed in the dataset. The majority (80%, 15 out of 19) of these promises are produced in first position; 80% (12 out of 15) of the first-position promises lead to a sequence closure, including 10 cases with a sequence closing third (SCT) and 2 cases with a new sequence being launched directly without a SCT; there are only 3 cases (17.6%) of the first-position promises observed to be expanded, which is less than one fourth of the sequence-closure responses (12 cases, 80%). By contrast, second-position obligation-reassuring promises do not exhibit such an asymmetry, although there are a few more closures than expansions, which are not statistically significant.

Table 4.4 Next-turn action of first-position and second-position promises

Next-turn action		First position	Second position
Sequence expansion (4)	Pursuit for a better promise	3 (17.6%)	1 (25%)
Sequence closure (15)	Sequence Closing Third (SCT)	10	1
	New sequence on a different topic	2	2
	Total of sequence closures	12 (80%)	3 (75%)
Total (19)		15(80%)	4(20%)

Ex 4.6 is an example of a first-position promise made to perform a previously failed obligation. The granddaughter (GRD) who lives in the United States is speaking to her grandfather (GRF) who lives in mainland China. In line 01, the granddaughter voluntarily recognizes her unfulfilled obligation of not having responded to her aunt's letter ('In terms of second aunt's letter, I haven't responded yet,') followed by her account for this failure, 'I haven't found time to reply ... I just found a job and have been quite busy recently' (line 02), and her willingness to fulfill the obligation, 'I always wanted to reply' (line 03). While the granddaughter orients to a volunteered acknowledgement and account for the failed obligation, the grandfather discounts her obligation and licenses a non-response, 'Ah, you don't need to reply, no worries' (line 04). In spite of this permission to not reply, the granddaughter progresses the interaction with a first-position promise in line 05, 'In a short while, I'll reply in a few days,' followed by an apologetic expression, 'I feel bad {for that}' (line 07). The grandfather produces a possible acknowledgment in line 06 and initiates a new sequence with a different topic in line 08, 'Your fourth uncle's kid,' treating the talk on the letter as closed. This segment shows that the preference for first-position obligation-reassuring promises is recognized by both participants as they co-construct the current sequence,

which allows the promise to be emerged in first-position, rather than second position: the granddaughter voluntarily acknowledges her failure and provides an account for it; the grandfather chooses not to solicit a promise when there is an opportunity for him to do so after line 04; and the granddaughter honors her obligation by promising first despite the grandfather's permission of not responding.

Ex 4.6 CallHome_0721-10:38

- 01 GRD: 我 那个 给 二姑 的 信;
wǒ nàge gěi èrgū de xìn;
 1sg DM give second-aunt NOM letter
 'In terms of second aunt's letter,'
 我 一直 没 回信 呢.
wǒ yìzhí méi huíxìn ne.
 1sg always NEG respond.letter PRT
 'I haven't responded yet.'
- 02 他- 我 收到 他 两 个 月 了;
tā- wǒ shōudào tā liǎng gè yuè le;
 3rd1sg receive 1sg two CL month PFV
 'It has been two months since I received the letter,'
 我 还 没- 没 时间 回,
wǒ hái méi méi shíjiān huí,
 1sg still NEG NEG time respond
 'I haven't found time to reply.'
- 03 我 一直 想 回, 就 这阵子(.)
wǒ yìzhí xiǎng huí, jiù zhèzhènzǐ(.)
 1SG always want respond just recently
 找- 刚 找 的 这 个 工作; 挺 忙 的.
zhǎo- gāng zhǎo de zhè gè gōngzuò; tǐng máng de.
 find just find NOM this CL job pretty busy PRT
 I always wanted to reply, (but) I just found a job and have been quite busy recently.
- 04 GRF: 啊. 你 你 不要 回 的; 没事儿.
ā. nǐ nǐ búyào huí de; méishìr.
 PRT 2sg 2sg no-need reply PRT no.problem
 'Ah, you don't need to reply, no worries.'

05 GRD:→ 等 我 过 一阵子, 等 我-
děng wǒ guò yízhènzǐ děng wǒ-
 Wait 1sg pass a-while wait 1sg
 等 我 [过]几天 就 要 回,
děng wǒ [guo]jǐtiān jiù yào huí,
 wait 1sg pass-few-day PRT will reply
 'In a short while, I'll reply in just a few days,'

06 GRF: [(嗯.))]
 [(ēn.))]
 INT
 'Mm.'

07 GRD: =我 都 不好意思 [了].
wǒ dōu bùhǎoyìsi [le.]
 1sg even embraced CRS
 'I feel bad {for that}.'

08 GRF: [四]叔 那 孩子;
[sì]shū nà hái'zi;
fourth-uncle that kid
 'Your fourth uncle's kid,'

09 GRD: 啊?
ā?
 INT
 'Ah?'

10 嗯 叔叔 那 孩子 [特 好玩儿,]
èn shūshu nà hái'zi tè hǎowánr,
 INT uncle that kid super funny
 'Mm, uncle's kid is very funny.'

11 GRF: [四叔 那]孩子.
sìshū nà hái'zi.
fourth.uncle that kid
 'Your fourth uncle's kid,'

Ex 4.7 is an example in which the speaker has an unfulfilled filial piety obligation. In lines 01 to 03, the daughter (DAU) informs her mother (MOM) of the arrangement of inviting her parents-in-law to live with the young couple in the U.S., which presumes an unfulfilled filial piety obligation to her own parents. In line 06, the mother says that they 'don't have objections.' In line

11, the daughter provides an account for inviting her parents-in-law rather than her own parents ‘I think because he after all (()).’ The account is co-completed by the mother in line 12 ‘Ai, right, after all, he is {the only child},’ which is confirmed by the daughter in line 15 ‘Right’. The daughter then initiates a first-position promise in lines 17 to 20, and 21, ‘After them, {it} will be your turn, okay... {after them} {we} will let you come here...And then we try our best (()).’ The mother does not directly register this promise but continues to confirm her understanding of the situation and to minimize the daughter’s burden in lines 19 and 22, ‘No worries, no worries,’ ‘Don’t worry about these things, okay, good baby.’ After a couple of inserted expansion sequences (omitted in the extract) in which the mother provides an account to assert her affiliative stance towards this issue, the topic closes with an assessment from the daughter in line 39. As with Ex 4.6, participants in this example collaborate to allow the promise to be emerged in first position: the daughter voluntarily acknowledges her failure with an account and works towards a volunteered promise to fulfill her obligation; the mother refrains from requesting or soliciting a promise throughout the sequence, which allows the daughter to produce the promise voluntarily.

Ex 4.7 CallHome_0735_1032

- 01 DAU: 就是说(.) 看情况, 把他爸爸妈妈接过来,
jiùshìshuō(.) kànríngkuàng bǎ tā bàba māma jiē guòlái,
 DM based.on.the.situation BA 3sg dad mom pick.up over
 ‘{I mean,} depending on the situation, {we will} bring his parents
 ‘here,’
- 02 =因为 以后 要是 拿了 °h 绿卡 的话.
yīnwèi yǐhòu yàoshi ná le °h lǜkǎ dehuà.
 because future if take PFV green.card PRT (if)
 ‘because in the future if we get the green card,’
- 03 恐怕 就 不好 过来了.
kǒnpà kǎi bùhǎo guòlái le.

- kǒngpà jiù bù hǎo guòlái le.*
 afraid just NEG easy come.over CRS
 '{I'm}afraid it will be difficult to {let them} come over.'
 (0.2)
- 04 MOM: 行,
xíng,
 'Okay.'
- 05 DAU: [先-]
 [xiān-]
 first-
 'First,'
- 06 MOM: [这 边] 我们 没 有 意见.
[zhèbiān] wǒmen méi yǒu yìjiàn.
 here 1pl NEG have opinion/objection
 'Here we don't have objections,'
- 07 DAU: [对, 我-]
[duì wǒ-]
 correct 1sg
 'Yeah, I'
- 08 MOM: [你 放]心 好了 .
[nǐ fang]xīn hǎole.
 2sg don't.worry PRT
 'Don't worry,'
- 09 DAU: [我]觉得, 因为 他 毕竟;
wǒ juéde yīnwèi tā bìjìng;
 1sg think because 3sg after.all
 'I think, because afterall he'
- 10 MOM: [哎,]
āi,
 INT
 Yeah,
- 11 DAU: 他- 他 已经 [挺 那 什么的 (())]
tā tā yǐjīng [tǐng nà shénmede]
 3sg 3sg already pretty that {difficult}
 'He, he is already pretty not easy,'
- 12 MOM [对 , 毕竟 一个,]
duì bìjìng yí gè,
 correct after.all one CL
 'Yeah, after all, he is the only {child},'

- 13 你 这 点 不要 担心(.)
nǐ zhè diǎn búyào dānxīn(.)
2sg this point don't worry
'You don't need to worry about this,'
- 14 家里 绝对: 就是 理解 这些 [事情;]
jiālǐ juéduì: jiùshì lǐjiě zhèxiē [shìqing;]
home definitely just understand these thing
'{We} definitely understand these things.'
- 15 DAU: [对呀,]
[duì ya,]
correct PRT
'Right.'
- 16 MOM: [嗷,]
[áo,]
INT
'Okay?'
- 17 DAU:→ [等] 他们 完 了 [之后 再] 再 你们的 turn @ 嗷 . hehe
[děng] tāmen wán le zhīhòu zài] zài nǐmen de turn áo. hehe
wait 3PL complete PFV after then then 2pl GEN turn PRT
'After them, {it} will be your turn, okay?'
- 18 MOM: [啊 这样.]
[ā zhèyàng.]
INT like.this
'Just like this.'
- 19 MOM: 啊 [没事 , 没事 .]
ā [méishì, méishì.]
INT nothing nothing
'No worries, no worries.'
- 20 DAU:→ [就 再 到 你们], 再 让 你们 过来.
[jiù zài dào nǐmen,] zài rang nǐmen guòlái.
Just then to 2pl then let 2pl come.over
'It will be your turn after that, {after them we} will let you
come here {to our home in the U.S.}'
- 21 然后 我们 争取 [反正- ((xx))]
ránhòu wǒmen zhēngqǔ [fǎnzhèng]
Then 1pl try.best anyway
'And then we try our best((xx)).'
- 22 MOM: [没事, 这些 东西 啊] 你 放心 好了;
[méishì zhèxiē dōngxi ā] nǐ fàngxīn hǎole;

nothing these thing PRT 2sg rest.at.ease PRT
'Don't worry about these things,'

嗷, 好 宝宝.

áo hǎo bǎobǎo.

okay baby

'Okay, good baby.'

((Lines omitted))

38 MOM: 你 放心好 了.

nǐ fàngxīn hǎole.

2sg rest.at.ease PRT

'Don't worry.'

39 DAU: 那 就 太 好 了.

nà jiù tài hǎo le.

DM just too good PRT

'That's great.'

4.3.2.2 Volunteered accounts and a preferred sequence organization

In the two examples above and other cases in the dataset, first-position promises to pre-existing obligations are observed often preceded by a volunteered account for the unfulfilled obligation and even an apology (line 07 Ex 4.6), which are usually accepted by the recipient explicitly or implicitly without a sequence expansion. This recurrent pattern of sequential organization is consistent with previous studies regarding accountability in conversation. Speakers of promises and other high-commitment actions are expected to perform the promised action (Searle 1969; Brandom 1994). When the expected action is not performed, accounts should be provided or will be demanded by the promisee (Heritage 1988). Robinson and Bolden (2010) find that explicit solicitations of accounts are disaffiliative and often withheld in conversation. In other words, accounts are preferred to be volunteered by the speaker over being solicited by the promisee.

Based on these preferences, the preferred sequence organization of obligation-reassuring promises can be illustrated as follows in Table 4.5. Note the most affiliative practices to deal with pre-existing obligations are to meet all three preferences in sequential order, as the speakers in Ex 4.6 and Ex 4.7 do.

Table 4.5 Sequential organization of promises to pre-existing obligations

Sequential organization	Preferences
1. Noticing/acknowledging the nonperformance	Preferred: volunteered confession of nonperformance Dispreferred: assertion of or accusation of nonperformance by the interlocutor
2. Providing accounts	Preferred: volunteered accounts Dispreferred: solicited by the interlocutor
3. Promising	Preferred: volunteered promises Dispreferred: solicited by the interlocutor

The recurrent pattern of such a sequential organization indicates that a volunteered acknowledgment of and/or a volunteered account for the nonperformance of an expected action often projects a volunteered promise. In Ex 4.8, the daughter (DAU) has not responded to her parents' letter, and the nonperformance is pointed out by the mother (MOM) with a tag question 'You did not mail the letter, is it {so}?' (line 01). The question is confirmed by the daughter in line 02, 'That's correct, I haven't mailed the letter.' She then quickly volunteers an account in the same turn, 'I have been quite busy recently' (line 03) The mother downgrades the disaffiliation by minimizing the consequence, 'Aha, no problem' (line 04). In the following lines omitted, the two speakers elaborate on the busy schedule, and the mother expresses her understanding. In line 14, the daughter returns to the topic of family letters with a shifted focus on the letters that the parents have sent to her, instead of the one she failed to send to the parents. With such a design, the

daughter manages to re-initiate the whole topic as a preface to her volunteered promise in line 16, ‘Anyways, after receiving (this) letter, I- I will send you some photos.’ The father appears to have a bad signal and misses the promise, and therefore initiates a request in line 19, ‘Ah, if you have time, write a letter to us.’ Taking the dad’s turn as a possible pursuit, the daughter upgrades her promise in line 20 with multiple sayings of ‘right,’ a specific time reference ‘this week,’ and an adverb ‘definitely.’ Multiple sayings with a single intonation contour in such interactional environments have been found to indicate the speaker’s stance that the course of action performed in other speaker’s prior turn is unnecessarily persisted and should be halted (Stivers 2004). Such a formulation not only displays her commitment to sending the letter but also indicates that her promise is independently and voluntarily made in first position, rather than being solicited by the father (DAD). This promise also closes the current sequence, and the daughter moves on to a new sequence marked by the topic-shifting device *ránhòu* ‘and then’ (Wang 2017).

Ex 4.8 CallHome 0711-0:42

- 01 MOM: 哦 你 信 没有 寄, 是 伐?
 ò nǐ xìn méiyǒu jì shì fá
 PRT 2sg letter NEG mail is PRT
 ‘Oh, you haven’t mailed the letter, is it {so}?’
- 02 DAU: 对; 我 信 还 没 寄 呢:
 duì; wǒ xìn hái méi jì ne:
 correct 1sg letter yet NEG mail PRT
 correct 1sg letter yet NEG mail PRT
- 03 挺 忙 的 啊 这阵子 还,
 tǐng máng de ā zhèzhènzǐ hái,
 pretty busy PRT PRT this-period.of.time quite
 ‘That’s correct, I haven’t mailed the letter. I’ve been quite busy recently.’
- 04 MOM: 啊哈; 没事儿.
 āhā; méishìr.

- INT no.problem
 'Ahha, no problem.'
 ((lines omitted))
- 14 DAU: 哎哟; 你们 的 信 我 都 收到 了, 对; 我- 我-
āiyō; nǐmen de xìn wǒ dōu shōudào le, duì; wǒ- wǒ-
 INT 2pl GEN letter lsg all receive PFV correct lsg lsg
 'Aiyo, I have received your letter, yeah, I- I-'
- 15 DAD: 哦, 好的.
ò hǎode.
 INT okay
 'Oh, okay.'
- 16 DAU: → 对: 反正 我- 我- (这/寄) 信 完 了 收到
duì:fǎnzhèng wǒ- wǒ (zhè/jì) xìn wán le shōudào
 Right anyway lsg lsg this letter complete PFV receive
 'Anyways after you receive my letter,'
- 17 再 寄 几 张 照片 给 你们 ((xxx))
zài jì jǐ zhāng zhàopiàn gěi nǐmen ((xxx))
 then mail few CL photo to 2pl
 'I- I will send you some photos then.'
- 18 DAU: [我们 又] ((xxx))
[wǒmen yòu]
 1pl again
 'We again ((xxx))'
- 19 DAD: [啊] 有空 你 写 信 来 吧.
[ā] yǒukòng nǐ xiě xìn lái ba.
 PRT have.free.time 2sg write letter come PRT
 'Ah, if you have time, write a letter (to us).'
- 20 DAU: → 对 对 对. 我 我- 这 周 肯定 寄 出去.
duì duì duì. wǒ wǒ- zhè zhōu kěndìng jì. chūqù.
 Right right right lsg lsg this week definitely mail out
 'Right, right, right, I- I- will mail it this week for sure.'
- 21 然后 (.) 对, 你们 现在 也 挺 好 的.
ránhòu(.) duì, nǐmen xiànzài yě tǐng hǎo de.
 DM correct 2pl now also pretty good PRT
 'And then (), right, you two are pretty good now...'
- 22 房子 也 不 能 弄 旧 房子 啊.
fángzi yě bù néng nòng jiù fángzi ā.
 house also NEG can make old house PRT
 '{in terms of} THE house, {you} can't just get an old house.'

4.3.3 Dispreference for second-position promises

The dispreference for second-position promises is displayed in the following three practices:

(1) the interlocutor/promise withholds to solicit accounts for a failed obligation or promises to fulfill the existing obligation; (2) when the solicitation for accounts and obligation-reassuring promises does occur, they are often mitigated; (3) sequences with second-position promises are often expanded.

4.3.3.1 Withholding solicitations for accounts and promises

Analyses of previous examples such as Ex 4.6 and Ex 4.7 show that the interlocutor (the promisee) tend to withhold solicitations of accounts and promises when they have the opportunity to. Instead, they collaborate with the promisor to allow the promise to be emerged in first-position. In Ex 4.6, the grandfather not only withholds solicitations for a promise but licenses the granddaughter for not fulfilling the existing obligation of responding to a relative's letter. In Ex 4.7, the mother co-constructs an account for the daughter's failure in fulfilling her filial piety obligation and withholds soliciting a promise. These practices of withholding solicitations for promises show that second-position promises are dispreferred by participants as they collaboratively work towards a first-position promise.

4.3.3.2 Mitigation in soliciting accounts and promises

When a first-position promising opportunity is missed, the interlocutor is observed to mitigate their first-position actions including pointing out someone's nonperformance of an obligation,

soliciting accounts for the nonperformance, and soliciting an obligation-reassuring promise using illocutionary force modifying devices, which indicates the disaffiliative feature of these actions. For example, in Ex 4.8, the mother (MOM) points out the daughter's (DAU) nonperformance in line 01, which is confirmed by the daughter in line 02. This practice of noting the nonperformance rather than requesting for performance or soliciting a promise is consistent with the previous analysis of withholding solicitation. Moreover, using a confirmation-seeking question formatted with a declarative plus interrogative tag, the mother manages to mitigate the disaffiliation caused by her action, and meanwhile provides the daughter an opportunity to reject the assumption of nonperformance and re-direct the conversation. In line 10, the father requests the daughter write letters, which is treated as a pursuit of an obligation-reassuring promise by the daughter as discussed earlier. This pursuit is designed with a conditional clause, *yǒukòng* ‘{if you} have time,’ which acknowledges the contingency for the daughter to complete the action, and the utterance-final particle *ba*, which functions to mitigate the illocutionary force of the request (Lee-Wong 1998; Fang and Hengeveld 2020)¹⁸.

4.3.3.3 Sequence expansion in second-position promises

In cases where nonperformance has been noticed but the speaker neither volunteers an account nor makes a promise in first position, the interlocutor takes the initiative to solicit an account and an obligation-reassuring promise, which leaves the promisor in second-position (Heritage and Raymond 2005). Data analysis of these cases show that participants orient to expand their

¹⁸ See the review on *ba* in Section 3.4.3, Chapter 3

sequences to upgrade the promise until a common ground of a satisfying commitment is reached.

Ex 4.9 and Ex 4.10 are two examples of such cases.

In Ex 4.9, speaker A is talking to his former high school teacher (B). The failed obligation in this segment is that A has not written letters to her mother and other friends for a long time. Unlike in Ex 4.7 and Ex 4.8, A's nonperformance in this example is pointed out by B, and A's promises are made in second position. The dispreferred practices result in significantly longer expanded sequences where the recipient (speaker B) pursues accounts and promises.

Speaker B points out A's nonperformance with a reported speech, 'He said that you haven't written to your mom...' in line 01 and the negative consequence of A's nonperformance (line 02, 'Your mom is concerned again'). In the following turn (line 03), A provides an account for this failed obligation, 'I'm lazy. This is my shortcoming. I'm most afraid of writing letters.' B rejects this account, 'You should stop being lazy' and utters the needs on behalf of A's family, 'Your family all miss you a lot' (line 07). The expression of needs serves as an indirect request to A. In lines 08-13, A provides a more convincing account for his failed obligation: he has been busy doing a part-time job, which is registered by B in lines 08 and 10 with the repeated utterances of *ao* and *dui* 'Right.' At this point of the interaction, A and B have finally solved the accountability issue. In lines 16-18, A makes the promise to write to his family. Moreover, this promise is significantly upgraded by expanding the recipients from 'family' to 'you' and then 'all of my friends.' The three-part list, which is found to be associated with emphasis (Atkinson 1984; Jefferson 1990) further amplifies his commitment to the future action. In the following line 19, B

registers this promise with a response token ‘Ai,’ and makes a new request in line 20, ‘If you have any photos, send us some.’ The second request is beyond the pre-existing obligation that A was originally accountable for. To justify the request, B provides her account that ‘we all miss you...not just you, but all of you who live abroad’ (line 21). A then grants this request with another upgraded promise (lines 25 and 26): the action is upgraded from sending photos to making phone calls; the one-time action is upgraded to recurrent action (“every once in a while”). This promise is well-registered and accepted by B in line 28 ‘Yeah, good, good, good.’

Ex 4.9 CallHome_0695_11:23

A: a former student who lives in the U.S. B: A’s high school teacher who lives in China

- 01 B: 他 说 (.) 你 大概 半年 没 给 你 妈 写 信。
·h tā shuō(.) nǐ dàgài bànnián méi gěi nǐ mā xiě xìn.
 3sg say 2sg approximately half.year NEG to 2sg mom write letter
 ‘He said that you haven’t written to your mom for approximately half a year.’
- 02 你 妈妈 又 不 放 心 了 什 么 的：
nǐ māma yòu bú fàngxīn le shénmede:
 2sg mom again not relieve CRS PRT
 ‘Your mom is concerned again, something like that.’
- 03 A: 我 是- 我 很 懒 (.) 我 这 个 是 我 的 缺 点。
wǒ shì- wǒ hěn lǎn(.) wǒ zhège shì wǒ de quēdiǎn.
 1sg is 1sg very lazy 1sg this is 1sg GEN shortcoming
 ‘I am- I’m lazy, this is my shortcoming.’
- 04 A: 我- 我 这 人 [最 怕 写-]
wǒ- ·hh wǒ zhè rén zuì pà xiě-
 1sg 1sg this person most afraid.of write
 ‘I’m most afraid of writing {letters}’
- 05 B: = [你 不 好] 再 懒 嘞。
= [nǐ bù hǎo] zài lǎn lei.
 2sg NEG good again lazy PRT
 ‘You should not be lazy any more,’
- 06 A: [我-]

- wǒ-
1sg
'I'
- 07 B: [家里]人 都 好 想 着 [你 的.]
jiālǐrén dōu hǎo xiǎng zhe [nǐ de.
family all very miss PROG 2sg PRT
'Your family all miss you a lot.'
- 08 A: [我知道 .,] 我- [我 这两天 .]
[wǒ zhīdào.]wǒ- wǒ zhèliǎngtiān.
1sg know 1sg 1sg these.couple.day
'I know. I- these couple of days,'
- 09 B: [(hehehehe)]
- 10 A: 我- 我 实际上; 前- 这 个 暑假
wǒ- wǒ shíjìshàng; qián- zhè ge shǔ-jià
1sg 1sg actually previous this CL summer-break
'I'm actually, this summer.'
我 不 在(.) 这 个 地方;
wǒ bú zài(.) zhè ge dìfāng;
1sg NEG at this CL place
'I won't be here.'
- 11 我 在 DC 那边, (.) 打工 .
wǒ zài DC nàbian, (.) dǎgōng.
1sg at there work.part.time
'I was actually doing a part-time job in DC.'
- 12 B: [哦, 哦, 哦.]
[ò, ò, ò.]
INT INT INT
'Oh oh oh.'
- 13 A: [在 外面]打工 根本也 没 功夫 来 写信 .
[zài wàimiàn dǎgōng gēnběn] yě méi gōngfu lái xiěxìn.
at out-side work.part.time at.all also NEG time come write-letter
'Because of the part-time job, {I} didn't have time to write a letter.'
- 14 回- [都 打 得 很 累.]
huí- [dōu dǎ de hěn lèi.
return all do COMP very tired
'Return- I'm really tired.'
- 15 B: [对. 对.对. 对. 对. 对.]
[duì. duì. duì. duì. duì.]

- correct correct correct correct correct
Right right right right right.
- 16 A:→ [我 准备 这-], 我 马上 准备:
[wǒ zhǔnbèi zhè-], wǒ mǎshàng zhǔnbèi:
1sg prepare this 1sg immediately prepare
'I'll- this- I'll immediately prepare to'
- 17 给 家里 写信, 给 你们 写信;
gěi jiālǐ xiěxìn, gěi nǐmen xiěxìn;
to family write-letter to 2pl write-letter
'write to my family, write to you,'
- 18 → 给 所有 的 [朋友 写-]
gěi suǒyǒu de [péngyou xiě-]
to all NOM friend write
'write to you all, to all of my friends'
- 19 B: [哎. 你] 写 写 信 哦.
[āi. nǐ] xiě xiě xìn ò.
PRT 2sg write write letter PRT
'Yeah, you should write some letters.'
- 20 B: 有 什么 照片 么 寄 一点 来,
yǒu shénme zhàopiàn me jì yìdiǎn lái,
have some photo PRT send some come
'{I} if you} have some photos, send some here'
- 21 A: 哎.
ài.
INT
'Okay.'
- 21 =反正 我们 [都是] 蛮 想念 你 的 啦.
=fǎnzhèng wǒmen [dōushì] mán xiǎngniàn nǐ de lā.
anyway 1pl all quite miss 2sg PRT PRT
'If you have any photos, send us some, we all miss you a lot anyway.'
(four lines omitted)
- 25 A:→ 以- 以后 我 还 经常 给 你;
yǐ- yǐhòu wǒ hái jīngcháng gěi nǐ;
Future 1sg also often to 2sg
'In the future, I will also frequently,'
- 26 → 以后- 以后 我- 呢-
yǐhòu- yǐhòu wǒ- è-
Future future 1sg uh
隔 一段 时间 给 你 打 一 个 电话.

gé yíduàn shíjiān gěi nǐ dǎ yí gè diànhuà.
 every a-period time to 2sg make a CL phonecall
 'In the future, I- eh, every once in a while, I will call you.'
 27 (0.2)
 28 B: 哎. 好, 好, 好, 好,
 āi. hǎo, hǎo, hǎo, hǎo; hǎo,
 INT INT INT INT INT INT
 'Yeah, okay, okay, okay, okay, okay'
 29 A: 好 伐;
 hǎo fá;
 Good PRT ((dialect))
 'Okay?'

In Ex 4.10, the uncle (UNC) is reprimanded for not visiting her niece (NIE, 6 years old) as promised before and the promise of an updated data is solicited. Similar to the above example, both the account and the promise are provided in second position. The uncle's response in line 04, '{I'll be} back after a period of time,' is not sufficient, and the niece orients to solicit an account in line 05 'How come you are saying "(come visit) sometime later" again?' In the second TCU of this turn, the niece pursues for a specific time reference, 'how long (until you come to visit).' With a yes/no question 'is it' in line 07, the uncle simply registers the niece's question but does not provide an account. She then makes three different versions of promise, 'I'll make time (line 07),' 'As long as I have time, I will go back,'(line 8), and 'As soon as I have time, I will go back, Tingting, okay?', 'In the future, I'll accompany you- I'll take you- play with you, is it okay? (line 10).' Note that the three promises display a noticeable upgrade of commitment. The first version in line 07 relies on her effort to 'make time,' which is less possible than the second version with 'as long as' in line 08. The second version frames the contingency of the future action as an external

condition that is out of the speaker's control. And the third version is designed with an explicit benefactive structure with a concrete act verb 'I'll play with you' (line 10).

Ex 4.10 CallHome_0626_0849

- 01 NIE: 上次 我在 奶奶 家 的 时候 给 你 打电话;
shàngcì wǒ zài nǎinai jiā de shíhou gěi nǐ dǎdiànhuà;
 last-time 1sg at grandma house NOM time to 2sg make-phonecall
 'Last time when I called you at grandma's house,'
- 02 你 都 说 是 过 一段 时间 才 回
 来,
nǐ dōu shuō shì 过 guò yíduàn shíjiān cái huílai,
 2sg all say is after a-period time only return
 'You were saying that you will return {to visit} after a period of
 time.'
- 03 过 现在 嘛: 啥 时候 回来 啊.
 过 xiànzài ma: shá shíhou huílai ā.
 now PRT what time return PRT
 'How about now? What time will you be back?'
- 04 UNC: Hm 过 一段 时间 再 回来.
hm guò yíduàn shíjiān zài huílai.
 after a-period time again return
 '{I'll be} back after a period of time.'
- 05 NIE: 你 怎么 又 是 说 过 一段 时间 呀;
nǐ zěnmē yòu shì shuō guò yíduàn shíjiān ya;
 2sg how.come again is say after a-period time PRT
 'How come you are saying after a period of time again?'
- 06 过 多长 时间 呀;
guò duōcháng shíjiān ya;
 after how-long time PRT
 'After how long {a period of}time?'
- 07 UNC: 是 吗: 我- 我 抽空-
shì mā: wǒ- wǒ chōukòng-
 Is Q 1sg 1sg make.time
 'Is it? I- I will make time-'
- 08 → 我 有空 我 就 回去 婷婷, 好不好,
wǒ yǒukòng wǒ jiù huíqu Tíngtíng, hǎobuhǎo,
 1sg have-time 1sg as.soon.as return NAME good-NEG-good
 'As soon as I have time, I will go back, Tingting, is it okay?'

- 09 NIE: [好.]
 [hǎo.]
 Okay
 'Okay.'
- 10 UNC:→ [之后] 我 陪 你- 我 看 带 你-
 [zhīhòu] wǒ péi nǐ- wǒ kàn dài nǐ-
 Afterward 1sg accompany 2sg 1sg see take 2sg
 陪 你 玩玩, 好不好?
 péi nǐ wánwán hǎobuhǎo?
 accompany 2sg have.fun good-NEG-good
 'In the future, I'll accompany you- I {will} see {if I can} take
 you- doing fun activities with you, is it okay?'
- 11 NIE: 好.
 hǎo.
 'Okay.'
- 12 UNC: 好不好?
 hǎobuhǎo?
 good-NEG-good
 'Is it okay?'
- 13 你- 你- 你 现在 吃饭 吃得 好不好
 nǐ- nǐ- nǐ xiànzài chīfàn chī de hǎobuhǎo
 2sg 2sg 2sg now eat-meal eat CSC good-NEG-good
 'Are you eating your food properly now?'

The above analysis shows that promises in second position are more vulnerable to the interlocutor's pursuits and sequence expansion. In both Ex 4.9 and Ex 4.10, as well as other cases with a second-position promise, the promiser "misses" the preferred first-position opportunities to provide an acknowledgment and an account for the nonperformance, and a promise to reassure others they will fulfill the existing obligation. Participants in both cases expand the sequence and upgrade the promises with various illocutionary force indicating devices until they reach common ground on sufficient obligation-reassuring promises.

4.3.4 Deviant cases: Passive-aggressive promises in face-to-face conversations

Unlike the telephone conversations examined in previous sections, obligation-reassuring promises are less frequent in the dataset of face-to-face conversations (4 out of 73, see Table 4.3) and are all produced in second position, which are deviant from the preference for first-position obligation-reassuring promises observed in telephone conversations. Analysis in this section will show that these cases demonstrate a noteworthy pattern of passive-aggressive promises in which the speaker appears to comply but indirectly expresses resistance to the interlocutor's pursuits.

In Ex 4.11, the granddaughter (GRD) has been playing video games with her cousins using her grandmother's (GRM) cellphone for more than one hour, and the grandmother now directs her to return the cellphone. An initial direct has been made prior to the extract. The granddaughter in line 01 makes a counter request for more play time, which receives no response from the grandmother. In line 02, the grandmother provides an account for the directive ('You have played for an hour and a half') and redoes the directive in line 03 ('Give it to me'). In line 05, the granddaughter makes a promise, 'Okay, {I} will give it to you.' Note the granddaughter is still focused on the cellphone rather than gazing at her grandmother while producing this promise, which shows her disengagement with the recipient. In line 06, the grandmother explicitly calls out this nonperformance with an angry voice. The granddaughter correspondingly raises her voice and repeats her promise with an aggressive voice and facial expression while gazing at the grandmother, '(I) will give {it} to you.' Despite promising to return the cellphone, her hands are noticeably moved away from the grandma when the latter reaches for the cellphone (see Chapter 5). After

this promise, the grandma disengages from the situation by taking a one-second pause and gazing at the camera. The visual and prosodic design of the promise in line 12 displays a strong resistance and discompliance with to the grandma's directive although the lexico-syntactic design remains the same as the earlier promise in line 08.

Ex 4.11 Summer_2019_ZS_00070

- 01 GRD: 你 再 让 我-
nǐ zài rang wǒ-
 2sg again let me
 'You let me {play for} another'
- 02 GRM: 一 个 半 小 时 打 下 了,
yī gè bàn xiǎoshí dǎ-xià le
 one CL half hour play-down CRS
 'You have played for an hour and a half,'
- 03 一 个 半 小 时,
yī gè bàn xiǎoshí
 one CL half hour
 'one hour and a half,'
- 04 (.)12 点- 哎 11 点 25 分 拿 来 的,
 (.)*shìèr diǎn- āi shíyī diǎn èrshíwǔ fēn ná lái de,*
 twelve o'clock INT eleven o'clock twenty-five minute bring PRT
 'since twelve- Oh, you took the phone at eleven twenty-five,'
- 05 (0.2) 现 在 一 点 钟 了,
 (0.2) *xiànzài yìdiǎnzhōng le*
 now one -o'clock CRS
 'now it's one o'clock.'
- 06 GRM: =快(.) 拿 来,
 =*kuài(.) take lái,*
 quick take come
 'Quick, give it to me.'
- 07 (0.2)
 ((KD is lying on the bed while looking down at the phone))
- 08 GRD: 好 <<all> 会 给 你 嘛,>
hǎo <<all> huì gěi nǐ ma,>
 Okay HUI give 2sg PRT
 'Okay {I} will give to you.'

- 09 =<<dim> 一 二 三 四,>
 =<<dim> yī èr sān sì> ((counting in the game))
 'One two three four,'
- 10 GRM:□ 现在 <<ff ↑不拿 过来> 是 吗,
 xiànzài<<ff ↑bù ná guòlái> shì ma,
 now NEG take over is Q
 'You are not giving me now, are you?'
- 11 GRM: ((Hand reaches to the cellphone))
- 12 GRD:→ 会 <<crescendo> 给> 你 的 嘛:
 huì<<crescendo> gěi> nǐ de ma: ((angry voice and facial
 expression))
 HUI give sg PRT PRT
 '{I} will give {it} to you!'
- 13 (1.0)
- 14 GRM: ((gaze moves towards the camera/researcher with a smile))
- 15 ((smile)) 好 了 嘛.
 ((smile)) hǎo le ma.
 good CRS PRT
 '{You} should be done now.'
- 16 GRM: ((hand reaches to the phone))
- 17 GRD: 把- 我 把 这 个 给 挖 完 嘛,
 bǎ- wǒ bǎ zhè ge gěi wā wán ma
 BA 1sg BA this CL PRT dig finish PRT
 'Let me finish this digging (task).'
- 18 (0.7)
- 19 GRM: 那 挖 到 什么 时候 去 啊;
 nà wā dào shénme shíhou qù ā;
 DM dig to what time go PRT
 'So when you will be done with digging?'
- 20 GRD: =马上 ↑[呗:]
 =mǎshàng ↑[bei:]
 soon PRT
 'Soon.'

Unlike previous examples where the speaker orients to cooperatively promise to complete the previously unfulfilled obligations, the type of promises produced in second-position in an expanded sequence of pursuits like line 12, Ex 4.11, displays a strong resistance and

noncompliance to the interlocutor's request for an expected action, which can be seen as a passive-aggressive promises. This group of promises is different from other regular cases where the promisor sincerely orients to perform the promised action. These deviant cases, therefore, do not invalidate the preference for first-position promises when the speaker has a pre-existing obligation.

Data analysis in this section shows that second-position promises are dispreferred when there is a pre-existing obligation. In cases where the speaker orients to comply with the request, participants tend to treat second-position as insufficient and expand the sequence with pursuits and upgraded promises (Ex 4.9 and Ex 4.10). In cases where the speaker orients to noncompliance, second-position promises function as a vehicle for resistance to the interlocutor's pursuits (e.g., Ex 4.11).

4.3.5 Summary

This section analyzes promises with pre-existing obligations in everyday conversations and provides evidence to support the preference for first-position promises in this environment. Participants are found orienting to a sequence closure when a first-position promise is made, accompanied by the preferences for volunteered acknowledgment of the previous failure and volunteered accounts for the failure. When the speaker misses the opportunity to produce a first-position promise, the interlocutor's first-position actions such as soliciting an account or promise, is often mitigated, and the sequence is often expanded to reach an upgraded obligation-reassuring promise. Lastly, deviant case analysis of second-position promises in face-to-face conversations shows that speakers in those cases make passive-aggressive promises to resist the interlocutor's

pursuits, which should be distinguished from promises made as the “main job” (Schegloff 2007) in other examples.

With these understandings, the next section examines whether the preference for first-position promises is also prioritized in official-journalist conversations on the *Wenzheng* programs.

4.4 Sequence organization of promises in officials-journalist interactions

Unlike ordinary conversations, institutional conversations are organized with a set of pre-allocated turn-taking rules. Therefore, government officials on the *Wenzheng* programs face the problem of cross-cutting preferences (Schegloff’s 2007): should they prioritize the preference for first-position promises as found in ordinary conversations or follow the turn-taking rules and overall structural organization procedures pre-established in the institutional setting? This section takes an inferential statistics method to further examine the sequence organization of promises in an institutional setting and presents unique features of officials’ design of promises.

4.4.1 The problem: Cross-cutting preferences in sequence-organization

Government officials on the *Wenzheng* programs and other politicians, when taking their positions, have made an unspoken promise with the pre-existing obligation to serve the people based on a social contract (Riley 2013). In cases when they fail to keep their promises, such as with public crises and government failures addressed on the *Wenzheng* programs, politicians and officials are held accountable and are expected to make obligation-reassuring promises to rebuild people’s trust and restore their image (Benoit 1997). Given the preference for first-position

promises in ordinary conversation, first-position promises might also be preferred in the *Wenzheng* programs. For example, in Ex 4.12, the official is accountable for not repairing an electric pole promptly, which poses a threat to the residents' safety. In lines 04-06, the host initiates a pre-question about the condition of the pole, which is by no means soliciting a promise. Instead of responding to the question, the official initiates a promise in lines 08 and 10, 'We'll send staff to identify the problem and rectify it immediately.'

Ex 4.12 2018-1-Nanning_Electric pole

- 04 HST: 我 就 想 问 一 下 我 们 的 魏 副 主 任 了。
wǒ jiù xiǎng wèn yíxià wǒmen de Wèi fùzhǔrèn le.
 1sg just want ask once 1pl GEN NAME deputy-director PRT
 'I just want to ask our Deputy director Wei,'
- 05 您 敢 不 敢 从 底 下 通 过 呢。
nín gǎnbùgǎn cóng dǐxia tōngguò ne.
 2sg dare-NEG-dare from under through PRT
 'Do you dare to walk under the pole?'
- 06 您 认 为 它 还 能 支 撑 多 长 时 间 呢。
nín rènwéi tā hái néng zhīchēng duōcháng shíjiān ne.
 2sg think 3sg still can support how-long time PRT
 'How long do you think it can stand more?'
- 07 (0.2)
- 08 OFF:→ 呃, 这 个 呢: 我 们 呢(.) 明 天 呢(.)
è, zhège ne: wǒmen ne(.) míngtiān ne(.)
 uh this PRT(topic) 1pl PRT(topic) tomorrow PRT
 'Uh, about this, we, tomorrow,'
- 09 就 组 织 人 员 到 这 个 现 场 进 行 认 定。
jiù zǔzhī rényuán dào zhège xiànchǎng jìnxíng rèndìng.
 PRT organize personnel to this site do identify
 'We'll send staff to identify the problem,'
- 10 立 即 整 改。

lìjǐ *zhěngǎi*.
immediately rectify
'and rectify it immediately.'

However, institutional conversations have a pre-established turn-taking system, and officials do not have a legitimate opportunity to self-select (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson 1974) or to initiate a promise out of turn, as in participants' ordinary conversations. Each questioning-officials session on the *Wenzheng* programs is a “big package” (Sacks 1995: 682) of interaction that consists of four activities as demonstrated in Figure 4.1: 1) the host presents the problem with a pre-recorded investigation video of the problem and a lead-in question – lead-in activity, 2) the host holds the officials accountable by probing into the problem – accountability-solicitation activity, 3) the host solicits a promise – promise-making activity, 4) the host closes the questioning session – closing activity. Following the turn-taking rules and the overall structural organization order, the promises are expected to be made in the responding position of a question-answer sequence in the third activity as in Ex 4.13, and first-position promises out of order might be sanctioned as in Ex 4.14.

Figure 4.1 Overall structural organization of question sessions



In Ex 4.13, the official is held accountable for the delay of an important city landscaping project, and the participants have completed the accountability-solicitation activity prior to this extract. In lines 01-03, the host initiates a sequence to solicit a promise from the official, ‘Before

October this year.... Can you accomplish it?’ Although not following the question agenda, the official makes his promise in line 04 as a response to the host’s question, ‘By the end of September, we must accomplish the task.’ The host appreciates the promise and closes the sequence in line 05.

Ex 4.13 2014-1-Nanning_Green city

- 01 HST: 那 我 先 问 您 吧。 今年 10 月份 之前，
nà wǒ xiān wèn nín ba. jīnnián shí yuèfèn zhīqián,
 that 1sg first ask 2sg PRT this-year October before
 我们 能 以 一个 良好 的 形象；
wǒmen néng yǐ yí gè liánghǎo de xíngxiàng;
 1pl can as one CL good NOM image
 ‘Let me ask you first, before October this year, are we able to present a good image,’
- 02 提升 我们 的 美化 彩化 力度
tíshēng wǒmen de měihuà cǎihuà lìdù
 improve 1pl GEN beautify coloring intensity
 来 迎接 八方 宾朋，
lái yíngjiē bāfāng bīnpéng,
 come welcome from.around.the.world guests.
 ‘to enhance our urban-greening work, so as to welcome guests from around the world?’
- 03 能 做 到 吗：
néng zuò dào mā
 can do arrive Q
 ‘Can you accomplish it?’
- 04 OFF: → 9 月 底 必须 完成 任务， ((smile))
jiǔyuè dǐ bixū wánchéng rènwu,
 September end must finish task
 完不成 任务 就地 免职。
wánbùchéng rènwu jiùdì miǎnzhí.
 complete-NEG-end task here.and.now resign

'By the end of September, we must accomplish the task; otherwise, I
 will immediately resign.'
 05 HST: 好, 掌声 鼓励 一下,
hǎo, zhǎngshēng gǔlì yíxià,
 Okay applause encourage once
 'Okay, let's thank (him) with applause,'
 感谢 梁局 对 我们 的 居民
gǎnxiè liángjú duì wǒmen de jūmín
 thank Director-Liang to 1pl GEN resident
 有 这样 的 承诺。
yǒu zhèyàng de chéngnuò.
 have this-kind NOM promise
 'Thank Director Liang for making such a promise to our residents.'

An out-of-order first-position promise without responding to the accountability question is likely to be treated as an evasion, and the interaction tends to be redirected to the accountability question. In extreme cases like Ex 4.14, the officials can be interrupted and sanctioned, which is consistent with Clayman's (2001) observation of evasions in American news interviews.

In Ex 4.14, the official is accountable for the imbalance of educational resources in the city of Xi'an, a major mid-western Chinese city. The official attempts to evade responding to the accountability question (line 05, 'What should our education administrative department be responsible for?') with statements of contingencies (lines 06-13) followed by a volunteered promise (line 14, 'Next, we need to continuously invest more...') He then presents the problem as an objectively existing contingency (lines 17-19) and states the existing/on-going efforts the department has spent solving the problem (20-21). But he is explicitly interrupted and sanctioned by the host in lines 22-24 for not responding to the accountability question, 'Okay, Director Zhao,

I am going to interrupt you, I want you to listen to my question again. What I am asking is what kind of responsibilities you/your department have, rather than asking you to list the facts that have been shown in the video clip.’ The official registers the host’s directive and provides a heavily hedged answer (lines 25-31) prefaced with fillers (*eh, zhege*) and epistemic marker *yinggai*, ‘I should say.’ Although this answer is hedged, it addresses the “responsibility” question by admitting the lack of investment in public education. The host registers this response and gives a positive assessment in line 32, which also closes the accountability-solicitation activity.

Ex 4.14 2018-4-Xi’an-Education

- 04 HST: 在 这 我 想 问 问 我 们 的: 赵 局 长;
zài zhè wǒ xiǎng wèn wèn wǒmen de: zhào júzhǎng;
 at here 1sg wang ask.ask 1pl GEN NAME director
 那么 为 什 么 会 出 现 这 种 失 衡 的 格 局,
nàme wèishénme huì chūxiàn zhè zhǒng shīhéng de géjú,
 so why will appear this CL unbalanced NOM situation
 ‘Here I want to ask our Director Zhao, so why would this unbalanced situation occur?’
- 05 咱 们 教 育 行 政 主 管 部 门,
zánmen jiàoyù xíngzhèng zhǔguǎn bùmén,
 1pl education administration chief department
 该 负 哪 些 责 任 呢.
gāi fù nǎxiē zérèn ne.
 should take which responsibility PRT
 ‘What should our education administrative department be responsible for?’
- 06 OFF: 嗯 刚 才 短 片 反 映 的 问 题
ēn gāngcái duǎnpiàn fǎnyìng de wèntí
 PRT just.now clip reflect ASS problem
 确 实 在 我 们 西 安 市 是 存 在 的.
quèshí zài wǒmen xīānshì shì cúnzài de.
 indeed in 1pl PN is exist PRT
 ‘Mm, the problem revealed by the video clip indeed exist in our city of Xi’an.’

- ((Lines omitted))
- 14 → 下来, 我们 在 学前 教育 方面
xiàlai, wǒmen zài xuéqián jiàoyù fāngmiàn
 next, 1pl in pre-school education aspect
 还要 加大 公办园 的
háiyào jiādà gōngbànyuán de
 still.need increase public-kindergarten ASSC
 投入 的 力度 和 数量.
tóurù de lìdù hé shùliàng.
 investment ASS strength and number
 'Next, we need to continuously invest more in pre-education and
 increase both the strength and number of public schools.'
- 15 这 是 在 学前 教育.
zhè shì zài xuéqián jiàoyù.
 this is at pre-school education.
 'This is about pre-school education,'
- 16 那么 在 义务 教育 方面;
nàme zài yìwù jiàoyù fāngmiàn;
 so at compulsory education aspect,
 还有 高中 教育 方面;
háiyǒu gāozhōng jiàoyù fāngmiàn;
 and highschool education aspect,
 'In terms of compulsory education, as well as high school education,'
- 17 呃: 能 看 出来,
è: néng kàn chūlai,
uh can tell out
 我们 主要 存在 的 是 不 均衡 的 问题,
wǒmen zhǔyào cúnzài de shì bù jūnhéng de wèntí,
 1pl main existing NOM is NEG balanced NOM problem
 'Uh, we can tell, the problem existing is mainly not imbalance.'
 ((Lines omitted))
- 20 那么 我们, 从 去年 开始,
nàme wǒmen, cóng qùnián kāishǐ,
 so 1pl fraom last.year start
 我们 也 在 做 调研,
wǒmen yě zài zuò diàoyán,
 1pl also PROG do research
 'so we have been doing survey since last year.'
- 21 就是 为了 咱们 西安 教育 的 均衡 发展,

- jiùshì wèile zánmen xiān jiàoyù de jūnhéng fāzhǎn,*
 just.is for 1pl PN education ASS balanced development
 我们 也 做 了 一个-
wǒmen yě zuò le yí gè-
 1pl also make PFV one CL
 'to promote a balanced development of the education system, we also
 made a-'
- 22 HST: 好, 赵局长, 我 打断 您 一下.
hǎo, zhàojúzhǎng, wǒ dǎduàn nín yíxià.
 Okay, NAME-director 1sg interrupt 2sg once
 'Okay, Director Zhao, I am going to interrupt you a bit,'
- 23 这 个 问题 我 想 请 您 再 次 听 明白,
zhè gè wèntí wǒ xiǎng qǐng nín zàicì tīng míngbai,
 this CL question 1sg want ask 1sg again listen clear
 我 问 的 是 负 有 哪 些 责 任,
wǒ wèn de shì fùyǒu nǎxiē zérèn,
 1sg ask NOM is take which responsibility
 'I want you to listen to my question again. What I am asking is what
 kinds of responsibilities you have,'
- 24 并 不 是 我 们 去 陈 述 现 象.
bìng búshì wǒmen qù chénshù xiànxiàng.
 rather NEG-is 1pl go state phenomenon
 片 子 当 中 已 经 反 映 过 了,
piānzi dāngzhōng yǐjīng fǎnyìng guò le,
 video in already reflect EXP CRS
 'rather than us listing the facts, which have been shown in the video
 clip already.'
- 25 OFF: 对. 呢: 从 我 们 这 个
duì. è: cóng wǒmen zhège
 correct uh from 1pl this
 应 该 这 几 年 来 讲;
yīnggāi zhè jǐ nián lái jiǎng;
 should this several year come say
 'Right. Uh, based on our work in these years,'
- 26 应 该 说 公 办 教 育 这 块 力 度 还 是 不 够.
yīnggāishuō gōngbàn jiàoyù zhè kuài lìdù hái shì búgòu.
 should.say public education this aspect strength still NEG-
 enough

'I should say, we have not put enough effort in this section of public education'

((Lines omitted))

30 呃：跟 武汉， 成都 相比， 特别 跟 南京 也是；
è: gēn wǔhàn, chéngdū xiāngbǐ, tèbié gēn nánjīng yě shì;
uh with PN PN compare especially with PN also.is

'Uh, compared to Wuhan and Chengdu, and especially Nanjing,'

31 跟 其他 几 个 兄弟 城市 来 比 的话。
gēn qítā jǐ gè xiōngdì chéngshì lái bǐ dehuà,
with other several CL brother city come compare if
我们 发展 速度 确确实实 还是 慢 了。
wǒmen fāzhǎn sùdù quèqueshíshí hái shì màn le.
1pl develop speed indeed still.is slow CRS

'And other sister cities, the development {of the public schools} in Xi'an is indeed still slow.'

32 HST: 好， 回答 非常 客观。
hǎo, huídá fēicháng kèguān.
Okay answer very objective
'Okay, your answer is very objective.'

Considering the preference for first-position promises when the speaker has an unfulfilled pre-existing obligation and the preference for following turn-taking rules, it is difficult to determine which preference the officials prioritize. The following Section 4.4.2 examines the distributional regularity of the two types of promises and tests two hypotheses of preference for first-position promises. Section 4.3.3 presents officials' turn-design strategies of first-position promises, which are observed to successfully progress the sequence despite the violation of pre-established turn-taking rules. Inferential statistics methods are applied in this section to assist with the analysis because promises are observed significantly more frequently in the *Wenzheng* programs than in ordinary conversation.

4.4.2 Distributional regularity

Applying inferential statistic methods, the question of whether participants in the *Wenzheng* programs prefer first-position promises or second-position promises can be translated into the following sets of null hypotheses and their alternatives. The first H_0 examines the distributional frequencies of the two types of promises:

- 1) H_0 : first-position promises like those in Ex 4.12 occur more frequently on the *Wenzheng* programs than second-position promises like those in Ex 4.13.
- 2) H_1 : first-position promises like those in Ex 4.12 do not occur more frequently on the *Wenzheng* programs than second-position promises like those in Ex 4.13.

The second H_0 concerns the participant's orientation by investigating the correlation between the type of the promise and the type of recipient's next-turn action – whether the direction of the interaction is progressing forward or backward.

- 1) H_0 : first-position promises are more likely to be followed by the recipient's next turn action that advances the sequence to closing than second-position promises.
- 2) H_1 : first-position promises are **not** more likely to be followed by the recipient's next turn action that advances to advance the sequence to closing than second-position promises.

For the second set of hypotheses, I categorize the host's next-turn actions into three types: 1) the host cooperatively accepts the promise and closes the sequence; 2) the host pursues a more committed promise; 3) the host rejects the promise and redirects the conversation to the previous

accountability-solicitation activity. The first two types of next-turn actions advance the course of actions forward; in contrast, type 3) reverses the interaction trajectory against the official’s attempt to progress to the promise-making activity.

The following statistical analysis results show that first-position promises are not significantly more frequent than second-position promises in the database, but second-position promises are significantly more likely to advance the interaction towards closing.

Table 4.6 shows the distribution of the two types of promises: among the 154 instances of first try¹⁹ obligation-reassuring promises, 55.8% are first-position promises, and 44.2% are second-position promises. While most officials contribute only one or two promises in each category, two officials each make three first-position promises with no second-position promises, and another official makes four second-position promises with only one first-position promise. The close frequency numbers of the two categories as well as the existence of the three outliers make it difficult to conclude that first-position promises are significantly more common than second-position promises.

Table 4.6 Distribution of obligation-reassuring promises on the *Wenzheng* programs

	First position	Second position
Counts	86	68
Percentage	55.8%	44.2%
Total	154	100%

¹⁹ In the *Wenzheng* conversation, the host (the recipient of the promise) might expand the sequence to pursue a more desirable promise, which increases the complexity of analysis. Officials in these extended sequences have less control of the interaction. Therefore, in the current study, only first – try promises – when the officials have relatively more freedom to make choices – are counted for the purpose of distributional analysis.

Table 4.7 illustrates the frequencies of the three types of next-turn actions following a first-position promise or a second-position promise. Among the first-position promises, 48 (54.7%) see the host registers the official's promise and closes the sequence²⁰, while in 12 cases (14.3%) the host pursues a better promise; and in 27 cases (31%) the host pursues an accountability response. Adding up the type 1) and type 2) cases, the hosts approve 69% of the officials' first-position promises and orient to the progressivity of the interaction. Among the second-position promises, 43 (63.2%) see the host close the sequence and 19 (28%) see the host pursue a better promise, which indicates that 91.2% of officials' second-position promises are approved by the hosts.

A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relationship between the type of promise and the host's next-turn action. The relationship between these variables was significant; the Chi-square statistic is 9.95, $p = 0.001608596$. Second-position promises are more likely than first-position promises to progress the interaction.

Table 4.7 The host's next turn of action after a first-position promise and a second-position promise

The direction of the interaction	Next-turn action	First-position promises	Second-position promises
Advanced	1) Closing the promising sequence	48 (54.7%)	43 (63.2%)
	2) Pursuing a better promise	12 (14.3%)	19 (28%)
	Subtotal	59 (69 %)	62 (91.2%)
Reversed	3) Pursuing an accountability response	27 (31%)	6 (8.8%)
Total (154)		86 (100%)	68 (100%)

The chi-square statistic is 9.95. The p -value is .001608596. Significant at $p < .01$.

²⁰ In some cases, the host/journalist reinitiates an accountability question after a few turns. These cases are still included as type 1.

As presented above, statistical analysis results reject both sets of hypotheses. Second-position promises are significantly preferred by the participants in the *Wenzheng* conversation dataset, which indicates that turn-taking rules and overall structural organization order impose a stronger restriction on participants in the *Wenzheng* programs. However, first-position and second-position promises have a relatively equal occurrence in the dataset, and 69% of the first-position promises are still approved by the host and successfully advance the interaction despite the violation of the turn-taking rules and overall structural organization order.

In the following section, I examine the turn design features of these successful first-position promises, aiming to find out common practices used by the officials to minimize the damage of departing from the protocols.

4.4.3 Turn-design features of successful first-position promises

Given the strong preference for following turn-taking rules as displayed in the previous section, officials have to adopt extra techniques to make successful first-position promises and change the trajectory of the interaction without being sanctioned. The following sections present the three most common techniques observed in the current dataset, including 1) making promises in the turn-final position in a multi-unit multi-action turn, 2) acknowledging accountability for the failed obligations before making a promise, and/or substituting the accountability response with a combination of other affiliative actions, 3) using compound TCUs.

4.4.3.1 Making promises in the turn-final position

There are two alternative designs of first-position promises observed in the current database: the first type is a single-action promise – such as in Ex 4.12 where the official initiates a promise without other actions; the second type is a turn-final position promises in a multi-unit multi-action turn. Ex 4.15 is an example of this type of first-position promise.

In Ex 4.15, the official (OFF) is accountable for not updating important staff contact information. The host also initiates a pre-question in lines 01-02 but this official does not provide an answer to that question either. Instead, the official acknowledges the responsibility of his department (line 03) and then initiates a promise in the same turn (lines 04-06). Note line 08 in Ex 4.12 is a turn-initial position promise, which is also the only TCU in the turn; lines 04-06 in Ex 4.15 are a turn-final position promise following the first TCU (line 03), which can be treated as a non-answer response to the host's question.

Ex 4.15 2017-2-Wuhan_Outdated contact information

- 01 HST: 您看 这 个 通讯录 还 是 几 年 前 的。
nínkàn zhè gè tōngxùnlù hái shì jǐ nián qián de.
2sg-look this CL contact-list still is few year ago NOM
'Look, this contact list is the one used a few years ago.'
- 02 如果 现在 区长 那边 的 人
rúguǒ xiànzài qūzhǎng nàbian de rén
if now district-head there NOM people
还 来 帮忙 吗。
hái lái bāngmáng ma.
still come help Q
'Will staff from the District Mayer's office {on the contact list}
still come help now?'
- 03 OFF: 这 就是 我们 犯 的 一 个 大 错误(.)
zhè jiùshì wǒmen fàn de yí gè dà cuòwù(.)
this just-is 1pl violate NOM one CL big mistake

	工作	没	做	好;	啊,	
	<i>gōngzuò</i>	<i>méi</i>	<i>zuò</i>	<i>hǎo;</i>	<i>ā,</i>	
	work	NEG	do	well	PRT	
	'This is a big mistake we have made. We didn't fulfill our work.'					
04→	我们	回去	以后	要	马上	整改;
	<i>wǒmen</i>	<i>huíqu</i>	<i>yǐhòu</i>	<i>yào</i>	<i>mǎshàng</i>	<i>zhěnggǎi;</i>
	1pl	return	after	will	immediately	rectify
	'We will rectify it immediately after we return to the office.'					
05	另外	还	要	举一反三:		
	<i>lìngwài</i>	<i>hái</i>	<i>yào</i>	<i>jǔyīfǎnsān:</i>		
	in.addition	still	need	infer.other.things.from.one.fact		
	'In addition, we will rectify other aspects of our work too.'					
06	凡是	对外	公示	的	公布	的 这个 信息(.)
	<i>fánshì</i>	<i>duìwài</i>	<i>gōngshì</i>	<i>de</i>	<i>gōngbù</i>	<i>de zhège xìnxi(.)</i>
	all	outward	display	NOM	announce	NOM this information
	'All of the information announced to the public,'					
	要,	随着	时间	的	改变,	内容
	<i>yào,</i>	<i>suízhe</i>	<i>shíjiān</i>	<i>de</i>	<i>gǎibiàn,</i>	<i>nèiróng</i>
	need	as	time	ASS	change	content
						ASSC
						change
	和	人员	的	改变	而	立即
	<i>hé</i>	<i>rényuán</i>	<i>de</i>	<i>gǎibiàn</i>	<i>ér</i>	<i>lìjí</i>
						<i>gǎibiàn guòlái.</i>
	'and personnel ASS change and immediately change over'					
	'needs to be changed immediately following the change of time, content, and personnel.'					
07 HST:	好的.					
	<i>hǎode.</i>					
	okay					
	'Okay.'					

Table 4.8 shows that turn-final promises designed in multi-unit multi-action turns are more frequent than single-action promises in both first-position promises and second-position promises. To find out whether there is a statistically significant correlation between the turn-design (turn-final promises in multi-unit multi-action turns vs single-action promises) and the sequence position of promises (first position vs second position), a Chi-square test is performed. The Chi-square

statistic is 14.9477, and the p -value $< .01$. This result shows that first-position promises are significantly more likely to be designed as a turn-final TCU in multi-unit multi-action turns. On the other hand, as the “Expected values” columns show, second-position promises are significantly more likely to be designed as single-TCU single action turns, which is related to the sequential environment of second-position promises where the accountability-solicitation activity has been accomplished earlier and the participants can focus on promise-making actions.

Table 4.8 TCU position of promises

	Multi-unit multi-action	Expected values	Single action turns	Expected values
First-position promises	75 (85%)	64.55	12	22.45
Second-position promises	40 (15%)	50.45	28	17.55

The chi-square statistic is 14.9477. The p -value is .000111. Significant at $p < .01$.

Previous studies on news interviews found that shifting question agendas show the interviewee’s resistance to the question (Clayman 2001; Greatbatch 1986). The two variants of first-position promises both resist the accountability question by initiating the new agenda of promise making, but turn-final position promises are more common in the dataset since they operate on a different level and display a lower degree of resistance compared to single-action first-position promises. First, both variants change the trajectory of the interaction, because the promise is originally expected to be withheld until the host initiates a promise-solicitation sequence, but single-action promises – turn-initial position – are produced even earlier than turn-final position promises. Second, the turn-final position promises to alter the official’s turn-taking

opportunity by continuously occupying the floor after the official has reached a turn-transition relevance place (TRP), but the preceding TCUs are usually relevant to the question and enable the official to maintain some degree of alignment with the host.; whereas single-action promises operate on the question-answer sequence – the promise is produced in the official’s legitimate turn but completely disregards the host’s question agendas and is more resistant to the host’s questions.

Regardless of the differences, first-position promises, in general, enable the officials to assert agency and to claim dominance and primacy in terms of what kind of future actions they commit to performing (Thompson, Fox & Couper-Kuhlen 2015: 264–265), in contrast with second-position promises that automatically present the official in a subordinate position (Heritage & Raymond 2005). The main reason why single-action promises are less successful is that they do not provide an accountability response to the host’s question, which is an essential condition to advance the interaction.

4.4.3.2 Accountability and other affiliative actions accompanying promises

Turn-final position promises are found to be successful in advancing the interaction because they minimize the damages (and the disaffiliation) caused by the violation of turn-taking rules by performing affiliative actions before the promise TCU. Among these pre-promise actions, the most frequently observed is acknowledging accountability (47%) – such as in line 03 of Ex 4.15. The importance of including accountability in multi-unit multi-action first-position promises is also supported by cases like Ex 4.14, in which the officials are sanctioned for lacking accountability in their promising turn. This observation not only affirms the agenda-setting power of questions

initiating actions but also aligns with the well-accepted notion of government accountability, which requires government officials to explain and justify their policies or failures and entitles citizens to the capacity to impose sanctions on officials' malfeasance (Schedler 1999).

In addition to accountability, other common actions or combinations of actions in first-position promising turns include statements of previous achievements or ongoing efforts, attributions to contingencies, and apologies and empathy. Ex 4.16 is such an example.

In the conversation, the official (OFF) is questioned about a water pollution problem that has affected a resident's fishpond. In his long turn, the official manages to complete multiple affiliative actions (lines 06-19) before volunteering a promise (lines 20-24). He begins the response with an apology and empathy in line 06, 'Honestly speaking, I express my deep sympathy and apology for your experience.' The preface 'honestly speaking' and the first-person singular pronoun 'I' enable the official to maximize his affiliation with the resident on a personal level, rather than the formal citizen-government relationship. In line 07, the official responds to the pre-sequence question (lines 01 and 03, 'Can water like this be used to feed fish') by transforming the focus of the question (Stivers & Hayashi 2010) from the quality of the polluted water to the quality of fish, 'The fish are no longer edible for sure.' In line 08, he shifts the topic to another action – a statement of achievement ('but I should say that the pollution problem you had last year has been resolved'). Lines 10 to 18 are a detailed account of the new pollution from an expert perspective. Instead of recognizing his (and his department's) responsibility, the official attributes the new problem to

technical contingencies. In lines 19-24, the official promises that the problem will be solved with specific solutions. This combination of multiple non-accountability response actions and a promise is successful as the host and journalist do not pursue his accountability.

Ex 4.16 2015-1-Wuhan_Fish and pollution OFF: official RJT: host journalist

- 01 RRT: 王区长(.) 这样 的 水 能 喂 鱼 吗:
Wángqūzhǎng(.) zhèyàng de shuǐ néng wèi yú mā:
 NAME-district-head this NOM water can feed fish Q
 'District Mayer Wang, Can water like this be used to feed fish?'
- 02 RJT: 于师傅 可能 今天 身体 不 是 很好;
yúshīfu kěnéng jīntiān shēntǐ bú shì hěnhǎo;
 NAME-Master maybe today health NEG is very-good
 但是 话 说 得 很 明白,
dànshì huà shuō dé hěn míngbai,
 but speech speak CSC very clear
 'Maybe Ms Yu doesn't feel quite well today, but she has made herself very clear,'
- 03 就是 想 问 一下 王区长(.)
jiùshì xiǎng wèn yíxià wáng qūzhǎng(.)
 just.is want ask NAME NAME-district-head
 像 这样 的 水 能 喂 鱼 吗:
xiàng zhèyàng de shuǐ néng wèi yú mā:
 like this NOM water can feed fish Q
 '{I}just want to ask District Mayor Wang, can water like this be used to feed fish?'
- 04 来, 我们 听一听 王区长 的 回应.
lái, wǒmen tīngyìtīng wángqūzhǎng de huíyìng.]
 come 1pl try-listen NAME-district-head ASSC response
 'Let's listen to the response from District Mayor Wang.'
- 05 HST: 王区长;
wángqūzhǎng;
 NAME-distrect-head
 'District Mayer Wang.'
- 06 OFF: 说实话(.) 我 对 于大姐 的 这样 一种
shuōshíhuà(.) wǒ duì yú dàjiě de zhèyàng yízhòng
 honestly.speaking 1sg to sister-NAME GEN this one-type
 遭遇; 深表 同情 和 歉意.

- zāoyù; shēnbiǎo tóngqíng hé qiànyì.
 experience deeply-express empathy and apology
 'Honestly speaking, I express my deep sympathy and apology to your
 experience,'
- 07 这个 鱼 肯定 是 不 能够 吃 了。
 zhège yú kěndìng shì bù nénggòu chī le.
 this fish definitely is NEG can eat CRS
 'The fish are no longer edible for sure,'
- 08 但是 应该 来讲, 您 去年 的
 dànshì yīnggāi láijiǎng, nín qùnián de
 but should say 2sg last.year NOM
 这 一 个 污染 源 老 问题 解决 了(.)
 zhè yí gè wūrǎn yuán lǎo wèntí jiějué le(.)
 this one CL pollution source old problem solve PFV
 'but I should say that the pollution problem you had last year has
 been resolved,'
- 09 但是 新 问题 又 出现 了。
 dànshì xīn wèntí yòu chūxiàn le.
 but new problem again appear CRS
 新 的 污染 源 又 出现 了。
 xīn de wūrǎn yuán yòu chūxiàn le.
 new NOM pollution source again appear CRS
 'but a new problem has appeared, a new pollution source has appeared.'
 ((Lines omitted: Official explains the technical problems of the new problem))
- 19 这 个 不过 的话 我 想 请 您 放心:
 zhè gè búguò dehuà wǒ xiǎng qǐng nín fàngxīn:
 this CL but PRT 1sg think hope 2pl careful,
 'However, I want to ask you not to be concerned,'
- 20 我们 尽快 就 会 责成 施工 单位, 啊;
 wǒmen jǐnkuài jiù huì zéchéng shīgōng dānwèi, ā;
 1pl as.soon.as.possible just will ask construction company PRT
 把 这 个 污水 管网 的话 呢;
 bǎ zhè gè wūshuǐ guǎnwǎng dehuà ne;
 BA this CL sewage pipe-system PRT(topic) PRT
 'We will ask the construction company to fix the sewage system,'
- 21 连接 好, 把 污染 源 把 它 堵住。
 liánjiē hǎo, bǎ wūrǎn yuán bǎ tā dǔzhù.
 connect well BA pollution source BA 3sg block-up
 'connect the pipes to stop the sewage'

- 22 同时 的话;
tóngshí dehuà;
 meanwhile DM
 我们 也 责成 构成 我们 水 污染 的(.)
wǒmen yě zéchéng gòuchéng wǒmen shuǐ wūrǎn de(.)
 1pl also request construct 1pl water pollution NOM
 造成 鱼 死亡 的 施工 单位 的话;
zàochéng yú sǐwáng de shīgōng dānwèi dehuà;
 cause fish dead NOM construction company PRT
 'Meanwhile, we also request the construction company who caused water pollution and fish death.'
- 23 要 对 你 的 经济方面 要 进行 补偿(.) 啊,
yào duì nǐ de jīngjì fāngmiàn yào jìnxíng bǔcháng(.) ā,
 need to 2sg ASS economic aspect need do compensation PRT
 'to compensate {you} for your economic loss.'
- 24 我 想 的话 不 让 您 的话 流血 又 流泪.
wǒ xiǎng dehuà bú ràng nín dehuà liúxuè yòu liúlèi.
 1sg think PRT NEG let 2sg PRT bleed and cry
 'I think, {we} cannot let your bleed and shed tears at the same time.'
- 25 HST: 嗯, 好的 小付.
ēn, hǎo de xiǎo fù.
 mm, okay Little Fu.
 'Mm, Okay, Little Fu.'

Analyses of the examples in this section show that first-position promises are more likely to be accepted if made after recognizing accountability. Promises made without accountability responses tend to be sanctioned by the host, and the interaction will be redirected to the accountability question. In some cases, such as Ex 4.16, a strategic combination of various affiliative actions, including recognizing responsibilities, statements of previous achievements and ongoing efforts, attributions to contingencies, and apologies and empathy can progress the interaction forward without an accountability response. Further investigation is needed to identify the mechanisms of the different effects of individual actions.

4.4.3.3 Compound TCU promises

Another turn-design technique officials adopt in making first-position promises is compound TCUs. In making first-position promises in the turn-final position, the official faces dual challenges: not only to continuously hold the floor although they have reached a transitional relevance place (TRP) but also to shift the topic from the accountability response or other affiliative actions to a volunteered promise. Although both parties understand that conversational turns in news interviews are longer than in ordinary conversation (Heritage & Clayman 2010), collisions between the interviewer and interviewee still occur at those TRPs like lines 05 and 06 in the following Ex 4.17. This section examines the *if X then Y* structure as an example of how officials adopt compound TCUs to minimize such collisions in their first-position promises.

Ex 4.17 201402_Nanning_Lixiaolong_Sinage

- 01 OFF: 这个 没有 的 问题 呢, 可能 是 呢-
zhègè méiyǒu de wèntí ne kěnéng shì ne-
DM NEG-have NOM problem PRT maybe is PRT
'Regarding this issue of no {signages},'
- 02 一个 是 我们 的:: 这个: °h 呃:: 交警 啊-
yīgè shì wǒmen de:: zhègè: °h e:: jiāojǐng ā-
one.thing is 1pl GEN DM uh traffic-police PRT
'one {reason} {is that} our traffic police officers,'
- 03 可能 是::<<all 管理 不 到位.>
kěnéng shì::<<all guǎnlǐ bú dào wèi.>
maybe is management NEG well
'maybe it's that {their} management is not sufficient,'
- 04 啊 落实 不 到位. (...) 啊;
ā luòshí bú dào wèi (...) ā;
PRT enforcement NEG well INT
'not implemented well.'
- 05 °h 第 二 个 的话 可能 有一些 副牌 可能 是 掉: 了;
°h dì èr gè dehuà kěnéng yǒuyìxiē fùpái kěnéng shì diào le;
the second CL DM maybe some sign maybe is drop PFV

'The second reason is that maybe some signs fell off,'
 06 HOS: [那 应该-]
 [nà yīnggāi-]
 DM should
 'Then {you} should-'
 07 OFF: <<all [那 么] 不管 什么 原因 吧;>
 <<all [nàme] BÙguǎn shénme yuányīn ba;
 DM no.matter what reason PRT
 'No matter what reason,'
 ((horizontal then vertical))
 08 → 我们 得 <<all 立刻 去 改:> (1.0) 啊-
 wǒmen děi <<all lìkè qù gǎi: (1.0) ā-
 1pl have.to immediately go correct INT
 'We have to immediately correct it.'

Compound TCUs represented by the conditional conjunction structure *if X then Y* are described as a TCU with two components in which the primary component foreshows the second component and are often used to collaborate with or preempt other participants (Lerner 1991). *If* (in Mandarin *ruguo*) compound TCUs have three main functions in the sequential environment of the *Wenzheng* programs. At the turn-taking level, the preliminary *if* component projects the occurrence of the second component, which stretches the official's turn space and prevents the host from taking the floor before the official completes his second component. At the action level, the *if* compound TCU is highly evasive since it enables the official to resist the presupposition in the host's accountability question (although it has been explicitly shown with evidence in the video clip or through interviews with residents), making the accomplishment of the promised action contingent on the truth value of the *if*-proposition. The third function is also at the action level: the official manages to restore their positive image with the second component of the *if*-compound

TCU – the promise, which tends to display a firm stance to take actions. Ex 4.18 exemplifies the officials’ design of these compound TCU promises.

In Ex 4.18, the official is being held accountable for food safety issues. The host raises an accountability question in line 03 ‘Why were these good policies not implemented?’ followed by a candidate’s answer, ‘There are a series of dirty unspoken rules working behind these good policies’ (line 04). The official resists the question with a non-answer response (line 07, ‘I cannot make a judgment...based on the image’), and then initiates a promise with a *yidan* ‘once’ conditional compound TCU (lines 08 and 09, ‘But once we find out it to be true, we will break the unspoken rule and provide people with real safe soybean products.’). This compound TCU promise is highly evasive. By saying he is not able to make the judgment and uttering the hypothetical preliminary component, the official resists the host’s theory about the unspoken rules and government misconduct; the second component asserts a strong commitment to solving the problem, which is contingent on the truth value of the first component. The host does not overtly accept the official’s promise, but she closes the sequence by providing an alternative explanation for the problem.

Ex 4.18 2013-2-Wuhan_Soybean products

01 HST: 其实 刚才 我们 高 局长 介绍 了;
qíshí gāngcái wǒmen gāojúzhǎng jièshào le;
 actually just.now 1pl NAME-director introduce PFV
 ‘Actually, as Direct Gao introduced just now,’

02 还是 有 一 系列 的 相关 的
háishi yǒu yí xìliè de xiāngguān de
 still have one series NOM related NOM
 执法 的 制度 和 措施 的.

- zhífǎ* *de zhìdù hé cuòshī* *de*
 law.enforcement NOM system and measure PRT
 'There are a series of relevant regulations for law enforcement,'
 03 那 为什么 这些好 的 措施没有得到实行,
nà wèishénme zhèxiē hǎo de cuòshī méiyǒu dédào shíxíng,
 so why these good NOM measure NEG receive implement
 'But why were these good policies not implemented?'
 04 我们 是不是 可以理解(.)
wǒmen shìbúshì kěyǐ lǐjiě(.)
1pl *is-NEG-is* can understand
 在 这些 好 的 措施 的 背后;
zài zhèxiē hǎo de cuòshī de bèihòu;
 at these good NOM measure NOM behind
 会 有 一些 不 好 的 (.)
huì yǒu yìxiē bù hǎo de(.)
 will have some NEG good NOM
 甚至 是 潜规则 在 实行,
shènzhì shì qiánguīzé zài shíxíng,
 even is unspoken-rule PREG implement
 'Can we interpret it in this way, that there are some unspoken rules
 working behind these good policies,'
 06 才 导致 这 张 显露 在 我们 面前
cái dǎozhì zhè zhāng xiǎnlù zài wǒmen miànqián
 just cause this CL display in 1pl front.face
 的 2011 年 的 进货单.
de 2011 nián de jìnhuòdān.
 NOM èrlíngyīyī year NOM purchase-order
 'that caused problems like this 2011 list.'
 07 OFF: 从 画面 上 来看 的话; 有没有 潜规则,
cóng huàmiàn shàng lái kàn de huà; yǒuméiyǒu qiánguīzé,
 from picture on see if have-NEG-have unspoken-rule
 我 现在 还 不 敢 判断;
wǒ xiànzài hái bù gǎn pànduàn;
1sg now still NEG dare judge
 'I cannot make a judgement about whether there are unspoken rules
 based on what we see in the image.'
 08 但是 一旦 我们 查出 他 有 潜规则,
dànshì yídàn wǒmen cháchū tā yǒu qiánguīzé,
 but once 1pl investigate-out 3sg have unspoken-rule

09 `But once we find out there are unspoken rules'
 我们 将 打破 这 个 潜规则,
wǒmen jiāng dǎpò zhè gè qiánguīzé,
 Ipl will break this CL unspoken-rule
 给 老百姓 真正 的 放心 豆制品;
gěi lǎobǎixìng zhēnzhèng de fàngxīn dòuzhìpǐn;
 give people real NOM care-free bean-product.
 `We will break these unspoken rules and provide people with real safe
 soybean products.'
 10 HST: 好, 也许 这 个 万松园 菜市场
hǎo, yěxǔ zhè gè wànsōngyuán càishìchǎng
 Okay maybe this CL NAME market
 只 是 一 个 局部 的 现象.
zhǐ shì yí gè júbù de xiànxàng.
 just is one CL local NOM phenomenon
 `Okay, maybe Wansongyuan Market is just a single case phenomenon.'

4.4.4 Summary

Section 4.4 examines the cross-cutting preferences in officials' promises on the *Wenzheng* programs. The data analysis finds that the preference for following the pre-allocated turn-taking rules and overall structural organization order is prioritized in this particular genre. Specifically, first-position and second-position promises have a relatively equal frequency in the dataset, but second-position promises are more likely to progress the conversation to a closure.

Despite this rule, officials can make extra interactional efforts to promise in first position to remedy the violation of pre-allocated turn-taking rules and overall structural organization orders. Among the various strategies to make “out of order” first-position promises, designing promises as turn-final position TCUs in multi-unit multi-action turns is the most prominent technique

adopted by officials. It is also observed that responding to the accountability question is necessary to advance the interaction; in many cases, promising voluntarily without an accountability response is treated as evasive and resistant to the question, which is explicitly sanctioned by the host. The preference for volunteered acknowledgments of and accounts for previous failures is consistent with the findings made in ordinary conversations. In some cases, officials also formulate a strategic combination of affiliative actions to evade the accountability question. In addition, officials are found to recurrently use compound TCUs at transitional relevance places (TRPs), such as *if X then Y* structures, which enables the officials to hold their floor and preempt the journalists' interruptions, and to resist the presuppositions of the accountability question.

4.5 Discussion and conclusion

To answer the question of when speakers make a promise in conversations, this study firstly categorizes obligations into four types, including pre-existing obligations, educed obligations, non-obligation in conventional promises, and self-benefiting obligations. This chapter then focuses on the first type of obligation and finds that making promises first, rather than second, is socially preferred when the speaker has an unfulfilled pre-existing obligation.

In everyday conversations, first-position promises are significantly more frequent than second-position promises in telephone call conversations. Second, participants are more likely to orient to close the sequence when a first-position promise is made but to expand the sequence when the promise is made in second position. Third, first-position promises are often projected by

voluntarily provided acknowledgments of the nonperformance and/or accounts for the failure. When the promisor misses the first-position opportunities, the dispreference for second-position promises is indicated by sequence expansions and the mitigation in first-position actions such as naming the nonperformance, soliciting accounts, and pursuing a promise.

In interactions between government officials and journalists on the *Wenzheng* programs, the government officials face a dilemma of cross-cutting preferences: the preference for first-position promises, since they have pre-existing obligations, and the preference for following turn-taking rules and overall structural organization orders that are pre-allocated in the institutional talk. Data analysis in this chapter shows that the second preference, following turn-taking rules, is prioritized in *Wenzheng* conversations but officials are found making first-position promises with a relatively equal frequency as second-position promises regardless of violating the protocol. Those first-position promises that are successfully recognized by the journalist are found to be designed with common strategies to remedy the damage caused by the violation of the preference organization.

In addition to the preference for first-position promises when the speaker has an unfulfilled pre-existing obligation, both ordinary speakers and participants in the *Wenzheng* programs are found to prefer volunteered acknowledgments of the nonperformance of the expected action and volunteered accounts for the nonperformance, which displays a higher degree of affiliation and leads to smooth progress of the conversation.

Findings in this chapter explicate the complexity of the sequence organization of social actions, deepen the understanding of commissive actions, and also pose challenges to the widely

recognized claim that offering is preferred over requests. Chapter 3.5 has found that whether a first-position commitment is preferred is highly associated with the formulation of the commitment. When the speaker is not obligated to perform the action, a first-position commitment (offering or proposing) designed with illocutionary force mitigating devices is indeed preferred over a request. However, an offer or proposal designed with a high degree of commitment and deontic right might be rejected by the recipient. This chapter examines the environment when the speaker has a pre-existing obligation and finds that a first-position commitment (promising) is preferred in everyday conversation.

This chapter also provides a unique perspective of political accountability interactions in mainland China. By analyzing the pre-allocated turn-taking rules, orders of overall structural organization, and officials' first-position promises, this study explores how local government officials in mainland China are held accountable in mass media and establishes the foundational work for future studies in this line of research.

5 Principle of proportionality: a multimodal analysis of responsive commitment to future actions²¹

5.1 Introduction

This chapter investigates how Mandarin speakers determine the weight of their commitment to future actions and design promises and other related actions using multimodal resources accordingly. Specifically, this chapter expands Zhou's (2020) application of the principle of proportionality (Goffman 1971; Heritage, Raymond & Drew 2019) from promising to a group of responsive commissive actions with varying degrees of commitment to future actions²², including obligation-reassuring promises made in first position (e.g., commitment made by government officials and a waitress in a restaurant), compliance to a request with weak commitment, and obligation-establishing promises made in second-position (attentively granting a request²³, Thompson, Fox, and Couper-Kuhlen 2015). Data analysis shows that Mandarin speakers (re)evaluate the consequences of the future action as the interaction progresses and make commitment in proportion to their evaluation of the severity of the consequences in an ad hoc fashion. In addition to lexico-syntactic and prosodic devices discussed in Zhou (2020), visual-bodily resources such as gaze and gesture are analyzed as components of the commissive

²¹ This chapter uses, with permission from John Benjamins, some material from Zhou (2020).

²² See the definitions of initiative commitment and responsive commitment in Chapter 2. The current chapter focuses on actions of responsive commitment. Initiative commissive actions such as offerings and proposals might follow other rules that are different from the principle of proportionality, which will be examined in future studies.

²³ Agentive granting of a request is considered equivalent to second-position promising in this study.

utterances in this study. Moreover, this chapter examines not only cases where multimodal resources congruently express the speaker's commitment but also cases where the speaker seems to violate the common notion of semantic consistency (Kendon 2004) or the co-expressiveness (McNeill 1992) between speech and gesture, which brings new perspectives to the multimodal analysis of interaction.

5.1.1 The principle of proportionality

Goffman (1971) proposes *the principle of proportionality* in his analysis of the relationship between an apology and the virtual offense it addresses: the effect of an apology should be proportional to the seriousness of the offense it is designed to remediate. A similar discussion appears in Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness: the seriousness of a face-threatening-action (FTA) is proportionally relative to the nature of the FTA (76) and participants should follow *the balance principle* by providing adequate reparations proportional to the damage their FTAs have caused to the interlocutor's face (236). Brown and Levinson (1987) also provide an equation to evaluate the "seriousness" of a particular FTA with variables including social distance, power dynamics, and culture-specific norms. This approach aligns with the role-expectation model proposed by earlier sociologists, such as Parsons (1951), who argues that members of a society are socialized with a set of "institutionalized expectations and the corresponding sentiments and sanctions" (436). He also mentions that rewards are proportional to achievements.

In their study of responses in request-for-action sequences in English conversation, Thompson, Fox, and Couper-Kuhlen (2015) categorize responses into five classes: particle (*alright, okay, and sure*), lexical/phrasal, minimal clausal (*I will* and *I won't*), expanded clausal (*I will X/I won't VP*), and graded clausal (*I'll Y/I won't Y*). It is argued that particles tend to occur in minimal complying responses to requests, whereas minimal clausal, expanded clausal, and graded clausal responses display the requestee's increasing agency and deontic rights – they have the right “to say what will be done in the future” (Thompson, Fox & Couper-Kuhlen 2015: 264–265). While acknowledging the effect of agency and deontic rights, the analysis in the following sections will show that the consequence of the named future action is an important dimension that needs to be considered.

Based on Thompson, Fox, and Couper-Kuhlen's (2015) response categories and Goffman's (1971) original hypothesis, Heritage and Raymond (Heritage & Raymond 2016) propose a typology of apology formats and categorize virtual offenses into two major types: local and endogenous offenses (small offenses), especially those in repair sequences, tend to receive minimal apologies; offenses distal and exogenous to the interaction itself (big offenses) tend to receive bigger apologies with explicit acknowledgment of agency, naming of the offenses, and even accounts for them. Data in their study, however, provides mixed support for this argument. In their most recent study, Heritage et al. (2019) revisit the proportional relationship between apologies and offenses with a different approach: they treat the “severity” of virtual offenses as a constitutive feature that is emerging and overtly expressed by participants' reflexive construction of apologies following participants' orientation in interaction, rather than as a “local” or “distal”

fixed feature. In other words, the relationship between the offenses and apologies is invisibly constructed by participants' orientation based on their assessments of the severity of the offenses in interaction, which is part of the whole interaction and is by no means intrinsic, objective or stable, as previously assumed. Taking this constitutive approach, or "from within" approach (31), Heritage et al. (2019) argue that the principle of proportionality is preserved in a certain context as the participants normalize departures from the principle and recalibrate their apologies with various recourses as their assessments of the severity change in an "ad hoc fashion." Heritage et al. (2019) point out that as an interactional rule among other social norms, the principle of proportionality is not limited to absolutions and that a similar "from within" constitutive analysis should apply to other actions as well.

Compared to backward-looking apologies that enable the participants to remediate interactional or real-life offenses, commissive actions are forward-looking and place speakers under future obligations (Austin 1962, Searle 1969). The forward-looking feature of commissive actions has concrete consequences, regardless of the performance or nonperformance of the named actions, unlike actions like assessments and apologies, which are more associated with interpersonal consequences. Responsive commissive actions such as promising and granting a request, in particular, have moral consequences as the speaker will be accountable for the named obligations (Haugh 2013), and the nonperformance will affect the credibility of the speaker and the institution they represent.

Zhou (2020) adopts the principle of proportionality with the severity of consequences as a correlation variable in her study of promising in Mandarin: the formulation of promises is normatively proportional to the consequences they will lead to, such that bigger promises are made to events with severe consequences, and smaller promises are made to events with less serious consequences. “Big promises” in the study (and in the current chapter) is a relative notion that refers to commissive actions with more illocutionary force indicating devices (IFIDs) that are hence more explicit and forceful (Austin 1962). In contrast, “small promises” refer to those relatively implicit and unspecified promises with fewer IFIDs. Following Heritage et al. (2019)’s constitutive approach, the severity of consequence is not measured as an objective or intrinsic feature of the particular event but is reflexively expressed by the participants based on their assessment of the situation as they orient to promises. The current chapter expands the scope of analysis to visual-bodily resources, including gaze and gestures, thus providing a more comprehensive understanding of how Mandarin speakers design their commissive actions based on their evaluation of the consequences of the named action.

5.1.2 Lexico-syntactic and prosodic resource for making responsive commissive actions

Studies in speech act theory propose two types of conventional devices in formulating promising, explicit performative formulae (e.g., *I promise*) and primitive (or indirect) devices that express the illocutionary force with more ambiguity and equivocation (Austin 1962, p.73-77). Austin mentions various types of primitive devices that can be combined to specify and qualify illocutionary force in utterances. In the case of promising in spoken language, those include the

mood of the sentence (usually declarative, sometimes imperative, such as *let me...* see Levinson's (1983) example), the combination of first-person pronouns and modal verbs (e.g. *I will* and *I shall*), tone of voice/cadence/emphasis, adverbs and adverbial phrases (e.g. *definitely* and *without fail*), connecting particles (e.g. *hereby*), non-verbal accompaniments of utterances (e.g. gestures and gazes), and the circumstances or context of the utterance. Zhou (2020) identifies three types of illocutionary force indicating devices (IFIDs) as common elements in big promises observed in both institutional and ordinary Mandarin conversation: explicit performative verbs, intensifying emphasis, and claiming the result of the promised actions.

Prosodic features such as pitch, loudness, duration, and timing have been found to express speakers' intentions (Hellbernd & Sammler 2016), emotions (Pell et al. 2009), and sincerity (Fish, Rothermich & Pell 2017) in perception experiments and acoustic analyses. CA and IL studies have found that pitch and loudness can convey affect-related stances (Selting 1996; Selting et al. 2009; Reber 2012). Zhou (2020) finds that what Ogden (2012) calls Intensifying Emphasis (IE) – the prosodic-phonetic practice of highlighting a lexical item as extreme/unexpected/intense in interactional actions – is a common prosodic resource for Mandarin speakers to make big promises in conversation.

5.1.3 Gaze and gesture in interaction

Visual-bodily behaviors are critical components of human interaction. Participants use gaze to display their attention and (dis)engagement in conversation (Goodwin 1981), coordinate participation roles as a speaker or a listener, and manage sequences and turn-taking (Goodwin &

Goodwin 1987; Rossano 2012). Goodwin (1981) finds that speakers work towards achieving mutual gaze at turn-beginning to establish a speaker-hearer relationship and mutual orientation with speaker restart being systematically used to obtain a recipient's gaze. In the same project, Goodwin analyzes gaze withdrawal as an indicator of the participants' disengagement from the course of action and nonorientation towards each other. Another important line of research regarding gaze behaviors is the relevance of gaze in different social actions and sequence types. Rossano, Brown, and Levinson (2009) find that in extensive telling sequences, recipients are expected to gaze at the teller more often than in shorter tellings, whereas, in adjacent pairs such as question-answer sequences, questioners gaze at the questionee more as they solicit responses. Beyond the level of action and sequence types, gaze is also found to be an important device for preference organization: Kenrick and Holler (2017) discover that preferred responses to polar questions in English conversations are often accompanied by gaze, whereas dispreferred responses tend to be produced with gaze aversion. Despite these findings, gaze behaviors are still underexplored in other sequence environments and action types, such as responsive commissive actions in the current study. Moreover, conversation participants' gaze behaviors vary in languages, cultures, and other social parameters such as genre, age, social status, and relationship (Rossano, et al. 2009). This chapter aims to discuss gaze behaviors in responsive commissive actions in Mandarin conversation. Specifically, video-recorded conversations involving various degrees of consequences are analyzed to determine whether gaze is associated with "big" commitment in conversation.

Recent years have seen a growing interest in researching visual-bodily behaviors in social interaction as researchers have reached a consensus regarding the multimodal characteristics of interaction. For example, Kendon (2004) argues that an utterance is the *ensemble* of speech and gestures and that speakers continuously orchestrate the two components to achieve a semantic coherence or co-expressiveness (McNeil 1992) between the two in interaction. Similarly, Goodwin (2013) uses the metaphor of lamination to highlight the multiple layers of semiotic fields in interaction. In terms of the functions of gestures, Kendon (2004) categorizes them into three major types: referential, pragmatic, and interpersonal. Referential functions refer to when gestures are related to the propositional content of an utterance. Pragmatic functions refer to those functions that are not referential, such as the modal function, which indicates how a verbal expression can be interpreted, and the performative function, which completes speech acts ('illocutionary marker gestures' in Kendon (1995)), and the parsing function, which marks the structure of the spoken discourse. Interpersonal functions of gestures are related to issues such as addressing and turn-taking. Informed by Kendon (2004) and other studies, this chapter analyzes the speaker's design of responsive commissive actions as a multimodal process that includes speech (lexico-syntactic and prosodic), gaze, and gestures.

5.2 Data and methodology

To conduct multimodal analysis, this chapter uses the Summer 2019 dataset of video-recorded everyday conversations and the *Wenzheng* program episodes. As discussed in previous chapters,

this study treats commissive actions as a continuum of commitment of various degrees and includes both initiative commitment and responsive commitment. 73 segments of commissive actions are identified in the everyday conversation dataset and 154 segments of promises are identified in the *Wenzheng* programs²⁴.

Table 5.1 is a summary of the actions accomplished in the 73 segments, including 33 initiative commitment and 40 responsive commitments. Given the fact that initiative commitment actions in everyday conversation such as offerings have different features and restrictions on turn design, this chapter focuses on responsive commitment actions, including minimal affirmation (e.g., *yeah, okay*), conditional granting (e.g., *if...then...*), and agentive granting of a request expressed with declarative sentences and various IFIDs, and first-position promising to a pre-existing obligation.

Table 5.1 Commissive actions performed in the dataset

Position	Action			Total
Initiative commitment	Offering: 30	Volunteer in joint activity: 3		33 (45.2%)
Responsive commitment	Minimal affirmation: 17	Conditional granting: 4	Agentive granting or first-position promising: 19	40 (54.8%)
Total				73 (100%)

This chapter adopts multimodal analysis methods to examine video-recorded conversations, including lexico-syntactic design, prosodic production, gaze, gestures, and other visual-bodily behaviors. This study applies Kendon's (2004) system of gesture analysis and treats a gesture as a visible bodily activity and a component of an utterance. Each gesture unit is a whole movement excursion that starts from the home position, reaches the apex of the movement with the greatest

²⁴ See Chapter 2 for the definition and examples of commissive actions.

clarity, and then moves back to the home position (Kendon 2004: 111). The preparation phase, represented by the symbol “~” in the transcripts, refers to the phase when the movement leads up to the stroke; the stroke, represented by the symbol “*”, refers to the apex of the movement; and the recovery phrase, represented by the symbol “-.”, refers to the movements following the stroke and returning to the home position.

Each extract is provided with an interlinear text transcript and an annotation of various interactional resources conducted in ELAN, including the orthography of the target utterance, the image captured when the specific linguistic item is produced, and notes on the accompanying visual bodily behaviors. In addition, results of detailed Praat analysis are presented for most extracts except for some conversations where the Wu dialect is used by speakers.

5.3 The principle in operation

5.3.1 Small commitments to actions without severe consequences

Small commitments, often expressed by particles or lexical devices, are produced in responses to requests for immediate or near-future actions that have minor or few consequences and are convenient to complete. Although Thompson, Fox, and Couper-Kuhlen (2015) find that the weight of commitment in responses can be determined by the deontic dynamic between the participants – a weak commitment made with particles often indicates the speaker’s low agency and the requestor’s high entitlement (Enfield 2011, Thompson, Fox and Couper-Kuhlen 2015, Stevanovic and Peräkylä 2012), this section presents evidence from examples with different power

relationships that participants make small commitments to actions with small consequences regardless of their deontic relationships.

In Ex 5.1, a group of cousins is playing with Lego at Lele's (LEL, 9 years old) place. Lele has distributed some pieces to other kids before this segment. As Man (MAN, 8 years old) is playing with the items she just received, Lele makes a request in line 02, 'Give this back to me after you finish using {it}.' As shown in the transcript and Figure 5.1, Lele lifts his head before the onset of his request speech and starts gazing at Man as his head position reaches the stroke phase. Lele maintains his gaze until the transition relevant place (TRP) of his turn.

In line 03, Man responds with a very soft interjection token, *ò*. Man maintains the same body position and does not gaze at Lele throughout the conversation as she is playing with the Lego piece (see Image C in Figure 5.1). In line 04, Lele redoes his request with a revised design, 'Actually, give it back to me {even if} you haven't finished using it.' The "even if" structure upgrades his request with a higher entitlement but the request is presented in an unserious way: the information delivered in the request appears to ask Man to return the Lego piece the right way but Lele is the one who has offered the Lego piece to Man earlier and does not appear to be stopping Man playing at the moment. Treating it as a request the same as the previous one, Man produces another soft interjection particle, *ēn* 'Mm' in line 05 without gaze or gestures (Image D in Figure 5.1), while continuing play with the Lego piece. At the moment, Lele has returned to his engagement with his Lego piece and does not pursue a higher commitment or stop Man immediately.

Man's lack of gaze or other visual movements during the production of her compliance tokens and throughout the conversation indicates that she is not fully engaged with the request sequence and that her priority is on her ongoing activity of playing with the Lego pieces in her hands. On Lele's side, the lack of pursuit of mutual gaze and his disengagement after his second request show his understanding that the request sequence is not the main activity and that returning the piece is an action with a minor consequence. Considering the speech and visual behaviors of both participants, this example shows that the speaker's design of responsive commitment is proportional to her evaluation of the consequence of the activity, which is shown by both participants' orientation in the conversation²⁵.

Ex 5.1 Summer_2019_0822_00025_0107

01 MAN: 这 什么 鬼. hahaha
zhè shénme guǐ.hahaha
 this what ghost
 'What is this? ((slang))'

02 LEL: 这 个 用 好 给 我 啊-
zhè ge yòng hǎo gěi wǒ ā-
 this CL use finish give 1sg PRT
 'Give this back to me after you finish using.'

Head ~~~~~-.-.-.
 Gaze at MAN |away

03 MAN: <<p>哦;>
 <<p>ò; >
 INT
 'Oh'

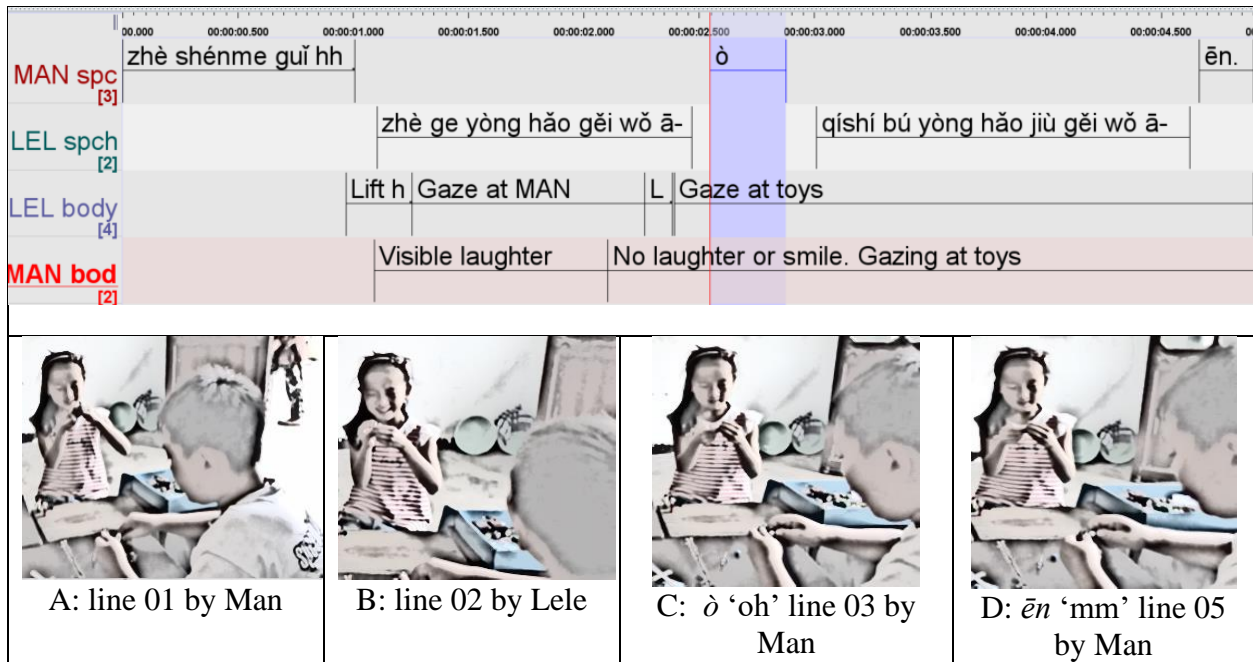
²⁵ An alternative analysis of the minimal compliance tokens is provided by Thompson, Fox, and Couper-Kuhlen (2015). They argue that minimal compliances like the one produced by Man display a low agency and deontic right, which is associated with the high entitlement displayed in the request. A separate study will be conducted to analyze how the two factors – consequence and deontic right – operate, but examples such as Ex 3.26 in Chapter 0 have shown the limitations of such an analysis. When the requested action has severe consequences, but the speaker produces a particle or other low-commitment response, the response is treated as not sufficient, and a higher commitment is often pursued in expanded sequences. In those cases, it is difficult to establish the relationship between the size of commitments and the agency-entitlement relationship between the participants.

Gaze ((focusing on the Lego piece, gaze not engaged with Lele))

04 LEL: 其实 不用 好 就(-) 给 我 啊。
qíshí bú yòng hǎo jiù gěi wǒ ā-
 actually NEG use finish just give 1sg PRT
 'Actually, give it back to me {even if} you haven't finished using (it).'

05 MAN: <<pp> 嗯;>
 <<pp> ēn.>
 INT
 'Mm.'

Figure 5.1: Visual-bodily behavior of Ex 5.1



In the following example Ex 5.2, the mother (MOM) and aunt (AUN) are helping Coen (COE, 8 years old) put covers on his new textbooks. At the beginning of the current segment, the mother and aunt are occupied by the activity while Coen is sitting on the couch. In line 01, Coen initiates a request 'Mom, give me the Chinese textbook after you put the cover on it.' Without a delay, the

mother responds with an interjection particle in line 02, *ēn*. ‘Okay.’ After a long silence, Coen makes another request, ‘and also add a cover to the English textbook.’ The 2.0-second silence (line 03) and the mother’s lack of response indicate that the mother treats the previous request-grant sequence as closed and that she is not orienting to the new request. The sequence then closes as the aunt initiates a question in line 06.

Ex 5.2 Summer_2019_0829_GH020313_0003

01 COE: 妈妈(.)你 语文 书 包 好 给 我 哦.
māma(.)nǐ yǔwén shū bāo hǎo gěi wǒ ò.
 mom 2sg Chinese textbook cover complete give 1sg PRT
 ‘Mom, give me the Chinese textbook after you put the cover on it.’
 Body: ((stands up from the couch and walks towards Mom, head slightly
 tilts to Mom at *gěi wǒ*, ‘give me’))

02 MOM: 嗯.
ēn.
 INT
 ‘Mm.’

Gaze: ((focusing on the book))

03 (2.4)((COE strolls in the living room))

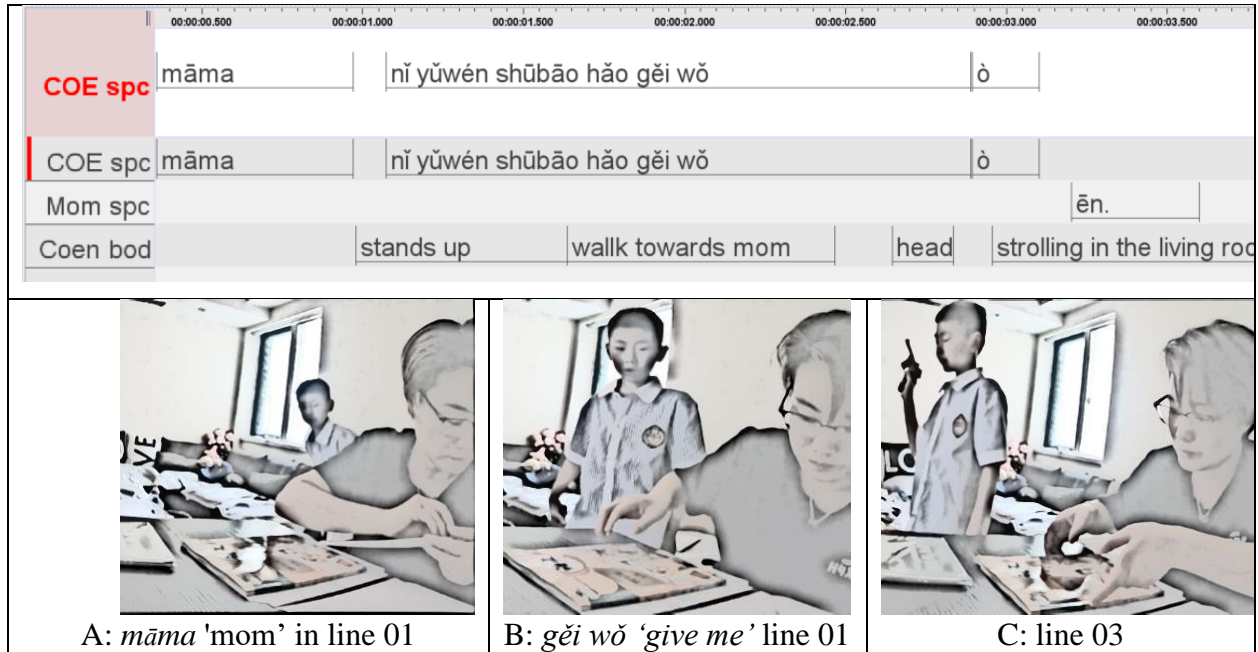
04 COE: 然后 再 加 英语 书
ránhòu zài jiā yīngyǔ shū
 and again add English textbook
 ‘and {add a cover to} the English textbook,’

05 (.)三 本 (.)我 包 好 就 Okay 了 老师 说 过 了;
 (.)*sān běn (.)wǒ bāo hǎo jiù Okay le lǎoshī shuō guò le;*
 three CL 1sg cover complete just Okay CRS teacher say EXP CRS
 ‘I just need to put a cover on the three books. My teacher said
 that would be sufficient.’

06 AUN: 包 三 本 就 Okay 啦?
bāo sān běn jiù Okay lā?
 cover three CL just Okay PRT
 ‘{You} just {need to} {add} covers for three {books}?’

Similar to Man's utterance of response in Ex 5.1, mom's response in line 02 is designed with an interjection particle without a visible gaze or head/body movement, indicating her treatment of the requested action as one with a minor consequence. Consistent with mom's evaluation, Coen's visual movements also show his treatment of the request as a minor one. Simultaneously as Coen initiates his request with a summons, *māma* 'mom,' he stands up from the couch and starts walking towards the desk where the mother and aunt are fitting book covers (see Image A in Figure 5.2). As he produces *gěi wǒ* 'give me,' Coen slightly tilts his head towards mother and looks downwards towards the desk (see Image B in Figure 5.2). These visual actions display his orientation toward the request action and are coherent with his speech action. However, after receiving the mom's minimal compliance without the orientation to further engagement in the request-granting sequence, Coen continues his stroll in the living room without pursuing mutual gaze (see Image C in Figure 5.2). Although his second request could be seen as a pursuit of mom's engagement, he does not gaze at mom, which does not make a bigger commitment relevant. Moreover, Coen's body movements during the production of his requests, in general, seem to be blended into another activity of strolling in the living room since he does not make a noticeable stop or pursue mutual gaze to further engage the mom. His body position is even more distant from the mother during the second request, which displays less orientation towards mutual engagement in the course of action. Therefore, both participants treat the requested and granted action of giving the Chinese textbook to Coen as a minor issue, for which a small commitment is sufficient.

Figure 5.2 visual-bodily behaviors in Ex 5.2



Commitments made in Ex 5.1 and Ex 5.2 in this section share commonalities regarding their sequential environment, turn design, and the recipient's next-turn response. First, both participants have been engaged in a primary activity involving an object, and a request is made to hand over the object to the requester after the ongoing activity is completed. Second, both speakers in the two extracts, Man, and the mother, respond to the request with a minimal commitment: a single particle without noticeable gaze or body movements. Third, after hearing the small commitment, both requesters produce a downgraded pursuit or second request (the logically problematic request in line 04, Ex 5.1 and a next-step request without gaze in lines 04 and 05, Ex 5.2). However, the speaker does not display a stronger commitment: Man produces an even weaker particle token, and the mother does not respond to Coen's second request.

Despite the differences in power dynamics and ages of the speakers – Lele is superior in Ex 5.1 as the owner of the Lego pieces and the organizer of the game, and is superior in Ex 5.2 as a parent and who is in charge of the activity, both extracts show that speakers orient to small commitments for actions without severe consequences, and such practices are mutually acknowledged by the interlocutor.

5.3.2 Big commitments to actions with severe consequences

The previous section presents cases when minimal responsive commitments are sufficient in events without severe consequences. However, there are other occasions in interaction that require speakers to make a big commitment given the severe consequences of the matter under the discussion. This section presents evidence for this aspect of the principle of proportionality with two promises made by a government official on the *Wenzheng* programs and one promise made in ordinary conversation.

In contrast to ordinary conversation, commitments made on the *Wenzheng* programs are understandably related to severe consequences, both in terms of the government official's credibility and the local government's public image and institutional credibility. As a result, officials' commitments are mostly designed with illocutionary force indicating devices (IFIDs) in their speech, such as performative verbs (e.g., *chéngnuò*, *bǎozhèng*, 'promise'), exact time references, and modal verbs (e.g., *bìxū*, 'must'). This section presents two examples of big promises made by a local government official in one conversation segment.

Prior to this segment, the host (HOS) has asked an accountability question regarding the missing street signs in certain areas of the city. The first promise is voluntarily made by the official in lines 07 and 08 of Ex 5.3 as a response to his existing obligation, and the second promise is made in line 20 of Ex 5.4 as a response to the host's pursuit. Despite the different sequence environments, both promises display the speaker's orientation to a strong responsive commitment to performing the future action with a severe consequence. And both promises deploy multimodal resources, including lexico-syntactic devices, prosodic stress (also known as intensifying emphasis, Ogden 2012), pragmatic gestures, and gaze.

In line 06, the host recognizes a transition relevant place after the official completes his accounts (lines 01-05) for the problem presented earlier. However, right after the onset of the host's turn, 'then should,' the official initiates his first promise: 'No matter what reason, we have to immediately correct it' (lines 07 and 08) with a compound TCU, which consists of two inseparable components with the first component projecting the second component. Compound TCUs are often used to expand one's turn in a possible completion point by indicating the whole unit as talk-in-progress (Lerner 1991). Note his promise is also prefaced with *name* 'then,' which projects the topic-shifting and secures the hearability of his upcoming promise as it takes up the slot of overlapping.

Ex 5.3 201402_Nanning_Lixiaolong_Sinage

01 OFF: 这个 没有 的 问题 呢, 可能 是 呢:
 zhège méiyǒu de wèntí ne kěnéng shì ne:
 DM NEG-have NOM problem PRT maybe is PRT
 'Regarding this issue of no {signages},'

02 一个 是 我们 的 - 这个: °h 呢:: 交警 啊;
yīgè shì wǒmen de - zhège °h eh:: jiāojǐng ā;
 one.thing is 1pl GEN DM uh police PRT
 'one {reason} {is that} our traffic police officers,'
 at |away |at

03 可能 是::<<all 管理 不 到位.>
kěnéng shì::<<all guǎnlǐ bú dào wèi.>
 maybe is management NEG well
 'maybe it's that {their} management is not sufficient,'
 |away |at

Head: |~~~~~*****-.-.-|

04 啊 落实 不 到位.(...) 啊;
ā luòshí bú dào wèi. ā;
 PRT enforcement NEG well INT
 'not managed well.'

Head: |~~~~~*****-.-.-|

05 °h 第 二 个 的话 可能 有一些 副牌 可能 是 掉: 了;
°h dì èr gè de huà kěnéng yǒu yìxiē fùpái kěnéng shì diào le;
 the second CL DM maybe some sign maybe is drop PFV
 'the second reason is that maybe some signs fell off,'
 Gaze: at Host

Head: |~~~~~*****-.-.-|

06 HOS: [那 应该]
[nà yīnggāi]
 DM should
 'Then {you} should-'

07 OFF: <<all [那 么] 丕管 什么 原因 吧;>
<<all [nàme] BÙguǎn shénme yuányīn ba;
 DM No.matter what reason PRT
 'No matter what reason,'
 Head: ~~~~~*/~~~~~*-.-.-|
 ((head: shakes then nods)

Gaze: at Host

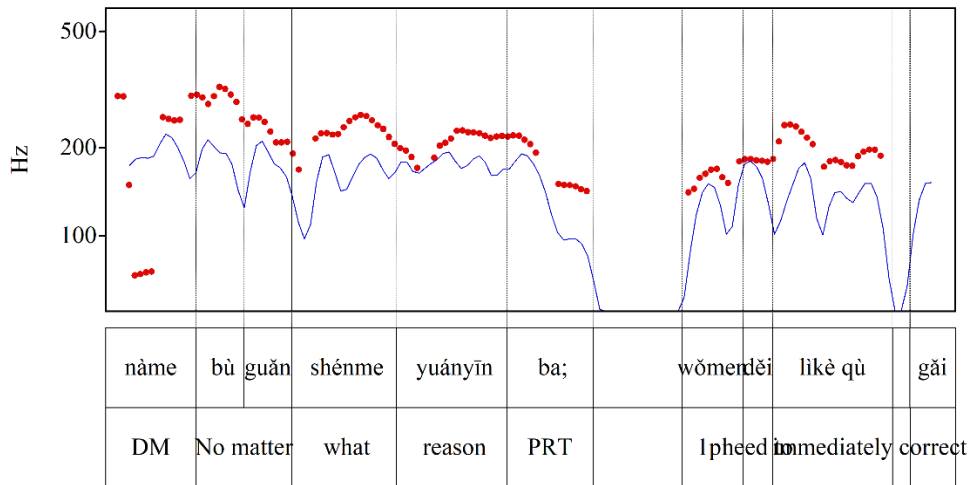
08 → 我们 得 <<all 立刻 去 改:,> (1.0) 啊.
wǒmen děi <<all lìkè qù gǎi: (1.0) ā.
 1pl have.to immediately go correct INT
 'we have to immediately correct it.'

Head: ~~~~~*
 ((head shakes then nods with a heavy stroke downwards))

Gaze: at Host
 09 HOS: ((moving her microphone aside))

Prosodically, Figure 5.3 shows that this promise is produced at a noticeably faster pace compared to his prior turns with multiple delays and lengthening (see lines 01 to 05): the first component (line 07) has a speech rate of 116ms/syllable, and the second component (line 08) is produced even faster with a speech rate of 95.4ms/syllable. Among the fast-produced syllables, Figure 5.3 also shows that the syllables *BUguǎn* ‘No matter’ have a prosodic prominence marked by a noticeably higher pitch range (227.1 Hz) and a longer duration of 231ms.

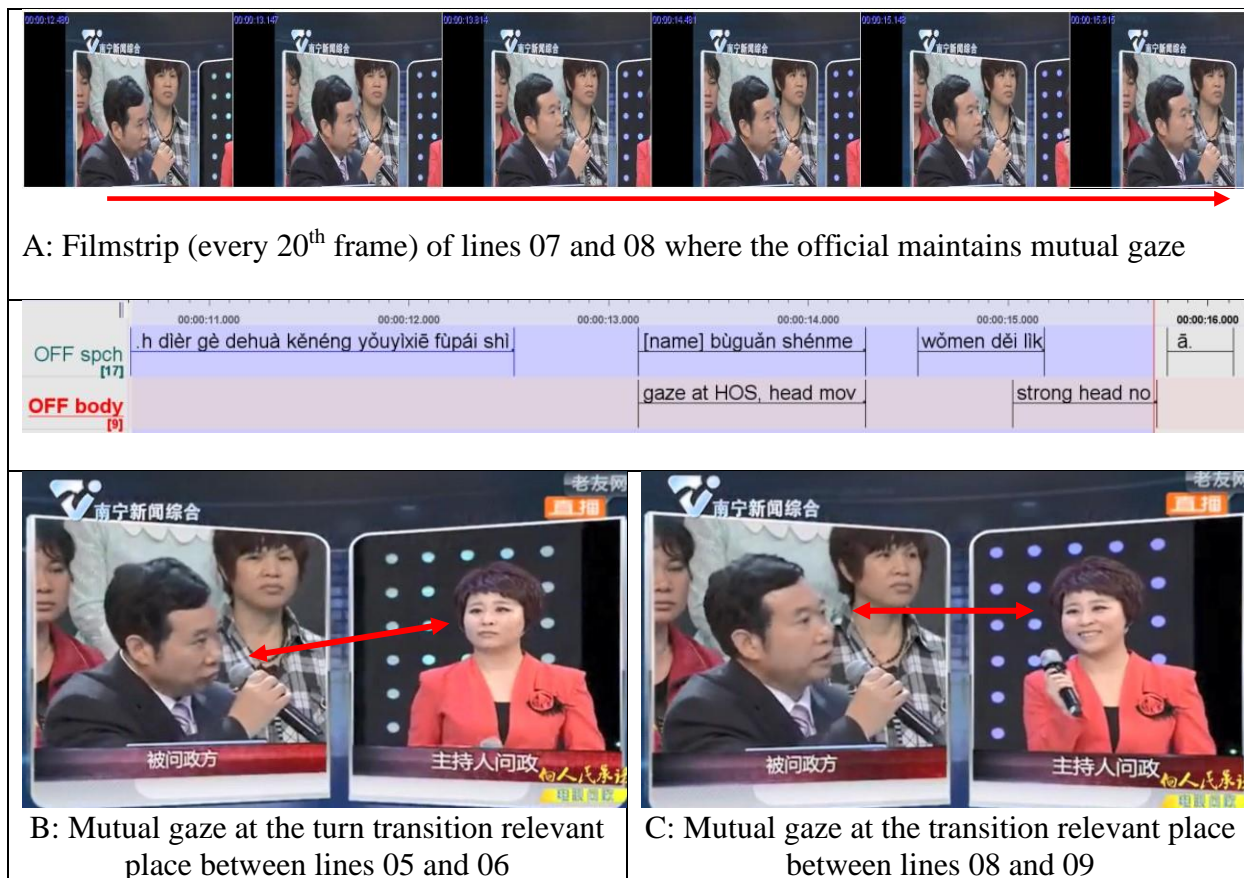
Figure 5.3 Pitch contour and intensity contour of lines 07 and 08 in Ex 5.3



In addition to the lexico-syntactic and prosodic devices, visual resources, including gaze and head movements, are also deployed in this volunteered promise. Image A in Figure 5.4 is a filmstrip image including every 20th frame of the video from lines 05 to 08. As shown in the transcript and the filmstrip image, the official secures mutual gaze with the host from line 05 to

line 08 without a break at the transition relevant place at the end of line 05, which indicates his orientation to expand his talk-in-progress. The host then smiles and moves away from her microphone in line 08 (Image C in Figure 5.4), showing her recognition of the official's turn expansion, disengagement from talking, and yielding her turn to the official (line 05).

Figure 5.4 Visual behaviors in lines 05 to and 08 in Ex 5.3



Another noticeable visual resource adopted by the official in his promise is head movement. As he produces ‘no matter what reason’ in line 07, his head first rotates laterally (shaking) on ‘no matter what’ (Images A and C in Figure 5.5) and then up-down (nodding) on ‘reason’ (Images D in Figure 5.5). The head nod also occurs in line 08 as he produces ‘we need to immediately correct






it’ (Images B and E in Figure 5.5). Both types of head movements are recurrently observed accompanying other government officials’ verbal promises in the dataset (also see the second promise in Ex 5.4, line 20). In speaking turns, headshakes are one type of negative gesture (including lateral movements of palm-down gesture) that are used as intensification devices as they indicate that there is no exception to the state of the current affair (McClave 2000; Kendon 2002; Kendon 2004). Head nods also signify a semantic core of prominence (Poggi & D’Errico 2013).

In this example, the official mobilizes multiple interaction modes to compress his promise in an expanded turn and to express his strong commitment and initiative in performing the committed action, including the compound TCU with the unconditional clause ‘no matter (what),’ the first-person plural pronoun – the institutional ‘we’, the adverb ‘immediately,’ the continuous mutual gaze, and head movements.

Figure 5.5 Visual behaviors in lines 07 and 08



‘So no matter what reason,’

			B: wǒmen děi lìkè qù gǎi 1pl need.to immediately go correct we need to immediately go correct {it}’
			
C: ‘no matter what’ with a head shake	D: ‘reason PRT’ with nodding	E: ‘immediately correct’ with nodding	

The second promise is produced in line 20 as a response to the host’s pursuit for a more committed timeline in line 18, ‘Then what time will the large-scale investigation start?’ The official displays a strong alignment with the host by matching the syntactic structure and the word order of the host’s question, ‘Tomorrow {we will} immediately start,’ and shows his strong commitment using an exact time reference, *míngtiān* ‘tomorrow’ and the adverb *jiù* ‘as soon as possible.’

Ex 5.4 201402_2 Nanning_Lixiaolong_Sinage

- 10 HOS: 哦, <<smile>态度 很好啊.>
ò <<smile>tàidu hěn hǎo ā.>
oh attitude very good PRT
‘Oh, {your} attitude is very good.’
- 11 那: 什么 时候 改 呢,
nà shénme shíhou gǎi ne,
DM what time correct PRT
‘So, when will {you} correct it?’

12 有 个 时间表 吗((smile)):
 yǒu gè shíjiānbiǎo mā((smile)):
 have CL schedule Q
 ‘Is there a schedule?’
 (1.0)
 (5 lines omitted where OFF produces a heavily downgraded account
 for the multiple sites that need to be fixed)

18 HOS: 那 大 检查, 大 排查 什么 时候 开始 呢:
 nà dà jiǎnchá, dà páichá shénme shíhou kāishǐ ne:
 DM big examination big investigation what time start PRT
 ‘Then what time will the large-scale investigation start?’

19 (0.8)

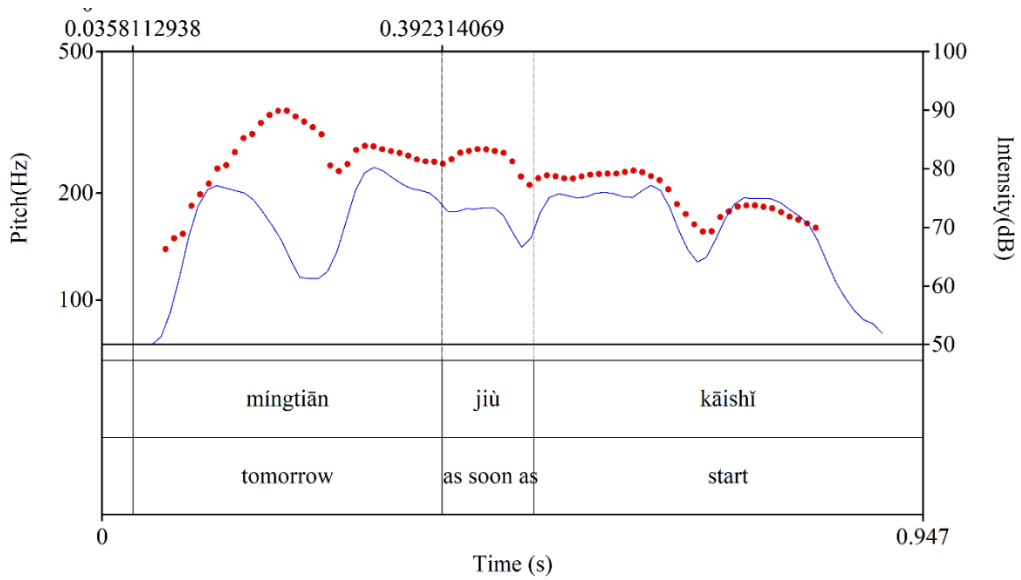
20 OFF:→ ↑ 明天 就 开始,
 ↑MINGtiān jiù KAIshǐ,
 tomorrow PRT start
 ‘{We’ll} start as soon as tomorrow.’

Head:

21 HOS: <<smile>明天 是 吗; > 掌声 鼓励 一下; 好 吗:
 <<smile>míngtiān shì ma; > zhǎngshēng gǔlì yíxià; hǎo mā:
 Tomorrow BE Q applause encourage COMP OkayQ
 ‘Is it tomorrow? {Let’s} encourage {him} with some applause, okay?’

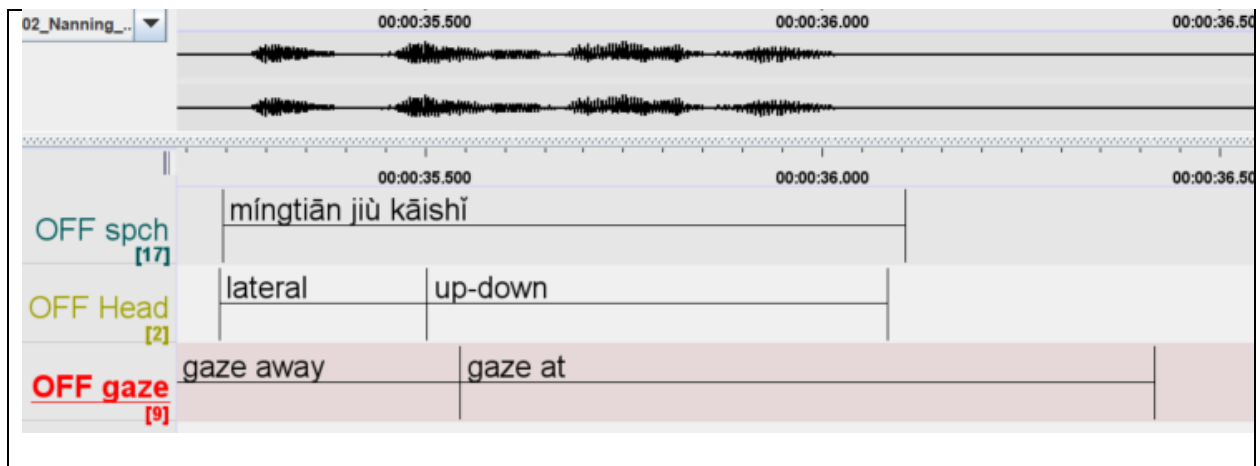
Although there is a 0.8-second delay, the official designs his promise in line 20 with the audible prosodic prominence on *míngtiān* ‘tomorrow’: the pitch range of this noun phrase is 203Hz, and the duration is 321ms, (see Figure 5.6), which not only responds to the host’s question with informational focus but also displays a high commitment to the promised future action.

Figure 5.6 Pitch contour and intensity contour of line 20 in Ex 5.3



Similar to the previous example in lines 07 and 08, this promise is also produced with simultaneous visual actions. After the 0.8 seconds of silence, the official starts his promise with the time reference ‘tomorrow’ accompanied by a head shake and averted gaze on his right side (Image A in Figure 5.7). He then gazes back at the host (Image B) and produces a strong nod as he utters the verbal phrase ‘start {as} soon {as}.’

Figure 5.7 Visual behaviors of line 20 in Ex 5.4





The above analysis of two big promises made by a government official show that commitment making is a multimodal process where the speaker orchestrates various resources of both speech and gesture devices to perform a big promise. Moreover, the observations of co-occurring prosodic prominence (*BUguǎn, gǎi, MINGtiān*) and intensifying head movements (head shakes and nods) in the two promises are consistent with the prominence-increasing effect in speech and gestures discussed in previous studies (“audiovisual prosody,” in Barkhuysen, Kraemer, and Swerts (2008)), which supports the idea of semantic coherence between speech and gesture. These observations also validate the principle of proportionality in commissive actions: given the severe consequences of political commitments, government officials deploy multimodal semiotic resources to make big promises in their conversations with journalists on television.

Ex 5.5 is the only example of a big promise observed in ordinary conversation that is designed with an explicit performative verb. In this conversation happening at the lunch table among family members, Min (MIN) is complaining to her cousin (COU) about a minor appearance issue of her husband’s lips while the husband (DON) is present. The promise is produced in line 16 where an

explicit performative verb *bǎozhèng* is used, and the result of the promise is specified. The first part of this extract (line 01 to line 04) is the continuation of the complaint Min begins earlier. After a 2-second-long pause in line 05, the cousin changes the topic and initiates a jocular activity by suggesting a possible solution in line 06, ‘In that case (you) should talk less’, followed by her loud laughter. Min considers the teasing inconsequential to her face and plays along with the cousin in her next turn by initiating another tease to her husband’s personality (‘Is this the reason why you didn’t like talking before?’) (Kotthoff 2003; Shardakova & Attardo 2017). Note that Min’s teasing is originally addressed to her husband as she uses the second-person singular pronoun *nǐ* and gazes at her husband, who is engaged in eating. Without a noticeable gap, the cousin self-selects and registers the new information (‘Oh, that’s why, Dongdong’). By addressing the husband with his name, Dongdong, the cousin attempts to return the floor to the originally selected speaker and to pack her participation in the wife’s activity of teasing. The self-select move, although similar to the affiliative co-teller and team-up cases mentioned in Hayashi (2012: 201), nonetheless violates turn-taking norms (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson 1974) and interrupts progressivity (Heritage 2007). Indeed, in line 13, the wife initiates a sanction with a jocular tease (Drew 1987; Haugh 2017) towards the cousin, ‘You know too much.’

Notice the utterance is a common pop cultural reference originally used as a warning on occasions when a secret is exposed. Such a choice of teasing content indicates the sanction is directed not merely to the cousin’s self-select move but her inappropriate participation in the couple’s private interaction. At this point, since Min has not displayed her absolution, some action

is due to remediating the offenses just occurred. With such an assessment, the cousin replaces the subject of the assertion and makes a modified repeat (Stivers 2005), ‘I know too much,’ followed by a volunteered big promise with an explicit performative verb, ‘{I} promise {I} won’t spread the word’ (line 13). In addition, she adds the positive result of her promise, ‘No one will know,’ and then self-corrects to a more specified format ‘There won’t be a fourth person who knows this thing’ (line 15). The self-corrected version is also a pop-cultural reference corresponding to Min’s warning, which helps emphasize Min’s ownership of the secret and makes the promise more precise and playful.

In this example, a big volunteered promise is made to remediate the exposure of a secret and a misplaced self-select move. The objective consequence of exposing a personal secret might not be as severe as that of the missing traffic signage as in Ex 5.3, but in the current speech event, especially with the cultural reference, the consequence is evaluated more severely than usual (the reference is commonly used in dramas when the possibility of murder is involved). In proportion to the severity, participants orient to a big promise.

Ex 5.5 Summer_2019_GH040250_Lips

- 01 MIN: 本来 是 不 发现 的。
běnlái shì bù fāxiàn de.
 Originally is NEG discover PRT
- 02 他 不 说话 的 时候 就 没有 感觉 的。
tā bù shuōhuà de shíhòu jiù méiyǒu gǎnjué de
 3sg NEG talk NOM time just NEG feeling PRT
 ‘It’s not obvious. You can’t see it when he doesn’t talk.’
- 03 COU: 恩。
ēn.
 ‘Right.’

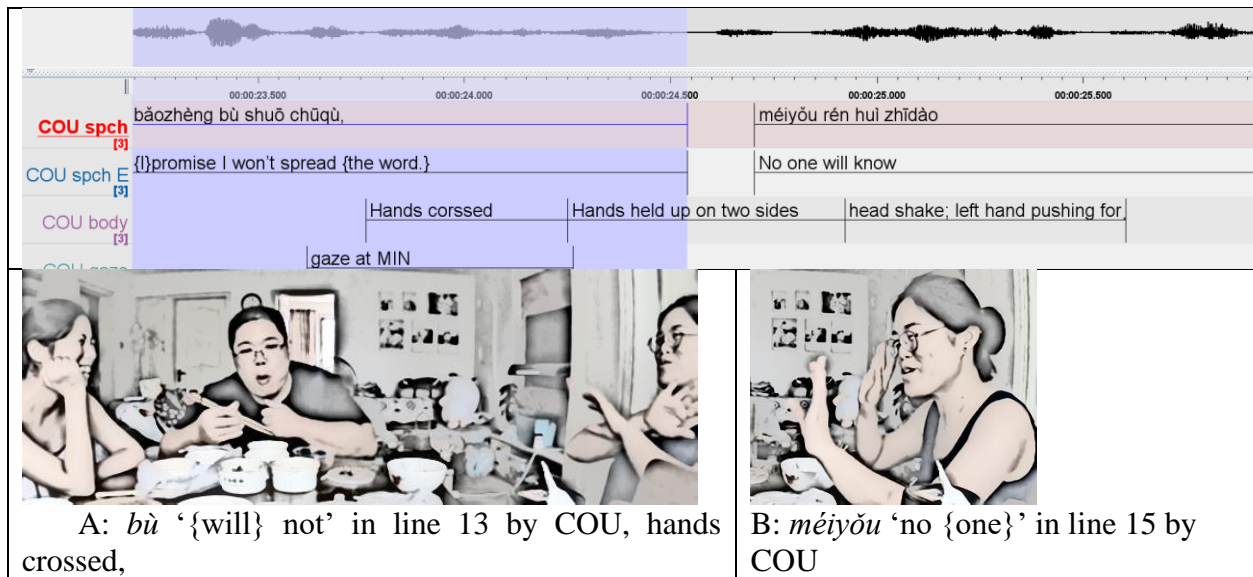
- 04 MIN: 但是 他 一 说话 一 吃 东西 就 很 明显;
dànshì tā yì shuōhuà yì chī dōngxi jiù hěn míngxiǎn;
 But 3sg once talk once eat thing just very obvious
 'But it's very obvious when he talks or eats.'
- 05 (2.0)
- 06 COU: 那 就 少 说话 吧. ((laughter))
nà jiù shǎo shuōhuà ba. ((laughter))
 Then just little talk PRT
 'In that case {you} should talk less, haha.'
- 07 MIN: 难道 这 就是 你 以前 不 爱 说话 的 原因:
nándào zhè jiù shì nǐ yǐqián bú ài shuōhuà de yuányīn:
 Is.it this just.is 2sg before NEG like talk NOM reason
 'Is the reason why you didn't like talking before?'
- 08 COU: =[哦, 是 这] 样子 的 啊, 东东.
 =ò, shì zhè] yàngzi de ā, Dōngdōng.
 INT is this way PRT PRT NAME
 'Oh, {it} is {because of} this, Dongdong.'
- 09 MIN: [((laughter))]
 (0.6)
- 10 MIN: 你 知道 得 太 多 了 hehehe
nǐ zhīdào de tài duō le hehehe
 2sg know COMP too much PRT
 'You know too much, haha.'
- Gaze: at COU
- 11 COU: [我知道] 得 太 多 了.
[wǒ zhīdào] de tài duō le.
 1sg know COMP too many PRT
 'I know too much.'
- Body: ((back rests on the chair))
- 12 MIN: [((laughter))]
- 13 COU: [保证] 不 说 出去.
[bǎozhèng] bù shuō chūqù.
 promise NEG say out
 '{I}promise {I} won't spread {the word}.'
- Gaze: at MIN
- Body: ~~~~~*****((hands cross))
- 14 MIN: [((laughter))]
- 15 没有 人 会 知道; 没有 第 四 个 人 知道 这 个 事情,
méiyǒu rén huì zhīdào; méiyǒu dìsì gè rén zhīdào zhè ge shìqing,

NEG person will know NEG the.fourth CL person know this CL thing
 'No one will know- there won't be a fourth person who knows this
 thing.'

Body: ~*****-. ((head shake; left hand palm-up vertically pushed forward))
 16 (2.0)

In addition to lexico-syntactic resources including an explicit performative verb and the result of the promise, the cousin also displays her big commitment using visual-bodily resources. As Ex 5.7 Figure 5.8 shows, the hands-crossed gesture produced in line 13 functions as a visual intensifier of the negation *bù*, and the head shakes and vertical open palm forward-push emphasize the negation *méiyǒu* in line 15. These gestures further enhance her commitment to keeping the secret.

Figure 5.8 Visual behaviors of line 13 and line 15



5.4 Reevaluating the consequences

Previous sections have provided evidence that Mandarin speakers make commitments to future actions in proportion to the consequence of the named action: small commitments are made

to actions with minor consequences, and big commitments are produced to actions with major severe consequences. The speaker's evaluation of the consequences, however, is not static or absolute, but dynamically evolving in an ad hoc manner (Heritage et al. 2019) as the interaction progresses. As the speaker's evaluation of the consequences is being upgraded, the commitment is accordingly elevated to a higher degree. This section presents two examples where the speaker's commitment to the future actions is upgraded as their (re)evaluation of the consequence evolves: one between a mother and son during lunch and the other between a customer and waitress in a restaurant. In both examples, the speakers upgrade their commitments as their assessment of the consequence evolves in the conversation, which is particularly common in sequences of remote requests (Maynard 1990).

In Ex 5.6, James (JAM) is requesting a waitress (WAI) in the restaurant to help check if the food served to him has the correct ingredients. Throughout this segment, the waitress makes four similar commitments to asking the chef about the ingredients (lines 09, 10, 12, and 15), and each is designed with noticeably more interactional resources, which shows how speakers' commitments evolve into bigger ones as they (re)evaluate the severity of the consequences and their deontic stance during interactions.

Ex 5.6 Summer_2019_0804_114307_06:35

05 JAM: 你 跟 我 说 这 不 是 芹 菜; 那 我-
nǐ gēn wǒ shuō zhè bú shì qíncài; nà wǒ
 2sg with 1sg say this NEG is celery DM 1sg
 'You are telling me that this is not celery, then I-'
 06 WAI: 哦; 是. 是. 是.

ò; shì. shì. shì.
 INT is is is
 'Oh, {it} is.'
 07 JAM: [是 吧.]
 shì ba.
 is PRT
 'Right?'
 08 WAI: [我 看] 一下.
 [wǒ kàn] yíxià.
 1sg look briefly
 'Let me take a look.'
 W gaze:at food_____.
 09 → =我 问 一下 师傅 里面 有没有 这个:
 wǒ wèn Yíxià shīfu lǐbiān yǒuméiyǒu zhège:
 1sg ask briefly chef inside have-NEG-have DM
 'I'll ask the chef if there is {any celery} in it.'
 W Gaze:at food_____
 10 WAI:→ 我 问 [一下 后边.]
 wǒ wèn [yíxià hòubian.]
 1sg ask brief back-side
 'I'll ask the back {kitchen}.'
 W Gaze:|at food_____|at James_
 W Head: ~~~~~((head lifted towards James))
 11 JAM: [因为 我 -] 刚才 说 的- [说 的 也] 是 金针 和 木耳,
 [yīnwèi] wǒ- gāngcái [shuō de- shuode]yě shì jīnzhēn hé mùěr
 because 1sg just.now say NOM say NOM also is enoki
 and wood ear
 'Because what I just said is also enoki mushroom and
 wood ear.'
 J Gaze:at girlfriend_____ |at the waitress_____
 W gaze:at James_____ |away and at food_____
 12 → [我 问 一下 师傅].
 [wǒ wèn yíxià shīfu.]
 1sg ask a.bit chef
 'I'll ask the chef.'
 W Gaze: |at James_____
 W Hand: ~~~~~-.-.-.
 ((index finger points over the shoulder))
 13 JAM: 但是 但 吃 的 味儿 不 对劲儿;

dànshì dàn chī de wèir bú duìjìr;
but but eat NOM flavor NEG right
'but the flavor is not right.'

J Gaze: at food|at the waitress

W Gaze: at food |at James|away

- 14 你 再 问 一 下,
nǐ zài wèn yíxià,
2sg again ask briefly
'{Could you} ask it again/anyway?'

J Gaze: at waitress

J Hand: index finger pointing forward

W Gaze: at food

- 15 WAI: → =我问- [我 问一下] 那个 料 啊.
wǒ wèn-] wǒ wènyíxià nàge liào ā.
1sg ask 1sg ask DM ingredient PRT
'I'll ask, I'll ask about the ingredients.'

W Gaze: at James| away and at the receipt

W Hand: ~~~*****-.-.-.-. -.-.-.-|

((index finger pointing over shoulder))

- 16 JAM: [你问问] (.) 昂;
[nǐ wènwen, ang;]
2sg ask ask
'Ask {the chef}.'

J Gaze: at waitress

W Gaze: at food/desk receipt

- 17 JAM: 昂- 你 问 下.
ang- ni wèn xià.
INT 2sg ask a.bit
'Okay, {please} ask {for us}.'

J Gaze: down|at WS |at Faye

W Gaze: at the table ((start walking away))

- 18 WAI: 你们 别 着急 啊.
nǐmen bié zháojí ā.
2pl don't rush PRT
'Take it easy.'

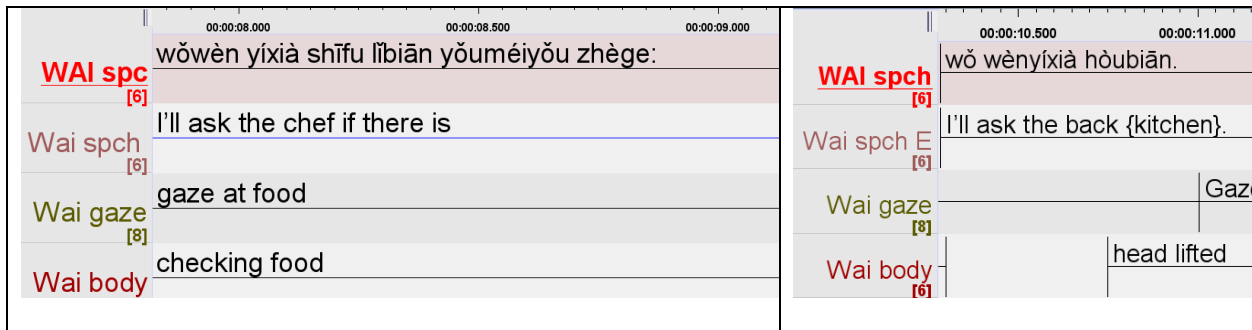
J Gaze: at WS

W Gaze: at the table and receipt ((walking away))

W body: walking away facing the table with right-hand palm down

Prior to this segment, the waitress has just expressed her disbelief at James’ statement. After showing her one piece of celery, the waitress acknowledges it in line 06 although she still says she will ‘take a look’ in line 08. As she is checking the food, the waitress makes her first two commitments in lines 09 and 10, ‘I’ll ask {the chef} if there is:’, ‘I’ll ask the back {kitchen}.’ As Figure 5.9 shows, she does not gaze at James until the last two syllables of her second commitment TCU, which often indicates turn-taking and sequence-closure (Rossano 2012). In lines 11 and 13, James orients to legitimize his request by providing another account for his request, ‘because what I just said/ordered is also enoki mushroom and wood ear, but the flavor is not right.’ Right after James utters ‘because I just’, the waitress shifts her gaze towards James and makes her third commitment, ‘I’ll ask the chef’ (line 12), resulting in an overlap with the beginning part of James’ statement of what he has just ordered. In addition to gaze, the waitress also points over her shoulder – referring to the kitchen where the chef is – with her index finger as she utters ‘*wèn*’, ‘ask.’ The visual behaviors in line 12 are presented in Figure 5.10.

Figure 5.9 Visual behaviors in lines 09 and 10



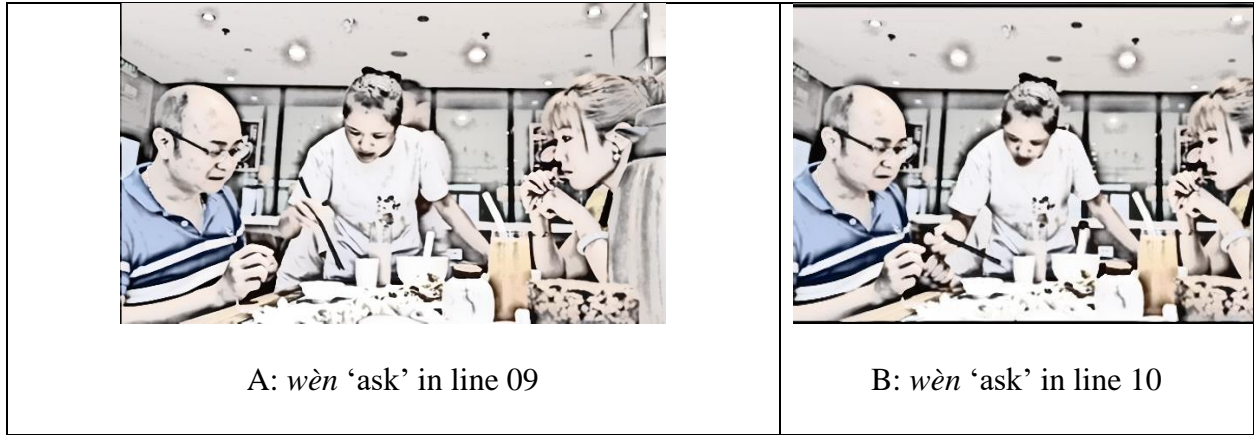


Figure 5.10 Visual behaviors in line 12

	00:00:11.000	00:00:11.500	00:00:12.000	00:00:12.500
WAI spch [6]	òubiān.	wǒ wèn yí xià shī fu.		
Wai spch E [6]	ok {kitchen}.	I'll ask the chef.		
Wai gaze [8]		Gaze at James		gaze away.
Wai body [6]	head lifted	index finger po		
Jam spch [5]		[yīnwèi]wǒ(-)gāngcái [shuō de shuode]yě shì jīnzhēn hé		
Jam spch E [5]		because what I just said is also enoki mushroom and w		

A: wèn 'ask' in line 12 by the waitress

The waitress's fourth commitment is made in line 15, 'I'll ask, I'll ask about the ingredients,' which is a response to James' explicit request in line 14, '{Could you} ask it again/anyway?' This

commitment is also towards with a gaze on James and an index finger-pointing gesture, but the movement has a larger amplitude compared to the one in line 12 (Images A and B in Figure 5.11 D). Note James firstly uses a pointing gesture in his explicit request to refer to the kitchen in line 14 (Image A in Figure 5.11), therefore the waitress' pointing could be seen as the gesture component of her response.

Figure 5.11 Visual behaviors in lines 14 and 15

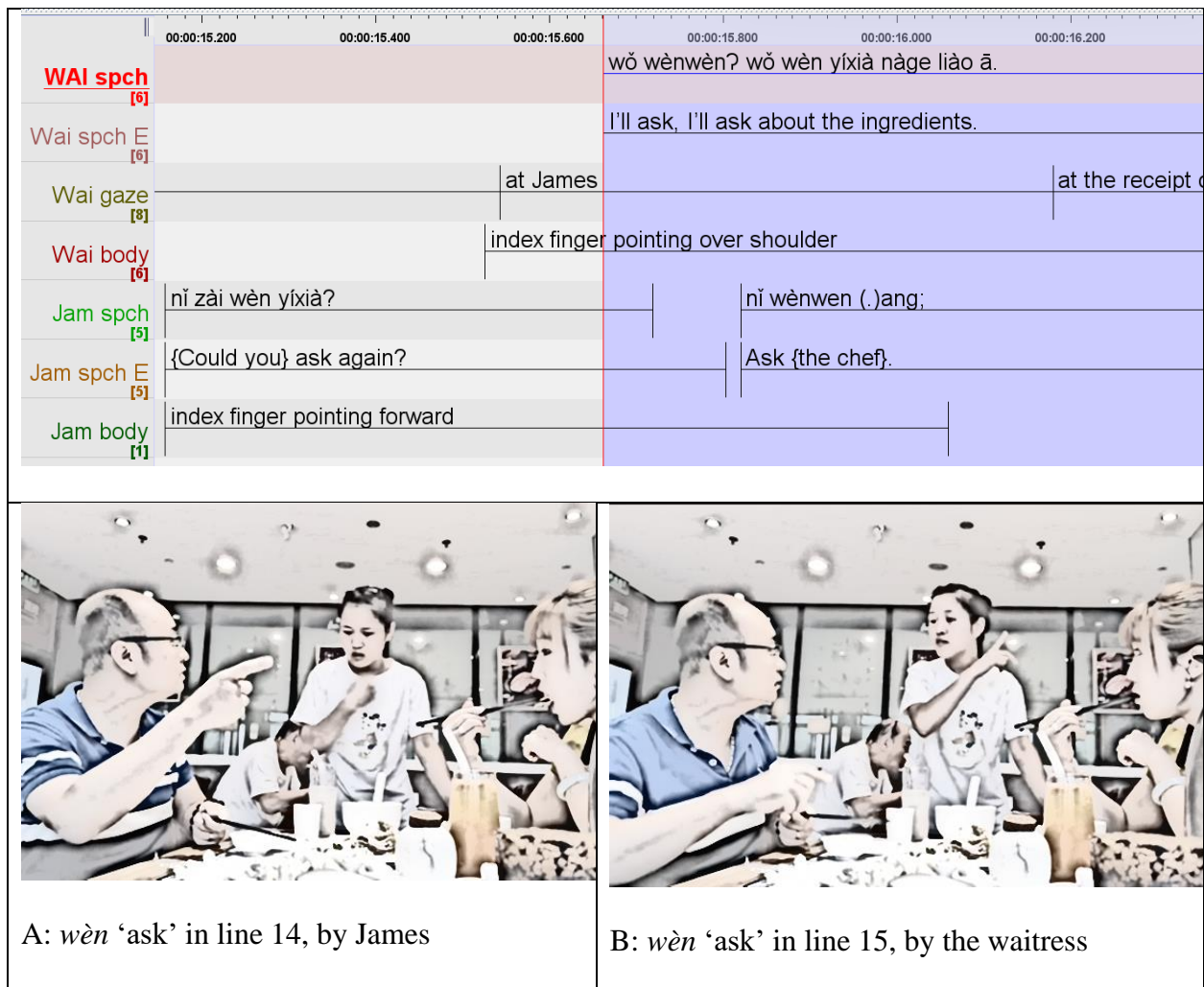


Table 5.2 summarizes the design of the four commitments made by the waitress. Although they have a similar lexico-syntactic design, the degree of commitment increases as the speaker mobilizes more interactional resources in the latter two utterances. It is also noteworthy that the four utterances differ in their sequential positions: lines 09 and 10 are produced at the beginning of the segment when the waitress makes the offer in initiating position after James shows her the wrong ingredient; line 12 is produced also in initiating position is preceded by James' account; line 15 is uttered in responding position after James makes an explicit request. The sequential context of the utterances, on the one hand, sets restrictions on the speaker's choices, and on the other hand, allows the speaker to (re)evaluate the severity of the consequence and determine the weight of commitment they should display. In this example, as the interlocutor orients to escalate the situation and eventually makes an explicit request, the waitress manages to make assessments on a moment-by-moment basis and upgrade her commitment by involving more modes of interactional resources.

Table 5.2 Design of the four commitment utterances in Ex 5.6

Line #	Pinyin	English	Sequence position	Modes of interaction
09	<i>Wǒ wèn yíxià shǒufu zhè lǐmiàn yǒuméiyǒu zhège:</i>	'I'll ask {the chef} if there is {any celeries}.'	Initiating	Speech
10	<i>wǒ wèn yíxià hòubiān.</i>	'I'll ask the back {kitchen}.'	Initiating	Speech
12	<i>wǒ wèn yíxià shǒufu.</i>	'I'll ask the chef.'	Initiating (preceded by an account)	Speech, gaze, pointing
15	<i>wǒ wèn- wǒ wèn yíxià nàge liào ā.</i>	'I'll ask - I'll ask about the ingredients.'	Responding	verbal, gaze, pointing with a larger amplitude

This section presents two examples (Ex 5.5 and Ex 5.6) where the principle of proportionality operates in the same conversation and speakers upgrade their commitments to certain actions based on their ad hoc evaluation of the severity of the consequences. Given that Ex 5.5 happens during a family meal, whereas Ex 5.6 is recorded in a restaurant, the two examples provide evidence of the principle of proportionality from different angles. Another important distinction between the two examples is that the committed action in Ex 5.5 is a remote future activity whereas Ex 5.6 involves a relatively immediate request. Regardless of the register and the temporal feature of the committed action, speakers follow the principle of proportionality and upgrade their commitment in an ad hoc fashion.

5.5 An ensemble of speech and gesture across referential and pragmatic functions

In previous examples, speakers are seen to follow the principle of proportionality and orchestrate multimodal resources to design a small or big commitment depending on their assessment of the consequences of the named action. However, this study observes that speakers' actions in various interactional modes are not always coherent or consistent, which also poses challenges to the principle of proportionality. A detailed data analysis shows that the seemingly inconsistent gesture might be a visual expression of dispreferred stances and actions spontaneously performed in the same turn. In other words, in certain sequential environments where a commitment is conditionally relevant, the speaker may mobilize gestures, particularly pragmatic gestures, to perform other actions and stances. Ex 5.7 is an example where the speaker makes a

big commitment with the lexico-syntactic component but simultaneously rejects the interlocutor's pursuit of the audio and visual channels of interaction.

Ex 5.7 Summer_2019_ZS_00070_0043

The grandma speaks Wu dialect in this segment.

- 01 GRD: 你 再 让 我-
nǐ zài ràng wǒ-
 2sg again let me
 'You let me- {play for} another'
- 02 GRM: 一 个 半 小 时 打 下 了,
yī gè bàn xiǎoshí dǎ-xià le
 one CL half hour play-down CRS
 'You have played for one hour and half,'
- 03 一 个 半 小 时,
yī gè bàn xiǎoshí
 one CL half hour
 'one hour and half,'
- G hand: ((right arm held in the air))
- 04 (.)12 点- 哎 11 点 25 分 拿 来 的,
(.)shìèr diǎn- āi shíyī diǎn èrshíwǔ fēn ná lái de,
 twelve o'clock INT eleven o'clock twenty-five minute bring PRT
 'since twelve- Oh, you took the phone at eleven twenty-five,'
- 05 (0.2) 现 在 一 点 钟 了,
(0.2) xiànzài yìdiǎnzhōng le
 now one-o'clock CRS
 'now it's one o'clock.'
- 06 GRM: =快(.) 拿 来, ((dialect))
=kuài(.) take lái,
 quick take come
 'Quick, give it to me.'
- 07 (0.2)
 ((KD is lying on the bed while looking down at the phone))
- 08 GRD: 好 <<all> 会 给 你 嘛,>
hǎo <<all> huì gěi nǐ ma,>
 Okay HUI give 2sg PRT
 'Okay {I} will give {it} to you.'
- R body: ((lying on bed while focusing on the game))
- 09 =<<dim> 一 二 三 四,>

=<<dim> yī èr sān sì> ((counting in the game))
 `One two three four,`

10 GRM:□ 现在 <<ff ↑不拿 过来> 是 吗,
 xiànzài<<ff `↑bù ná guòlái> shì ma,
 now NEG take over is Q
 `You are not giving me now, are you?`

GRA Hand: |~~~~~*****/

11 GRA Hand: ~~~~~*****-.-.-| ((hand reaching the phone))

12 GRD:→ 会 <<crescendo> 给> 你 的 嘛:
 huì<<crescendo> gěi nǐ de ma: ((angry voice and facial
 expression))
 HUI give sg PRT PRT
 `{I} will give {it} to you!`

R Gaze: at GRA |away (aggressive facial expression))

R Body: |~~~~~*****-.-.-.-.-|
 ((sits up and moves hands away from grandma))

13 (1.0)

14 GRM: ((gaze moves towards the camera/researcher with a smile))

15 ((smile)) 好 了 嘛.
 ((smile)) hǎo le ma.
 good CRS PRT
 `{You} should be done now.`

16 GRM: ((hand reaches to the phone))

G hand: |~*-.|((hand reaches to the phone with index finger pointing))

16 GRA: |~***-.-.| ((hand reaches to the phone))

R Body: |~***-.-.-.-.| ((body moves to avoid the GRA's hand))

17 GRD: 把- 我 把 这 个 给 挖 完 嘛,
 bǎ- wǒ bǎ zhè ge gěi wā wán ma
 BA 1sg BA this CL PRT dig finish PRT
 `Let me finish this digging {task}.`

18 (0.7)

19 GRM: 那 挖 到 什 么 时 候 去 啊; ((dialect))
 nà wā dào shénme shíhou qù ā;
 DM dig to what time go PRT
 `So when you will be done with digging?`

G hand: |~ *****-.-.-.-.-.-.-.-.-.-|

20 GRD: =马上 ↑[呗:]
 =mǎshàng ↑[bei:]
 soon PRT

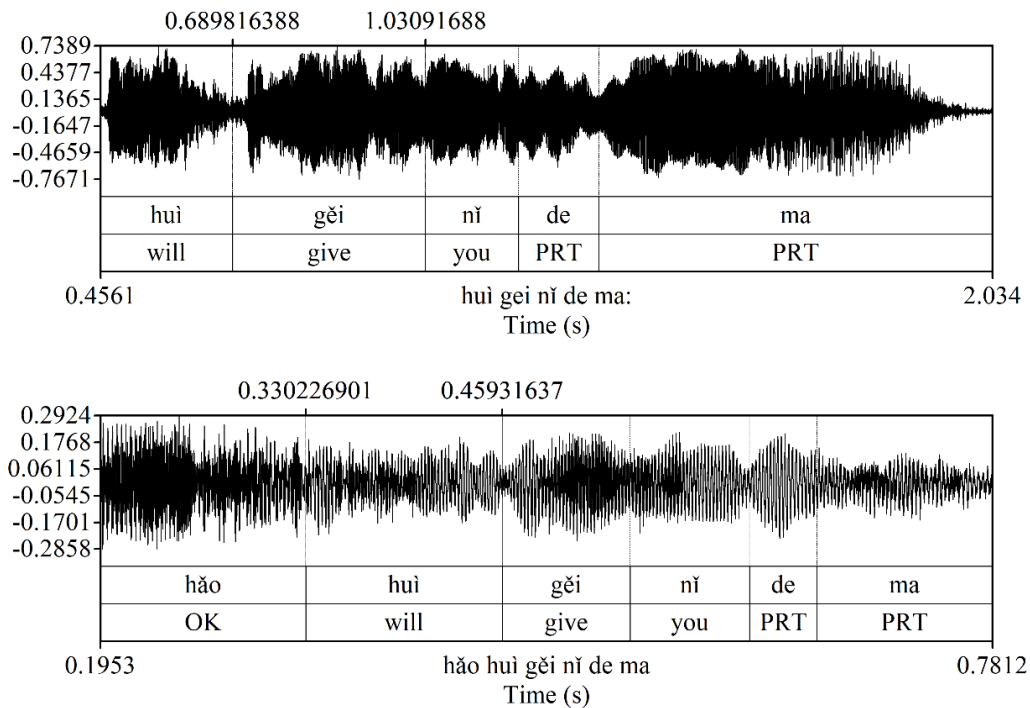
'Soon.'

In this conversation, Rong (RON) is playing a group mobile game with her cousins using her grandma's cellphone. Prior to this segment, the grandma (GRA) has explicitly requested that Rong to return her phone as she stands outside of the room where the kids are playing games, and Rong tries to negotiate more playtime. In lines 02 to 05, the grandma pursues the account that Rong has been playing for one hour and a half, which is followed by a strong command in line 06, 'Quick, give it to me.' Instead of complying with the command, Rong makes her first promise in line 08, 'Okay, I will give {it} to you,' and she remains lying still on the bed and focusing on the game. Rong's promise in this turn functions to delay the immediate request and indicates that her priority is the ongoing gaming activity. She then returns to the game in line 09.

Rong's second promise produced in line 11 is where her interactional resources in different modes seem to be incoherent. In line 09, grandma asks a tag question to solicit Rong's confirmation of her noncompliance with an audibly louder voice, 'You are not giving it to me now, are you?' Without a response from Rong, grandma makes another pursuit using gestures: her hand, which has been held still in the air since line 01, reaches for the cellphone (see Image B in Figure 5.13). In this sequential environment, Rong makes her second promise with the same sentence as line 08, '{I} will give {it} to you,' but this time she drops the turn-initial token 'okay' and produces a crescendo utterance with an audible emphasis on *gěi* and elongation on the particle *ma* at the end. Figure 5.12 is a comparison of the waveforms of the two utterances in line 11 and line 10. As shown in the figure, line 11, *huì gěi nǐ de ma*: in general, has a significantly wider amplitude than

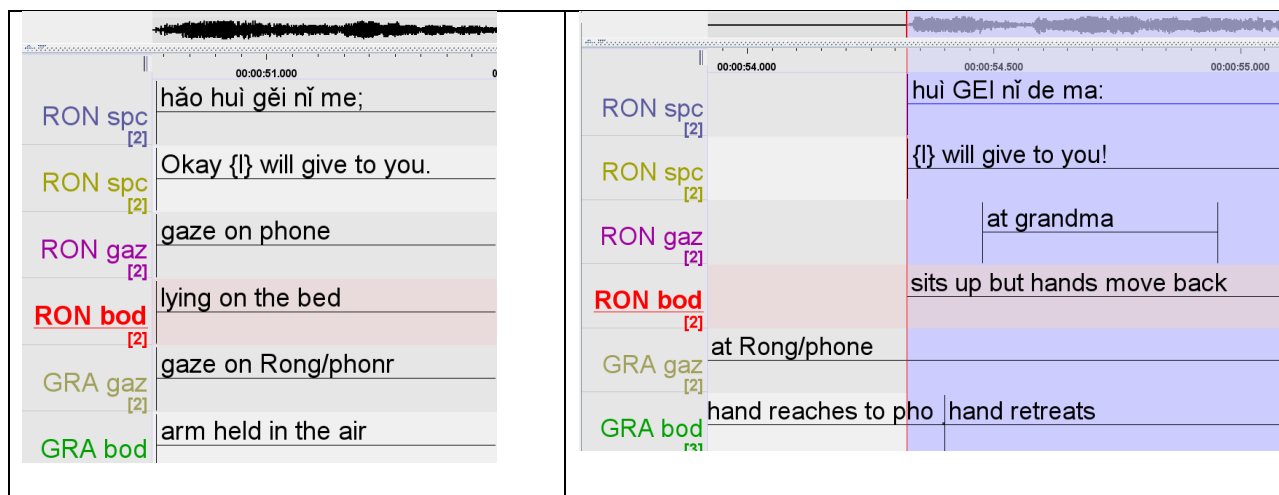
line 08, *hǎo huì gěi nǐ de ma*. In addition, line 11 is produced with a longer duration than the same component in line 08 (1580ms vs 451ms). Individual syllables in line 11 are also produced with a longer duration than in line 08 (e.g., *huì* in line 11 has a duration of 233ms, but the same syllable only lasts 129ms in line 08). In regular cases where the principle of proportionality is followed, a louder utterance with stronger energy and intensity displays a bigger commitment. However, Rong’s utterance in line 11 is unusually amplified with aggressive facial expressions, which should be seen as a strong refusal to comply with grandma’s command.

Figure 5.12 Waveforms of line 11 and line 08 in Ex 5.7



In addition to the aggressive prosodic design, Rong’s visual-bodily behaviors more explicitly express her rejection of compliance. As soon as grandma’s hand reaches out to the cellphone in line 10, Rong sits up from the bed and quickly moves her hands back so that grandma cannot reach the cellphone (see Figure 5.13 Image B). On the one hand, Rong’s body movement is a response to grandma’s hand gesture; on the other hand, the body movement and the extreme prosodic design co-construct Rong’s action of resistance, which is registered by grandma as she softens the conflict with one-second silence, a smile to the researcher, and a downgraded pursuit ‘You should be done now’ in line 15.

Figure 5.13 Visual behaviors in line 08 (left) and line 11 (right)





The seemed “mismatch” of lexico-syntactic, prosodic, and visual components of action in this section is possible because both speech and gestures have referential functions and non-referential (pragmatic/interpersonal) functions²⁶. Although in many cases, prosody and gestures tend to match and intensify the referential meaning of speech, analysis in this section shows that the same lexico-syntactic design can perform very different actions if the prosody of the utterance is designed differently and that the ensemble of speech and gesture operates across different types of functions.

5.6 Discussion and conclusion

This chapter has followed the recent discussion on the principle of proportionality and investigated its applications in responsive commitment actions in Mandarin conversation. Findings in this study show that Mandarin speakers design their commitments in proportion to the consequences of actions, which is consistent with findings in previous studies on apologies in

²⁶ Halliday (1985) categorizes three functions of language, including ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions. To some extent, Kendon’s (2004) classification of gestures is consistent with the functions of language in general, which makes it possible for speakers to utilize different categories of functions in one utterance.

English. As Goffman (1959) has famously argued, participants always take strategies to present themselves well in perceived situations. Making commitments presents the speaker with a reliable and positive image in the moment of interaction, but also risks their credibility if the committed actions are not performed. Given the benefits and costs/risks of promising, the severity of action consequences becomes a crucial variable in determining whether to make a commitment or not, and more importantly, what size and weight the commitment should be. Examples in the present study show that participants actively evaluate the consequences and the interactional situations to formulate their responsive commitment in proportion to the severity of the consequences: smaller consequences get smaller commitments (e.g., Ex 5.1 and Ex 5.2), and bigger consequences get bigger commitments (e.g., Ex 5.3 and Ex 5.4). Analysis in this study also shows that the principle of proportionality can provide a new perspective for understanding interaction in different genres. Actions committed in institutional talk, as in the *Wenzheng* programs, tend to have more severe consequences for the real world than ordinary conversations, therefore they are more likely to be formulated as big promises with various resources from multiple interactional channels (e.g., lexico-syntactic resources such as explicit performative verbs and time references, prosodic stress, and bodily-visual behaviors such as head movements and gaze).

Moreover, findings in this chapter provide evidence for the idea that the consequences of committed actions are not intrinsic, objective, or fixed, but are constitutively evaluated and reevaluated by the participants in interaction on a moment-by-moment basis (Goodwin 1979) regardless of the interactional genre. As a result, we see examples (Ex 5.5 and Ex 5.6) in which

participants begin with a smaller commitment but later on orient to a bigger one, which is in proportion to the increasing severity of consequences in their evaluation; we also find participants in ordinary conversations make big promises if they consider the promised actions to have serious consequences in certain contexts (e.g., Ex 5.5).

This chapter also expands the scope of research on interactional actions to a multimodal analysis of Mandarin conversations. First, mutual gaze is often observed in big commitments to activities with severe consequences and is often missing in small commitments to low-consequence events. Second, gestures such as head shakes, nodding, and hand gestures are often deployed to intensify lexical devices in the speaker's big commitments, whereas small commitments tend to be built with minimal compliance particles and without visual behaviors. Most importantly, findings in this chapter show that the variety of interactional resources and their different types of functions enable speakers to orchestrate them not only in a coherent manner to make a bigger or smaller commitment in proportion to the severity of consequences, but also in a seemingly incongruent ways to perform multiple actions or stances in the same turn. These discoveries address deviant cases of semantic coherence and provide new perspectives for future studies.

6 Conclusions

6.1 The findings

In this study, I have analyzed the sequential position and composition (Schegloff 2007) of promising and commissive actions in naturally occurring Mandarin conversations using methods in conversation analysis, interactional linguistics, and multimodal analysis. Previous studies on promising have mainly adopted speech act theory to analyze how linguistic items express the speaker's intention, and CA and IL studies on social actions have yet to explore promising in social interaction. There are even fewer studies that investigate social actions in Mandarin conversation. This dissertation answers the questions of *when* and *how* Mandarin speakers make commitments to future actions in conversation. Moreover, this study has shed light on the key dimension of commitment, which has a broad relevance to understanding a variety of sequences and types of actions such as offering, proposing, and granting a request.

Chapter 1 establishes the analytic framework of the dissertation. It starts with a comprehensive review of existing studies of promising and commissive speech acts from various approaches, including speech act theory, politeness theory, language development and psychology, political discourse analysis, critical discourse analysis, conversation analysis, and interactional linguistics, as well as studies on commissive speech acts in Chinese linguistics. The review of CA and IL studies on related social actions focuses on sociocultural and contextual dimensions that have been found to shape the position and composition of these actions, including the benefactive relationship, the bilateral or unilateral feature of the named future activity, the social relationships

between the speakers such as entitlement and deonticity, the contingency of performing the named future action, and the degree of the speaker's commitment. Informed by these understandings and Du Bois' (2007) stance triangle, a triangle model of directive-commissive action is established as the analytic framework of this study.

Chapter 2 introduces data and methods used in this study and provides a new definition of commissive actions that treats various first-position and second-position actions, from low-commitment offering and compliance to high-commitment promising, as points on a continuum of commitment to future actions. It then specifies sociocultural and interactional features that distinguish promising from other commissive actions.

Chapter 3 examines common lexico-syntactic resources of commissive actions in Mandarin conversation. A general survey of the dataset shows that the most common format of commissive action in Mandarin conversation is a first-person pronoun declarative without modal verbs or other linguistic devices that operate additionally on the illocutionary force of the utterance. On the continuum of commitment to future actions, two other categories of linguistic devices are identified based on their functions: (1) illocutionary force modifying devices (IFMDs) that mitigate the speaker's commitment, such as vague time references, the modal verb *kěyǐ*, and the utterance-final particle *ba*; and (2) illocutionary force indicating devices (IFIDs) that upgrade the speaker's commitment to future actions, such as performative verbs, exact time references, benefactive structures, the modal verb *huì*, and self-repetition of particles.

An overview of the distribution of these devices in the dataset shows that government officials use significantly more IFIDs and fewer IFMDs than ordinary people. Performative verbs, modal verbs indicating obligation and willingness, exact time references, and intensifiers are the top IFIDs observed in government officials' promises. In ordinary conversation, benefactive structures and self-repetition of particles are most common. Ordinary speakers use various IFMDs to mitigate their commitments, but government officials are only found to use vague time references in their promises.

These IFMDs and IFIDs are then analyzed in the context of social action formats that recurrently occur in commissive actions. Major findings on the IFMDs include: (1) the modal verb *kěyǐ* in the format of [*wǒ/nǐ/wǒmen*+ *kěyǐ* + *VP*] ['I/you/we can do X'] is often used to downgrade the speaker's first-position commitment in offering, inviting, and proposing by providing an option or solution to the recipient's problem; (2) the utterance-final particle *ba* occurring in the format of [*Wǒ* + *VP*+ *ba*] is observed in offering and proposing as a pseudo-innovation marker used to mitigate the speaker's deontic authority and to decrease the imposition on the recipient to accept the offer or proposal.

Important findings on the IFIDs include: (1) The benefactive structure, occurring in the format of [*Wǒ* + *Coverb* + *Benefactor* + *VP*], is a common device used in making offers in ordinary Mandarin conversations, especially in face-to-face conversations; (2) Appearing in the format of [*wǒ* + *huì*+ *VP* (*de*)] ['I will VP'], the modal verb *huì* without prosodic stress is used to make an offer to perform an action expected by the recipient to inform about the speaker's my-side

arrangement of an established future activity, whereas *huì* with prosodic stress is used to reassure the speaker's commitment either in first-position when there is a pre-existing obligation or in second position when a big promise is pursued; (3) self-repetition is a different type of IFID that is commonly used to assert the speaker's commitment in granting a request and accepting a proposal.

Analysis in Chapter 3 also reveals a general preference for how many degrees of commitment should be displayed in different sequential positions: when the speaker is not obligated to perform the future action, a lower degree of commitment modified with IFMDs is preferred in first position, whereas a higher degree of commitment is preferred when the commissive action is performed in second position. This discovery, along with the new observations on the typological features of Mandarin conversation, poses challenges to the widely recognized claim that offering is preferred over requesting. Unlike in English where the offering is often made with polar interrogatives (Couper-Kuhlen 2014) that indicate a low degree of commitment, offering (and other commissive actions) in Mandarin conversation are observed often made with simple declarative, which indicates the speaker's deontic authority over the future action and imposes an acceptance of the offer. The problem that emerged here is that offering (and other actions) can be performed with different linguistic devices and with varying degrees of commitment in different languages, and in different sequential environments even in the same language. As pointed out by Thompson and Mann (1986) and others, form and function have a logically independent relationship, and there is no one-on-one mapping relationship between a linguistic format and discourse or interactional

function (Walker 2014). Therefore, sequential environments and linguistic typological differences should both be taken into consideration when analyzing offering and other social actions in interaction.

Chapter 4 investigates the sequence position of a particular type of commissive action: promising with a pre-existing obligation. The chapter begins with categorizing four types of obligations observed in the dataset: (1) pre-existing obligations related to previous promises or social roles such as filial piety and political obligations, (2) obligations that are educed in the current conversation, (3) non-obligations in conventional promises at the end of a gathering or a phone call, and (4) obligations to the speaker themselves. Focusing on the first type – pre-existing obligations – the data analysis of ordinary conversations shows that first-position promises are preferred over second-position promises when the speaker has an unfulfilled pre-existing obligation. Evidence for this claim includes: (1) participants are more likely to orient to closure with first-position promises; (2) first-position promises are observed co-occurring with volunteered accounts for the nonperformance; (3) sequences with second-position promises are often expanded. In the few deviant cases where first-position promises are made, it is found that the speaker is making passive-aggressive promises to display resistance. In other words, making a commitment to the future action is not the “main job” (Schegloff 2007) in those deviant cases.

Chapter 4 also finds that government officials who make promises on the *Wenzheng* programs also follow the preference for first-position promises despite the cost of violating the pre-allocated turn-taking rules on the television program. In these first-position promises, the officials are

observed adopting various strategies to minimize the effect of violating the pre-determined turn-taking rules, including (1) designing multi-unit multi-action turns with promises produced in the turn-final position, (2) producing other affiliative actions in the same turn, such as acknowledging the failure, providing accounts, and expressing empathy or apologies, and (3) making promises with compound TCUs (e.g., the *rúguǒ... nàme...* ‘if...then...’ structure).

Chapter 5 examines how Mandarin speakers use multimodal interactional resources to construct their varying degrees of commitments following the principle of proportionality. Informed by the principle of proportionality found in apologies (Goffman 1971; Heritage, Raymond & Drew 2019) this chapter finds that Mandarin speakers design their responsive commitments in proportion to the speaker’s evaluation of the consequence of the involved future action: big promises are made for severe consequences, whereas small commitments are made for minor consequences. This chapter emphasizes the dynamic and ad hoc fashion of the speaker’s evaluation of consequences and takes a “from within” method (Heritage et al. 2019) to analyze the conversation-external factor – consequence – through participants’ orientation displayed in their conversational practices. In both ordinary and institutional data, speakers are found to constantly reevaluate the consequences of the involved activity and upgrade their commitments accordingly.

In terms of action design, Chapter 5 examines how multimodal resources including lexicosyntactic formats, prosody, head movements, and gaze are orchestrated together as an ensemble (Kendon 2004) to express varying degrees of commitments. Small commitments such as minimal compliances are observed to be made with single particles such as *en* without mutual gaze or other

visual behaviors. In contrast, big promises such as those made by government officials are found to involve a full set of interactional resources, such as IFIDs at the lexico-syntactic level, prosodic stress on the emphasized lexical items, and mutual gaze, and nodding or headshaking. Findings in this chapter also support the claim that gesture and speech in interaction are semantically coherent. In deviant cases where the two semiotic fields seem to be incoherent, data analysis shows that the speaker is performing multiple actions in the same utterance through different channels of communication: For example, while the lexico-syntactic resource might be performing its referential function of a cooperative commitment, the co-occurring prosody and/or gestures might be performing the pragmatic function of a rejection.

6.2 Implications

This dissertation contributes to the study of social interaction in both theoretical and methodological aspects and has important implications for the study of Chinese linguistics.

First, this study explicates the basic features of the under-explored social action of promising in the context of commissive actions. As Sacks (1995) famously states, “a culture is an apparatus for generating recognizable actions” (226). The formation and ascription of social actions is a fundamental research locus in CA and IL, but the existing research has only revealed the tip of the iceberg of the various types of human social actions. Findings in this study regarding the sequential position and composition of promising and other commissive actions, especially the dimension of

obligation and the principle of proportionality, provide novel perspectives for future studies of commissive actions.

Second, the triangle model of directive-commissive actions and the continuum of commitment to future actions proposed in this study have theoretical implications for the study of social interaction. The triangle model highlights the three key elements in a directive-commissive action – the agent, the beneficiary, and the named future action – which enables comprehensive analyses of fundamental relationships among the three elements, such as the power dynamic between the agent and the beneficiary, the cost/contingency relationship between the agent and the future action, and the benefit/interest relationship between the beneficiary and the future action. Although previous studies have discussed either one or two of these relationships in action formation and ascription (Curl & Drew 2008), the triangle model provides a systematic analytic framework that not only helps understand individual social actions but also benefits future studies that aim to compare different social actions.

By taking an inclusive approach and treating various actions as points on the continuum of commitment, this study underlines the cooperative feature of social interaction while recognizing the differences between initiative commitment and responsive commitment. Social interaction is fundamentally cooperative (Tomasello 2009) and making commitments is a type of joint commitment in multiple senses. Making a commitment to a future action provides a solution to the current situation when an action/assistance is needed but not immediately available or preferred. Initiative commissive actions such as offering volunteers the performance of the needed action as

a solution and at the same time inviting the recipient's agreement; responsive commissive actions such as granting a request agree to the interlocutor's solution and at the same time commit to the needed action. When an agreement on the solution is achieved and the assistance is confirmed, i.e., an offer of assistance is accepted or a request is granted, the participants create a mutual expectation or joint imagination of the future activity based on the assumption that the committing party is credible and trustworthy. As Clark (1996) points out, promises must be heard, understood, and recognized by the promisee, otherwise, they are treated as attempts. Commitments made in different sequential positions may indicate a different allocation of deontic rights, but both initiative and responsive commitments orient to the joint imagination of the future activity.

Third, this study demonstrates the significance of studying social actions with not only cross-cultural but also cross-registral perspectives. Recent years have seen a growing number of cross-linguistic studies on social actions (e.g., N.J. Enfield, Stivers, and Levinson's (2010) study on question-answer sequences and Floyd et al.'s (2014) study on recruitment), which have furthered the understanding of typological differences of the same social action in different languages and culture. Studies on the same action in different registers, however, are relatively lacking.

Everyday social life is organized by various social actions in interaction, but each action is a unique species that has its natural "habitats" – the environment where it is performed, including the register at global level and the sequential position at local level – and its unique format – the sequence type and action design. Compared to prevalent actions such as greeting, promising is less frequently observed in everyday conversation but more common in political interactions.

Moreover, the design features of promising vary in the two registers: politicians' promises are performed with more explicit devices and indicate a higher degree of commitment, whereas ordinary people's promises are less explicit and allow more negotiation. By collecting and analyzing conversations in both ordinary and institutional settings and with different modes of communication, this study shows the necessity of examining the registral differences in social actions.

Fourth, this study demonstrates the methodological advantages of IL approaches in analyzing long-standing linguistic problems. Treating social interaction as a laminated multi-semiotic process, IL enables traditionally unavailable resources such as prosody and gesture to be used as co-occurring evidence (also referred to as contextualization cues by Gumperz (1982)) for analytical claims on lexico-syntactic phenomena. In Chinese linguistics, for example, linguistic devices such as the modal verb *hu* and the utterance-final particle *ba*, and promising as a speech act, have been studied in previous research but many questions regarding their features and functions remain unanswered. The novel IL approach allows a deeper understanding of these linguistic puzzles through multimodal analysis on a moment-by-moment basis.

6.3 Future directions

With the findings in the current study, future research on promising and commissive actions may be furthered in the following directions. First, this study has examined a few IFMDs and IFIDs using CA and IL methods, but more linguistic devices are yet to be explored systematically.

For example, based on the findings on the modal verbs *huì* and *kěyǐ* used as an IFID and an IFMD respectively in ordinary conversations, a comprehensive corpus linguistic analysis of different categories of modal verbs used in both ordinary conversation and official-journalist interactions will help identify the general patterns of modal verbs in commissive actions, and a follow up qualitative analysis using IL methods will then illuminate the sequential environments and interactional functions of different types of modal verbs. In the same line of research, some IFIDs and IFMDs are analyzed as components of a social action format, which has been proven an effective notion to study social actions. Future studies may further this line of research by identifying other recurrent formats of specific commissive actions. Second, Chapter 5 provided evidence that speakers follow the principle of proportionality in designing their responsive commitments. What has not been investigated is whether this principle can be applied to initiative commissive actions, or if there are other principles operating for different actions. Third, Chapter 5 also examined prosody, gaze, and head movements as multimodal resources in commissive actions and discussed the coherent relationship between speech and visual behaviors in the speaker's utterance. Future studies may investigate other multimodal resources in the same environments or in other social actions, discover various functions of different types of visual behaviors, and further the discussion on the relationship between speech and visual behaviors. Lastly, with the analytic framework developed in this study and findings on Mandarin conversations, future projects on the cross-linguistic analysis of IFIDs and IFMDs such as interrogatives/declaratives, benefactive structures, modal verbs, utterance-final particles, and self-

repetition of particles, will reveal universal and cultural-specific patterns of promising and other commissive actions.

Appendix 1: Glossing Conventions

1pl	first-person plural
1sg	first-person singular
2sg	second-person singular
adv	adverbial marker <i>de</i>
ASS	associative <i>de</i>
BA	<i>ba</i> structure
CL	classifier
CRS	current relevant state <i>le</i>
CSC	complex stative construction <i>de</i>
DM	discourse marker (e.g., <i>nà</i> , <i>nàge</i> , <i>nǐshuō</i>)
EXP	experiential marker <i>guo</i>
GEN	genitive <i>de</i>
INT	<i>interjection</i> (e.g., <i>o</i> , <i>a</i> , <i>en</i>)
NEG	negator, <i>bù</i> and <i>méi</i>
NOM	nominalizer <i>de</i>
PFV	perfective aspect <i>le</i>
PRT	particle
PROG:	progressive marker (<i>zài</i> , <i>zhèngzài</i>)
Q	question particle (e.g., <i>ma</i>)

Appendix 2: Transcription conventions

Mandarin conversational data in this dissertation are represented in four-line transcripts following general conventions suggested by Li (2019). The first line represents the original orthography – Chinese characters; the second line is the official romanization, Pinyin with tone marks indicating lexical tones; the third line is word-by-word or morpheme-by-morpheme gloss of the utterance; the fourth line provides an English translation. Symbols used in the transcription of speech follow the conventions proposed by Selting et al. (2009); symbols for visual-bodily behaviors follow the conventions laid out in Kendon (2004) and Li (2019).

General transcription conventions

→	target line
=	latching
[]	overlap
hahaha	short “syllabic” laughter, also see “hehe”
((laughs))	extended laughter
<<laughing> >	laughter particles accompanying speech with indication of scope
<<smile> >	smile voice
°h, °hh	audible inhale, according to its duration
h°, hh°	audible outhale, according to its duration
(.)	micro-pause

(1.0) measured pause of approximately 1 second.

:, :: prolongation

((xx)) unintelligible syllables in pinyin line

((nodding)) gestures or transcriber's notes

{ } information added in the free translation

'okay/that works' "/" indicates an alternative translation

Speech delivery

ACcent upper case in the Pinyin line indicates a primary stress

? rising to high (final pitch movement)

, rising to mid (final pitch movement)

; falling to mid (final pitch movement)

. falling to low (final pitch movement)

- glottal cut-off

↑ pitch step up

↓ pitch step down

<<f>> forte, loud

<<ff>> fortissimo, very loud

<<p>> piano, soft

<<pp>> pianissimo, very soft

<<all> >	allegro, fast
<len> >	lento, slow
<<cresc> >	crescendo, becoming louder
<<dim> >	diminuendo, becoming softer
<acc> >	accerlerando, becoming slower

Visual-bodily behaviors

~	preparation of gesticulation
*	stroke of gesticulation
**	holding of stroke
-..	recovery of gesticulation
	boundary of gesture phrase
<u>gaze at</u>	gaze at
<u>gaze away</u>	gaze away
<u>at</u> <u>away</u>	gaze shift away

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