



ELSEVIER

Available online at www.sciencedirect.com

SCIENCE @ DIRECT®

Journal of Pragmatics 37 (2005) 967–995

Journal of
PRAGMATICS

www.elsevier.com/locate/pragma

“There is more here than meets the eye!”: the use of final *ou* in two sequential positions in Mandarin Chinese conversation

Ruey-Juan Regina Wu

*Department of Linguistics and Oriental Languages, San Diego State University,
5500 Campanile Drive, San Diego, CA 92182-7727, USA*

Received 4 October 2002; received in revised form 8 December 2004; accepted 13 December 2004

Abstract

An increasing number of studies of language and social interaction have begun to explore the phenomenon that parties to talk-in-interaction do not always speak their minds in a straightforward manner. Rather, for various interactional reasons, they may just allude to the action they intend to accomplish, in and through various linguistic or non-linguistic resources. By drawing on methodological practices from conversation analysis, this paper examines one of these resources in Mandarin Chinese: the final particle *ou*. It is shown that final *ou* and its attached utterance regularly occur in two kinds of sequential positions in spontaneous Mandarin conversation: (i) in first position where informing, reporting or story-telling is underway; and (ii) in responsive position where some implicit yet potentially negatively-valenced interactional work is being done. It is argued that despite these two seemingly distinct positions, the central usage of final *ou* is for the speaker to highlight the salience and newsworthiness of a focal event — commonly by alerting the recipient to the implication that “there is more here than meets the eye!”

© 2004 Elsevier B.V. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Conversation analysis; Interaction; Mandarin Chinese; Particles; Sequential positions; Allusion

E-mail address: rwu@mail.sdsu.edu.

0378-2166/\$ – see front matter © 2004 Elsevier B.V. All rights reserved.

doi:10.1016/j.pragma.2004.12.006

1. Introduction

An increasing number of studies of language and social interaction have begun to explore the phenomenon that parties to talk-in-interaction do not always speak their minds in a straightforward manner. Rather, for various interactional reasons, they may just hint at, or allude to, the action they intend to accomplish, in and through various linguistic or non-linguistic resources.

In a seminal work in this area, for example, Pomerantz (1980) describes a practice which she terms “telling my side.” She demonstrates how a speaker’s “my side” report – a report of the speaker’s “limited access” to an event (e.g., “Your line’s been busy,” “I saw you drive by last night,” “You were in Room 252 for a long time this afternoon,” etc.) – can be done with a view to soliciting the interlocutor’s account for that event without explicitly requesting it.

In a similar vein, Schegloff (1996) shows how the practice of agreeing with others by repeating what they have said can indicate the speaker’s prior orientation to an inexplicit conveyance of the matter at hand. Specifically, Schegloff offers evidence that by selecting a repeat, as opposed to other agreement tokens such as “yeah,” “uh huh,” and the like, to confirm the interlocutor’s explication of one’s prior talk, the confirming party not only confirms the explication offered by the interlocutor, but also confirms that what is being confirmed had previously been “alluded to” – i.e., had been conveyed without saying – by the confirming party in the preceding talk. Schegloff argues that one use such confirmatory repeats have is to allow a speaker to avoid doing or saying something explicitly while at the same time introducing the import of what it is about into the interactional occasion.

The action of doing or saying something “not in so many words” can also be accomplished through the exploitation of prosody. Schegloff (1998), for example, shows that by displacing primary stress from where it is normally located (e.g., “I’ll never hear from him again,” rather than “I’ll never hear from him again”), a speaker can invite his/her interlocutor to search for the other element related to the item which has been stressed (e.g., “I’ll not hear from him again, like the others”), and to find the implication that is being so invoked. And by not articulating the element which the stressed talk is expected to be paired with, but merely treating the alluded-to element as something that can be taken for granted, a speaker can be heard to tacitly and allusively accomplish such actions as complimenting, complaining, or self-deprecating.

Similar phenomena have also been observed in languages other than English. For example, Ohori (1995) examines the pragmatic properties of a group of what he calls “suspended clauses” in Japanese – that is, clauses which are explicitly marked for subordination but which nonetheless are not accompanied by main clauses. He argues that such suspended clauses have discourse functions that are not manifest in their non-suspended counterparts; and that when faced with such suspended clauses, a recipient must infer what is left unsaid, through, for example, recovery of an associated idiomatic expression or invocation of relevant aspects of the context.

While Ohori’s study focuses only on reduced idiomatic expressions and logical connectives, Tanaka (2001) demonstrates that Japanese adverbials can also be exploited for similar interactional ends. In particular, she demonstrates how speakers may refrain from articulating the main predicate of an utterance and simply end that utterance with an

adverbial adumbrating the thrust of the turn. She goes on to demonstrate how syntactically incomplete utterances of this kind, with their suggestive capacity, can serve as a powerful resource for managing affectively loaded or sensitive matters.

In an account of the use of the Korean connective *nuntey* in spontaneous conversation, Park (1999), as well, demonstrates a similar suggestive capacity exhibited by this Korean connective. She proposes that *nuntey* – in contrast to other sentence endings – can be used to set up what she terms an “accountability-relevance” point – that is, a point where the speaker signals to the interlocutor that something is accountable at the moment, and thereby invites the interlocutor to make an inference about what that accountable issue might be. Park argues that this usage of *nuntey* figures primarily in interactionally delicate actions, and serves, among other things, to relieve the speaker of the burden of saying the “bottom line.”

The present paper considers a similar phenomenon in Mandarin Chinese. Specifically, it aims to demonstrate how the use of a Mandarin final particle, *ou*, can figure in the process of alerting the recipient to some implication beyond what has otherwise been reported or conveyed in the *ou*-suffixed utterance, conveying the sense that “there is more here than meets the eye!”

The paper is conversation-analytic in orientation. The analysis of this study draws primarily upon a corpus of approximately 2 hours of audiotaped telephone conversations and 14 hours of videotaped face-to-face¹ conversations among family members, friends and acquaintances. The data were collected in the US, Taiwan, and Mainland China.^{2,3}

2. The target form: final *ou* with a markedly high pitch or with some kind of pitch movement

Traditionally, Mandarin final particles, including the final particle *ou*, are characterized as inherently toneless, unstressed, and lacking definite intonation contours (e.g., Chao, 1968; Li and Thompson, 1981). An examination of the present corpus, however, quickly reveals that there are, in fact, two types of phonetically distinctive *ou* in the corpus. While one of them is produced with a flat, low pitch, and exhibits prosodic characteristics closer to what has been described for final particles in the literature, the other does not. This second type of *ou*, although prosodically bound to the immediately preceding utterance like the

¹ Although participants’ nonverbal conduct – such as laughter, facial expression, gestures, body orientation, and the like – are important components of face-to-face interaction, an examination of the data shows that nonverbal conduct does not appear to affect the meanings and functions of final *ou*. In other words, the use of final *ou* serves to accomplish the action of conveying the sense that “there is more here than meets the eye,” with or without accompanying nonverbal conduct by its speaker. In this paper, nonverbal conduct is therefore only addressed when it appears pertinent to the analysis – such as, for example, when the presence of such conduct can be understood as a display by the participants of their orientation to the action accomplished by final *ou*, or when nonverbal conduct by one participant turns out to be relevant to the subsequent use of final *ou* by another.

² The conversations recorded in Mainland China were collected by Qing Wang in the summer of 1996. I thank Qing Wang and Sandra Thompson for allowing me access to this data set.

³ While there may be some dialectal differences in the use of particles, the data suggest that the usage of final *ou* presented in this paper, although seemingly more prevalent in the Mandarin spoken in Taiwan, does occur in the Mandarin spoken in Mainland China, Cf., for example, examples (2) and (9).

first type, is produced either with a markedly high pitch, or with some kind of dynamic pitch movement, such as a rising or a falling-rising pitch contour.⁴

This paper considers this second type of prosodically marked *ou* (henceforth final *ou*).⁵ This final *ou* and its attached utterance are recurrently found in two kinds of sequential positions⁶ in the present corpus: (i) in first position where informing, reporting or story-telling is underway; and (ii) in responsive position where some implicit, yet potentially negatively-valenced interactional work is being done. Examples (1) and (2) respectively illustrate the use of final *ou* in these two sequential positions:^{7,8}

(1) (Café S560a; R606a)

1Y:→ *a- a na ge xiaohai- (hen-) piaoliang ou↑::*
 PRT PRT that C kid very beautiful PRT
 ‘And- and that kid- is (very-) pretty OU↑::’

2Y: *a dou bu xiang tamen liang ge*
 PRT all N like they two C
 ‘And/but (she) is not like the two of them at all.’

3R: *hhhh*
 (laugh)
 ‘hhhhhh’

(2) (WQ 1b) ((F and W are discussing the economic conditions of Mainland China.))

1F: *suoyi dongbei bijiao qiong ou [(zhe yangzi ma)*
 so north-east relatively poor PRT this way Q
 ‘So the Northeast is relatively poor? [Is that so?’

2M:→ *[↑dongbei bu qiong ou↑↓*
 north-east N poor PRT
 [‘↑The Northeast is not poor OU↑↓’

⁴ In my corpus, there are no discernible differences in usage between final *ou* produced with a distinctively high pitch and that produced with some kind of dynamic pitch movement. These two types of *ou* tokens will therefore be treated as one category and will be referred to as “final *ou*” in this paper.

⁵ For an analysis of the prosodically unmarked *ou*, i.e., final particle *ou* with a flat, low pitch, and for a discussion of how prosody may contribute to the import and function of the final particle *ou*, see Wu (2004).

⁶ In the study of conversation, the term “sequence” has been used to refer to “an orderly stretch of talk and other conduct in which some course of action gets initiated, worked through, and brought to closure” (Schegloff, 1995: 3). Sequences of turns therefore “are not haphazard but have a shape or structure, and can be tracked for where they came from . . . and where they might be going” (Schegloff, *ibid.*: 2). In the present study, sequential positioning is defined as the relative ordering of turns or turn-constructive units in a sequence: “First position” refers to the position where a sequence is initiated, and “responsive position” refers to a position where a relevant next action responsive to a prior one by another is due. In this study, “first position” and “responsive position” are defined by reference to their base sequence, rather than by reference to the overall sequential organization of the talk in which that base sequence is embedded.

⁷ The conventions used in the transcription of Mandarin utterances in the data fragments follow those developed by Gail Jefferson (see Atkinson and Heritage, 1984: ix–xvi). For a more detailed explication of the transcription notations employed in the transcript excerpts in this paper, see Appendix A.

⁸ Since both types of prosodically distinctive *ou* occur in my data, I have transcribed final *ou* with a flat, low pitch as “*ou*” (cf. line 1 in example (2)), and final *ou* with a distinctively high pitch, or with some kind of dynamic pitch movement as “*ou↑*”. In addition, to facilitate reading, final *ou* tokens to be scrutinized in the excerpts are all boldfaced.

In example (1), the *ou*-attached utterance (*na ge xiaohai- (hen-) piaoliang ou↑::*: ‘that kid- is (very-) pretty OU↑:::’) occurs in the midst of speaker W’s report of a mutual friend’s child. In example (2), the *ou*-attached utterance (*dongbei bu qiong ou↑* ‘The Northeast is not poor OU↑’) is produced to disconfirm speaker F’s proffered understanding of the economic conditions of the northeast area of Mainland China. Without going into further detail in these two sequences at the moment,⁹ suffice it to note that the use of these two final *ou* tokens – like many others in the data – cannot be easily explained by the traditional characterization of final *ou* as a marker of “warning” (Chao, 1968; Li and Thompson, 1981) or “exclamation” (Chao, 1968). Instead, as I will demonstrate in this paper, what seems to be intrinsic to the use of final *ou* in such sequences is a display by the speaker that what is conveyed or stated in the *ou*-suffixed utterance is of heightened news value and hence merits special attention.

While suffixing an utterance with final *ou* is not the only practice through which a Mandarin Chinese speaker can alert his/her interlocutor to something that is potentially noteworthy or newsworthy,¹⁰ there are two features of this practice of *ou*-suffixing which set it apart from the other practices which also serve a “newsmarking” function: First, the use of *ou*-suffixing has mainly to do with a speaker’s attempt to register a *heightened* sense of newsworthiness with respect to the matter at hand, and especially with respect to the piece of information suffixed with final *ou*. Second, the proposed heightened news value frequently (though not invariably¹¹) can only receive its due appreciation through the juxtaposition of another event or other circumstances.¹² This other event can be an ironic and unexpected twist to what is reported in the *ou*-suffixed utterance, and/or a particular sequential or situational background which serves as the backdrop for the *ou*-suffixed utterance.

In what follows, I will provide a unified account of how these two features are manifested in the use of final *ou* in sequentially first and responsive positions, as well as how these features contribute to the sense commonly associated with this final particle: “There is more here than meets the eye!” I will begin with cases in which final *ou* occurs in first position.

⁹ These two excerpts will be examined in more detail in Sections 3 and 4, respectively.

¹⁰ Final particle *ei*, for example, is observed to serve a similar newsmarking function, although how final *ei* and final *ou* differ in this regard is beyond the scope of the present study.

¹¹ Cf. example (4) in Section 3.1, as well as examples (7) and (8) in Section 3.3.

¹² As pointed out by one anonymous reviewer, terms such as “another event,” “other circumstances,” or “situational background” are fairly broad and even vague; an alternative account for this candidate phenomenon, as suggested by the reviewer, could be to consider it as a practice consisting of two components where the *ou*-suffixed component is preliminary to the “juxtapositioned-event” or the “punchline-component.” While this alternative account could nicely characterize some excerpts discussed in this paper, it presupposes that there are necessarily two components involved in this candidate phenomenon and that the second component will necessarily involve a twist or a “punchline.” Such presuppositions, however, are not always accurate, and will make it difficult to explain cases in which the *ou*-suffixed utterance is not followed by a juxtapositioned event (cf. examples (4), (7), and (8)) or those in which the *ou*-suffixed utterance occurs in responsive position (cf. Section 4). Thus, while acknowledging that terms such as “situational background,” “another event,” or “other circumstances” may be broad, I have nonetheless chosen to use these terms in formulating the candidate phenomenon introduced in this paper, on the grounds that they provide the necessary broadness required to come to terms with the diverse usages of final *ou* observed in my data.

3. The use of final *ou* in sequentially first position

3.1. Marking heightened newsworthiness: initial observations

As already noted, a major sequential environment in which final *ou* regularly occurs is as part of a turn in which informing, reporting, or story-telling is underway. As also noted, a major usage of *ou*-suffixing, here as elsewhere, is to register a particular sense of newsworthiness, whose proper understanding frequently turns on the juxtaposition of another event or other circumstances. As an initial illustration of this phenomenon, consider the following excerpt, taken from a multi-party conversation among a group of friends. Here, speaker W is talking about a car accident she recently had.

(3) (Tea Time s2A-214)

1W: <ei! hao haoxiao de shi wo hai mei jiang wan. zai zhe ge shihou (.)
 PRT very funny NOM thing I yet N speak finish at this C time
 <‘Hey, (there is one more) funny thing, I am not finished yet.
 At this time (.)’

2W: wo dou dai taiyang yanjing ma
 I all wear sun glasses PRT
 ‘I normally wore sunglasses,’

3W: yinwei w- yanjing- shizai- shou bu liao
 because eye really bear N able
 ‘because my- eyes- really- couldn’t tolerate.’

4W:→ <wo dou-wo you dai taiyang yanjing ou↑
 I all I have wear sun glasses PRT
 <‘I normally- I wore/was wearing sunglasses OU↑’

5W: danshi wo che huo zhuang wan yihou ne (.)
 but I car accident hit finish after PRT
 ‘but after the collision, (.)’

6W: yinwei wo yao-
 because I need
 ‘Because I needed to-’

7W: j- jingcha lai le a
 police come CRS/PFV PRT
 ‘The po- the police came,’

8W: na jiu jiao wo chu lai yixia a
 then then ask I go out awhile PRT
 ‘and then they asked me to get out (of the car) for a moment,’

9W: kan neng bu neng zoulu a
 see can N can walk PRT
 ‘and checked to see if (I) could walk,’

10W: shenme de a hou.
 what NOM PRT PRT
 ‘and things like that, you know.’

11 (0.5)

- 12W: *chu lai zhihou, wo shuo- yangguang hao qiang ou*
go out after I say sunshine very strong PRT
'And after I got out (of the car), I said-“The sunshine is really strong!”’
- 13W: *wo cai↑a wode taiyang yanjing wode taiyang yanjing↓*
I then PRT my sun glasses my sun glasses
'I was then like, ↑ “(Where’re) my sunglasses?”
“(Where’re) my sunglasses?”↓’
- 14W: *jieguo wode taiyang yanjing- (.)*
as:a:result my sun glasses
'And then my sunglasses- (.)’
- 15W: *hao hao de houn (.)*
fine fine ASSC PRT
'were- (.) perfectly, (.)’
- 16W: *zhe de hen hao ou↑*
fold CSC very well PRT
'were folded perfectly’
- 17F: *[hhh*
(laugh)
[‘hhh’
- 18W: *[zai wode hou zuo*
at my back seat
[‘on the back seat.’

As we can see, the final *ou* in line 4 is attached to speaker W’s claim that she was wearing sunglasses when this accident happened.¹³ Important to note for our present purposes here is the fact that this piece of information, as it transpires, in fact serves as an “interpretative key” (Schegloff, 1992: 202) to the recognition of the punchline which the speaker later produces, i.e., that the sunglasses were perfectly folded on the back seat after the violent collision (lines 14–18). Here, then, there is a sense that the final *ou* token is attached to an utterance which deserves special attention in its local context, not because it conveys information which is particularly unusual in itself,¹⁴ but because this is a piece of information by reference to which the story can be monitored step by step in the course of its telling, and by reference to which recipients may recognize the story’s punchline when it arrives. And, I suggest, it is just this sense that there is particular newsworthiness associated with, yet above and beyond what is conveyed in the *ou*-suffixed utterance, that final *ou* serves to register.

¹³ As the reader may have noted, there is another occurrence of final *ou* (*zhe de hen hao ou↑* ‘were folded perfectly OU↑’; line 16) in this excerpt. Although the sequence in which this final *ou* occurs is too involved to be explicated here, it should be noted that this final *ou* token does serve a similar function as proposed in this paper: As it turns out, speaker W’s sunglasses had just been tightened before the accident. Against this background, then, the fact that the sunglasses were perfectly folded on the back seat after the accident is not only newsworthy, but is indeed “unthinkable,” as the speaker later puts it. This final *ou* token thus, like many others in my data, can be understood as serving to register the implication that there is particular news value above and beyond what is stated in the *ou*-suffixed utterance. For a more detailed explication of the use of this final *ou* token, see Wu (2004).

¹⁴ In fact, as is evident in lines 2–3 in example (3), it is W’s habit to wear sunglasses.

A similar phenomenon is evident in example (1), discussed earlier, in which speaker Y is reporting and commenting on the child of a mutual friend (neither the friend nor the child is present on this occasion):

(1) (Café S560a; R606a)

1Y:→ *a- a na ge xiaohai- (hen-) piaoliang ou↑::*
 PRT PRT that C kid very beautiful PRT
 ‘And- and that kid- is (very-) pretty OU↑:::’

2Y: *a dou bu xiang tamen liang ge*
 PRT all N like they two C
 ‘And/but (she) is not like the two of them at all.’

3R: *hhhh*
 (laugh)
 ‘hhhhhh’

4M: *hhhh bao cuo le. hahahaha*
 (laugh) hold wrong CRS (laugh)
 ‘hhhh (They) brought back (the) wrong (baby from the hospital). hahaha’

Here, final *ou* is attached to the utterance conveying the information that this friend’s child is very pretty. And this information, as with the “sunglasses” episode examined above, can be seen as carrying heightened news value when predicated on another circumstance – here, the circumstance being that this child was born of parents who have very plain looks (line 2).

What is involved in the practice of *ou*-suffixing, then, is what can be termed a process of “second-order newsmarking.” That is, this practice is not merely used to mark the speaker’s perspective that the particle-marked information is newsworthy in its own right. Rather, by suffixing a piece of information with final *ou*, speakers not only mark the information as newsworthy; they also indicate that the invoked newsworthiness should be understood by reference to something that remains to be invoked or explicated. And, I would argue, it is by virtue of this quality of the newsmarking function that the use of final *ou* is commonly heard to convey the import that “there is more here than meets the eye!”

While the due appreciation of the newsworthiness embodied in the use of *ou*-suffixing frequently turns on the juxtaposition of another event or circumstance, such an event or circumstance is not always invoked or explicated subsequently, however. Example (4), from a newspaper article written by a psychiatrist about a counseling session he had with a terminal patient, provides a case in point. Prior to this excerpt, this patient was described as being highly suspicious that her cancer was terminal, even though her primary doctor had been reluctant to confirm this to her.¹⁵ This excerpt begins with a carefully-designed question by the psychiatrist in relation to this patient’s concerns:

¹⁵ It may be worthwhile to register a cultural difference here: Unlike most American doctors who may find it their duty to inform their patients of their life expectancies, many doctors in Taiwan or China are still reluctant to confirm terminal diagnoses.

(4) (“Zhufu yu Gaobie” (“Best Wishes and Farewell”), *United Evening News*, September 1, 2003)

- 1 “*ruguo bingqing zhende bu leguan,*”
if illness:condition really N optimistic
“‘If (your) condition really doesn’t/didn’t look good,’”
- 2 “*ni hui bu fangxin shenme shi?*” *wo xiaoxinde wen*
you ASP N relieve what thing I cautiously ask
“‘what will/would you be concerned about?’ I cautiously asked.”
- 3 “*du gaozhong de xiaohai, xiansheng,*”
study high:school ASSC child husband
“‘(My) high-school kid and husband,’”
- 4 “*tamen dou hai xuyao wode zhaogu,*”
they both still need my care
“‘they both still need my care.’”
- 5 “*danshi wo keneng guo bu liao zhe yi guan le ...*”
but I probably pass N able this C obstacle CRS
“‘But I probably cannot survive this ...’”
- 6 “*huitan zai tade chuoqi zhong jinxing zhe.*
meeting at her sob middle proceed ASP
‘The session continues while she sobs.’
- 7 “*wode xiongkou hen men.*
my chest very stuffy
‘My chest feels very tight.’
- 8 “*youyuzheng de xiong men jiu shi zhe zhong ganjue.*
depression ASSC chest stuffy just is this kind feeling
‘This is exactly the kind of chest pain that (a patient of) depression feels.’
- 9 “*zhishao, ni hai you jihui shuo chu ni dui tamende ai.*”
at:least you still have chance speak out you toward their love
“‘At least, you still have a chance to tell them how you love them.’”
- 10→ “*buyao rang zhe ge jihui xiaoshi ou↑*”
N let this C chance disappear PRT
“‘Don’t let the opportunity slip away OU↑’”
- 11 “*wo miao le yixia tade jiancha baogao,*
I glance ASP a:while her exam report
‘I glance at her examination report;’
- 12 “*daxian zhi ri keneng jiu zai shu ri zhi nei*
death ASSC day perhaps just at several day ASSC within
‘(she) probably has only a few days to live.’
- 13 “*ta keneng suishi xian ru hunmi,*
she maybe any:time sink into coma
‘She may slip into a coma any time;’
- 14 “*daoshi ta jiu mei you jihui zai shuo zhexie hua le.*
then she then N have chance further say these words ASP
‘(and) she’ll never have a chance to say these words then.’

Here, the use of *ou*-suffixing by the psychiatrist in line 10 (*buyao rang zhe ge jihui xiaoshi ou*↑ ‘Don’t let the opportunity slip away OU↑’) appears to be motivated on the ground of his (privileged) knowledge of the patient’s life expectancy (lines 11–14), implying that this patient will need to express her love for her family now or never. We can note that while the use of *ou*-suffixing here, as in those cases examined earlier, serves to alert its recipient to a heightened sense of newsworthiness associated with the matter being addressed, what renders the matter particularly newsworthy in this case (i.e., the patient’s brief life expectancy) apparently remains undisclosed to the recipient.¹⁶ Example (4) thus allows us to see that although the practice of *ou*-suffixing is a resource through which a speaker can register a piece of information as worthy of heightened attention “on this occasion, by this speaker, for this recipient,” against some situational background, the specifics of the situational background and the import of the use of *ou*-suffixing may not always be subsequently explicated. Much like following one’s statement with a suggestive wink or grimace, the practice of *ou*-suffixing introduces the relevance of, and alerts its recipient to, some implication above and beyond what was just said, while oftentimes leaving that implication for the recipient to determine. We will return to a few related issues in Section 3.3. But first let us examine a number of cases in which the recipient’s and coparticipants’ reactions can be seen as lending further support to the proposed usage of final *ou*.

3.2. Marking heightened newsworthiness: evidence from the reactions of the recipient and/or coparticipants

In the previous section, I have shown that a unique feature of this practice of *ou*-suffixing is to mark a heightened sense of newsworthiness above and beyond what is conveyed in the *ou*-suffixed utterance – a feature which, I have argued, contributes to a reading characteristically associated with the production of *ou*-suffixing, i.e., “there is more here than meets the eye!” To lend further support to this argument, we will examine in this section a number of fragments from the present corpus in which the recipient’s or

¹⁶ As one reviewer pointed out, given that example (4) is a reported case, we cannot know for sure what the psychiatrist left out in this report about what he had said to the patient, and hence it is not entirely clear whether or not what rendered the matter particularly newsworthy in this case indeed remained undisclosed to the recipient. While this is a valid point, several features in the psychiatrist’s depiction of his interaction with the patient reported in this article suggest that the psychiatrist had exercised great caution in talking to the patient, and appeared to have *avoided* revealing to the patient that she had but a few days to live. These features include, among others, (i) the psychiatrist’s choice of a hypothetical question (lines 1–2) in leading the patient to voice her concerns, (ii) his depiction of the manner in which he asked this question, i.e., *xiaoxinde* ‘cautiously’ (line 2), and (iii) his depiction of how he checked the paperwork to find out about the patient’s life expectancy, i.e., *miao* ‘glance (without having others notice)’ (line 11). These textual features and descriptions seem to be in perfect accord with his verbatim account of how he (cautiously) deployed an *ou*-suffixed utterance to alert the patient to the heightened newsworthiness involved in the information conveyed in the utterance – an account in which the background information needed for proper understanding of the heightened newsworthiness involved was *represented* not as part of what the psychiatrist/writer had told the patient, but as something which he had a privileged access to and which he was sharing with the reader. In any case, whether or not the psychiatrist actually comported himself in the ways described here, his account of this whole event and his usage of *ou*-suffixing in the article nevertheless give us a rare and valuable look into the thought processes of an *ou* speaker, calling attention to that which is otherwise normally left unsaid and only left for the recipient to work out – namely, what has motivated the use of *ou*-suffixing.

coparticipants' subsequent reactions can be seen as tuned in to this allusive, "double-barreled" newsmarking quality conveyed by *ou*-suffixing.

A return to example (1), about a mutual friend's child, offers one such instance. Recall that in this excerpt, as noted earlier, the heightened newsworthiness marked by the *ou*-suffixing regarding this child's good looks is apparently predicated on the additional information that this child does not look like the parents. Now it can be further noted that although the *ou* speaker does not openly explicate the upshot of her report after delivering these two pieces of information, recipients nonetheless display a clear understanding of the upshot and the "double-barreled" newsworthiness involved:

(1) (Café S560a; R606a)

1Y:→ *a- a na ge xiaohai- (hen-) piaoliang ou↑::*

PRT PRT that C kid very beautiful PRT

'And- and that kid- is (very-) pretty OU↑:::'

2Y: *a dou bu xiang tamen liang ge*

PRT all N like they two C

'And/but (she) is not like the two of them at all.'

3R: *hhhh*

(laugh)

'hhhhhh'

4M: *hhhh bao cuo le. hahahaha*

(laugh) hold wrong CRS (laugh)

'hhhh (They) brought back (the) wrong (baby from the hospital). hahaha'

Note here that following Y's delivery (line 2) of the information to which her prior *ou*-suffixed utterance is meant to be juxtaposed, both R and M produce quite a bit of laughter. These laugh tokens, while displaying these two recipients' orientations to the matter being addressed as "laughable," are arguably not produced in response to the information delivered in the *ou*-suffixed utterance (i.e., that this child is very pretty), nor the follow-up information (i.e., that this child does not look like her parents); neither information, by itself, is laughable. Rather, they are produced as a way of displaying an understanding and appreciation of the ironic twist predicated on the *juxtaposition* of these two pieces of information, as can be seen by the joke which M subsequently proffers (*bao cuo le* '(They) brought back (the) wrong (baby from the hospital)'; line 4). Here, the joke, built as a putative extension of speaker Y's report, speaks precisely to the ironic nature of the juxtaposition of these two reported events.

Whereas in example (1), the recipients display their understanding of the import conveyed by the *ou* speaker after the speaker has delivered the background information to which the *ou*-suffixed utterance is designed to be juxtaposed, there are cases in which recipients themselves bring up the juxtaposed background. Examples (5) and (6) provide two such instances.

Example (5) is taken from a multi-party conversation recorded in Taiwan. At this point in talk, speaker W is recounting a story about an American friend of hers who told W that she was planning to leave immediately after her family's Christmas Eve dinner to go on

vacation with her boyfriend in Hawaii.

(5) (Tea Time s079b)

- 1W: *yedan- ershisi:hao chi wan fan zhihou*
 Christmas the:twenty:fourth eat finish meal after
 ‘Christmas- On the twenty-fourth, after finishing dinner,’
- 2W: *ta jiu gen- yao gen ta nanpengyou fei dao- (.) xiaweiyi qu*
 she then with ASP with she boyfriend fly to Hawaii go
 ‘she then with- was going to fly to- (.) Hawaii with her boyfriend.’
- 3W:⇒ *chi wan- mashang jiu yao zou le ou↑*
 eat finish immediately then ASP leave CRS PRT
 ‘Right after she finished the meal- then she was planning to leave OU↑’
- 4 (.)
- 5W: *wo jiu shuo- ou zhende ou. na nide- fu- fumu bu hui zenmeyang*
 I then say PRT really PRT then your parents N ASP react
 ‘I then said- “Oh, really? Then won’t your- pa- parents react?”’
- 6W: *ta jingyade kan zhe wo*
 she surprisingly look ASP I
 ‘She was staring at me, surprised,’
- 7W: *fu(mu) zenme hui shuo zenmeyang ne*
 parents how:come ASP say react PRT
 ‘(and was like), “Why should (my) parents react?”’
- 8 (.)
- 9W: *hen jingyade kan zhe wo, wen wo- (.) %why%*
 very surprisingly look ASP I ask I why
 ‘She stared at me, looking very surprised, and asked me, “%Why%?”’
- 10W: *(wo shuo) ou*
 I say PRT
 ‘(I then said,) “Oh.”’
- 11 (.)
- 12W:⇒ *wo jiu shuo, <na shihou yishi dao shuo ou tch!*
 I then say that time aware arrive say PRT
 ‘I then said, <(Only) then did I start to become aware that tch!’
- 13H:⇒ *bu yi[yang]*
 N same
 ‘(it’s) differe[nt].’
- 14L:⇒ *[jiazhi guan bu tong la.*
 value view N same PRT
 [‘the (cultural) values are different.’

In line 3, W attaches a final *ou* to a piece of information in the story – the incident in which her American friend planned to leave immediately after a family dinner on Christmas Eve. While this kind of behavior is perfectly acceptable in this American family, as suggested by this friend’s reported reaction to W’s query (lines 6–9), this is something which W takes – and the interlocutors understand – as highly unusual according to Chinese cultural values

(lines 12–14). Here, we can see that the newsworthiness of the focal event registered by the use of final *ou* is not portrayed against a situational background subsequently invoked by the *ou* speaker; it is rather portrayed against the background of implicit cultural values and assumptions collaboratively constructed by the *ou* speaker and her interlocutors.

But the juxtaposed background of a focal event need not be invoked by the *ou* speaker, nor collaboratively constructed by the *ou* speaker and his/her interlocutors. Given that the heightened sense of newsworthiness embodied in the use of final *ou* frequently involves an ironic and/or unexpected twist of what is otherwise reported in the *ou*-suffixed utterance, it comes as no surprise that there are cases in which interlocutors attempt to *preempt* just this kind of twist upon hearing an *ou*-suffixed utterance. Example (6), taken from the same conversation as example (1), provides a case in point. Just prior to this excerpt, participants have been talking about how early a mother can find out a baby's gender during pregnancy. L then shares a story about her sister-in-law:

(6) (Café sony a39; normal a 51)

- 1L: *xiang wo- wo dixifu ta sheng le <hen haowan*
like I I sister-in-law she give:birth CRS very funny
'Like my- my sister-in-law, she's given birth (to a baby). <Very funny.'
- 2L: *zhiqian yisheng dou yizhi gen ta shuo nan de*
before doctor all continuously with she say male NOM
'Before, the doctor always told her that (it would be) a boy.'
- 3?: *zhende ou*
really PRT
'Really?'
- 4L:→ *hen a dou shuo nan de ou↑::.*
yes PRT all say male NOM PRT
'Yeah. (The doctor) always told (her that it would be) a boy OU↑::.'
- 5L: *jiu- [jiancha shihou dou shuo nan de*
just exam when all say male NOM
'Jus- [During the exams, (the doctor) always told (her that it would be) a boy.'
- 6M:⇒ *[(jieguo) sheng chulai shi nü de*
result give:birth out is female NOM
['(And it turned out) to be a girl (when the baby) was born.'
- 7L: *<ranhou deng ta jie-*
then wait she
<'Then (the day) she got-'
- 8L: *ta: shengchan na yi tian women (jiu) yao huiqu*
she give:birth that one day we then need return
'The day when she: (was expected to) give birth, we had to go back.'
- 9L: *°hhh ranhou wo didi- jie dianhua a*
then I brother receive phone PRT
'hhh Then my brother- received a phone call.'
- 10L: *ranhou- wo didi jiushi- ta yao jiao ta dasao*
then I brother that:is he need call she big:sister:in:law
'Then- my brother just- He has to call her elder sister-in-law.'

- 11L: *ta shuo dasao sheng le (ie)/(ei)*
 he say big:sister:in:law give:birth CRS/PFV PRT PRT
 ‘He said, “Elder sister-in-law has given birth (to a baby)!”’
- 12L: *ranhou- sh- shi nan de ei*
 then is male NOM PRT
 “‘And- i- it’s a boy EI!””
- 13L: *wo shuo feihua*
 I say waste:words
 ‘I said, “You’re telling me?””
- 14L: *<yinwei wo zao jiu zhidao ta jiancha shi [nan de =*
 because I early then know she exam is male NOM
 <‘cause I had known for a long time that her exam (report)
 said it’d be a [boy.’=
 (14 lines omitted, in which L reports a conversation she had with her
 brother, as well as one she later had with her mother in the hospital,
 which continues on line 29.)
- 29L: *ei, ranhou- ranhou wo mama jiu shuo (.) juran shi nü de zhe yang*
 PRT then then I mother then say unexpectedly is female NOM this way
 ‘Then- then my mother said, (.) “(I can’t believe) it is a girl.” Like that.’
- 30L: *(wo) shuo zenme hui. a ta jiu (zhao na ge) yisheng- (0.2)*
 I say how can then she then look:for that C doctor
 ‘I said, “How can it possibly be?” And she then (asked for the) doctor- (0.2)’
- 31L: *ni kan- lian chusheng zhihou wo- didi dou hai shuo shi nan de ie*
 you see even give:birth after I brother all still say is male NOM PRT
 ‘Look, even after (the baby) was born, my- brother was still telling
 me that it was a boy!’
- 32 (L continues to report that the doctor, without further examination,
 announced the baby to be a boy after its birth.)

In line 4, after confirming the reported event about the doctor’s prediction of the baby’s gender, L moves on to resume her story by recycling the key information (*dou shuo nan de* ‘(The doctor) always told (her that it would be) a boy’) and suffixing it with a final *ou*. As is apparent from the trajectory of L’s story, this final *ou* is used in complete accord with those examined earlier: marking “double-barreled” newsworthiness. Here, what is being marked as of heightened newsworthiness pertains not to the mere fact that the baby is expected to be a boy, but rather to the fact that the doctor, taking the baby’s gender for granted, announces the presumed but mistaken gender of the baby after its birth without further examination (lines 31–32).

Of particular interest in this excerpt is that, upon hearing L’s *ou*-suffixed utterance, M moves (in line 6) to preempt what she takes it L is about to articulate – a twist predicated on the presumed gender of the baby. While M turns out to be not completely correct in her anticipation of the trajectory of L’s subsequent talk, her preemptive move does display an accurate understanding of L’s deployment of the *ou*-suffixing as embodying an attempt to mark a heightened sense of newsworthiness and as adumbrating some kind of an

forthcoming ironic twist with regard to the information presented in the *ou*-suffixed utterance.¹⁷

In various ways, then, the fragments examined in this section provide further evidence for supporting the claim that the practice of *ou*-suffixing serves a “double-barreled” newsmarking function, registering the matter being addressed as containing a heightened news value when juxtaposed with some additional information. As these fragments have demonstrated, recipients of *ou*-suffixed utterances may display their understanding of this usage of final *ou* by providing sequentially relevant responses, by co-constructing or presenting the juxtaposed background being pointed to, or by attempting to preempt the foreshadowed twist adumbrated by the use of final *ou*.

3.3. Marking heightened newsworthiness: reflexive usage and interim summary

What we have seen thus far is how final *ou* can serve to register a heightened sense of newsworthiness of the event being reported, and how appreciation of newsworthiness of this kind turns on the juxtaposition of a background situation. We have also seen evidence from various reactions from interlocutors which lend further support to this “double-barreled” newsmarking quality of final *ou*.

Before we conclude this section, however, it needs to be pointed out that, like other conversational practices, the practice of *ou*-suffixing is one that can be exploited. That is, this practice can be used to reflexively embody, or otherwise intensify, the claim that the matter being described deserves special attention in the “here and now” – even though no contrasting background is presented. While this emphatic usage of final *ou* is also apparent in everyday conversation, its sense and the motivation for its use are particularly visible in the contexts of TV commercials or review programs, whose institutional goals are to maximize just this kind of viewer attention. Consider examples (7) and (8).

¹⁷ As pointed out by one reviewer, strictly speaking, M’s preemptive move in line 6 displays her orientation to the *ou*-suffixed TCU (turn constructional unit) of which *ou* is a part, rather than to the practice of *ou*-suffixing alone. However, given that final particles, including the particle *ou*, are always bound and enclitic to the preceding morphosyntactic units (Chao, 1968), whatever is conveyed and accomplished through *ou*-suffixing has to be conveyed and accomplished through an *ou*-suffixed TCU. Hence, it is essentially difficult, if not impossible, to locate examples in which participants orient to the practice of *ou*-suffixing alone. One way to resolve this compounding issue of whether the claimed action or stance is accomplished through the practice of *ou*-suffixing or through an *ou*-suffixed TCU is to juxtapose examination of each occurrence of *ou*-suffixing with that of an analytically comparable excerpt containing another final particle, and to explicate the differences, if any, exhibited in these excerpts. Although this is not a topic that can be taken up in the space available here, (cf., however, Wu (2004) and Wu (in preparation)), it is worth noting that in Mandarin Chinese, there are many resources other than *ou*-suffixing that can be used for marking a piece of information as newsworthy to its recipient. For example, speakers may simply deliver a piece of news and mark it with stress, as L does in line 2 in this excerpt (i.e., ‘Before, the doctor always told her that (it would be) a boy.’), or they may make mark it with the final particle *ei*, as done by L in line 12 (i.e., “‘And- it- it’s a boy EI!’”). That both of these practices serve to mark the target information as newsworthy in its own right, rather than as involving “double-barreled” newsworthiness, can be glimpsed from the recipients’ reactions in the next turns: In line 3, the information is responded to with a “newsmark” (cf. Jefferson, 1981), and in lines 13–14, the information is reportedly dismissed by the recipient as anything but newsworthy. Both responses apparently display the recipients’ orientation to the implication that what has been delivered has been delivered as news (in its own right); and both responses differ from the kinds of recipient responses to *ou*-suffixed utterances that we have observed in this and the previous sections.

Example (7) is taken from a Mandarin TV program, “A Tour of Night Markets on the Big Island” (*Yeshi Da Dao You*), and example (8) from another program, “Super Gourmet Mission” (*Chaoji Meishi Renwu*). In example (7), the host of the program is giving a few more details of the night market being reported on after mentioning its location, and in (8), the hostess is showcasing a restaurant in Hong Kong which reportedly has long been known for a particular Chinese dish – *baozaifan*.

(7) (A Tour of Night Markets on the Big Island; 26:45)

- 1 *zai zheli a, chuan de, yong de, wan de,*
at here PRT wear NOM use NOM play NOM
‘Here, (whether it’s) stuff to wear, stuff to use, or stuff to have fun with,’
- 2 *ying you jin you*
should have exhaust have
‘(you can) find it all,’
- 3 *geng bie shuo shi tainan chuming de meiwei xiaochi la*
even N say is (place) well-known ASSC delicious snack PRT
‘not to mention the well-known delicious Tainan snacks!’
- 4→ *kanguanmen, you jihui yiding yao lai guang guang ou↑*
viewers have opportunity definitely have:to come shop:around shop:around PRT
‘Viewers, you definitely should come and shop around if you get a chance OU↑’

(8) (Super Gourmet Mission; 35:34)

- 1 *tianleyuan zai jiulong diqu ne, shi mai baozaifan de lao zihao*
(restaurant) at (place) area PRT is sell (dish) ASSC old brand
‘Tianleyuan (restaurant) has long been known for “baozaifan” in the Kowloon area.’
- 2→ *hen duo xianggang ren de di:yi wan baozaifan na,*
very many H.K. person ASSC first bowl (dish) PRT
jiu shi zai zheli chi de ou↑
just be at here eat ASSC PRT
‘Very many Hong Kong people had their first bowl of “baozaifan” here OU↑’

In example (7), final *ou* is attached to the host’s invitation to the viewers to pay a visit to the night market; in example (8), final *ou* is attached to a piece of supporting evidence for the long-standing reputation of this restaurant’s *baozaifan* – that is, the fact that very many people in Hong Kong had had their first *baozaifan* at this restaurant. In each case, the use of final *ou* – like many others in this TV program – does not seem to be pointing to any contrasting background, the presence of which is otherwise frequently needed for the proper understanding of an event’s heightened news value, as already discussed. Rather, what the final *ou* appears to be doing in each excerpt is to emphasize or intensify the newsworthiness of the targeted information; that is, it is used to *reflexively constitute* the emphatic reading regularly associated with its use, and to invite its recipients/viewers to just this kind of reading. That the final *ou* is used here for emphatic purposes can be reinforced by the fact that each of these *ou*-suffixed turns also contains other intensifiers – for example, the use of *yiding* ‘definitely’ and the direct address term *kanguanmen*

‘viewers’ in example (7) and the use of *hen duo* ‘very many’ and *di yi* ‘the first’ in example (8); all of these appear to be deployed and designed to highlight the salience and significance of the information being reported.

To summarize, this section has illustrated the use of final *ou* in first position. In this sequential position, final *ou* is commonly used to register a heightened sense of newsworthiness of the event being reported. As we have seen, this heightened news value regularly turns on the juxtaposition of a background situation which, as we have also seen, may be invoked by the *ou* speaker, the interlocutor(s), both, or neither. In the last scenario – where no contrasting background is presented – I have suggested that the use of final *ou* is indexical and allusive in nature; that is, its very occurrence may reflexively embody or otherwise constitute the emphatic quality that is otherwise regularly associated with its use.

In the next section, we will see that registering an emphatic reading of what is being reported can also be observed in the use of final *ou* in responsive position, although the associated purposes of its use are particularized distinctively in this sequential position.

4. The use of final *ou* in sequentially responsive position

In the previous section, we noted two properties exhibited by the use of final *ou* in first position. First, its use is mainly associated with the speaker’s attempt to accord a heightened sense of newsworthiness to the event being reported. Second, the proposed heightened sense of newsworthiness is frequently only able to receive its due appreciation via the lamination of another event or other circumstances.

In this section, we will see that these two properties are also observed in final *ou* when it occurs in responsive position. In this sequential position, the use of final *ou* is also designed to propose a marked sense of newsworthiness with respect to what is being stated or conveyed in the particle-suffixed turn. Unlike the use of final *ou* in first position, however, this sense should be understood not in light of the juxtaposition of a background event, but in light of its relationship to what another has just said or done in the current interaction; that is, its use, as we will see, regularly serves to allude to some negatively-valenced interactional project it attempts to accomplish in the local conversational environment.

One of these negatively-valenced projects frequently observed in the present corpus is issuing a disagreement. Example (9), discussed earlier as example (2), offers a straightforward case. This excerpt is taken from a conversation between a man from Mainland China (M) and a woman from Taiwan. Just before this excerpt, M has mentioned that it is difficult to grow rice in the northeast area of Mainland China. To this, F proffers a candidate understanding:

(9) (WQ 1b)

1F: *suoyi dongbei bijiao qiong ou.* [(zhe yangzi ma)
so north-east relatively poor PRT this way Q
‘So the Northeast is relatively poor? [(Is that so?)’

- 2M:→ [↑*dongbei bu qiong ou*↑↓
north-east N poor PRT
[↑The Northeast is not poor OU↑↓]
- 3F: *bu qiong [ma?*
N poor Q
'(It's) not [poor?]'=
- 4M: [*nei ge* (.) <*yin(wei) na ge dadou* (.)
that C because that C soybean
[‘That uh (.) <‘cause the soybeans (.)’
- 5M: *.hhh dadou (k)- mai de jiaqian hen hao*
soybean sell ASSC price very good
'*.hhh soybeans* can be sold at a good price.'
- 6M:→ <*dongbei mianfen ye hen hao* [<*dongbei bu qiong ou*↑
north-east flour also very good north-east N poor PRT
<‘The Northeast’s flour is also very good. [<The Northeast is not poor OU↑.]’
- 7F: [*dadou na lai zuo shenme*
soybean take come do what
[‘What’re soybeans used for?’

As we can see, M employs two tokens of final *ou* in this excerpt, both attached to dispreferred responses. The first one (in line 2) is attached to a disconfirmation of F’s proffered understanding of the economic situation of the Northeast of Mainland China. The second one (in line 6) is attached to the reassertion of his prior position, which comes as a conclusion at the end of a series of accounts (lines 4–6).

Similarly, in example (10), we observe the same kind of *ou*-suffixed utterance in the context of disagreeing. In this excerpt, participants are discussing a new school (*Songshan*) and its ranking relative to several other top-ranking senior high schools.

(10) (CS Party regular 344a)

- 1C: *yinwei xiang na ge songshan gaozhong a xin chengli de a*
because like that C (school) senior:high PRT newly establish NOM PRT
'Because like Songshan Senior High, (it's) a new school.'
- 2C: <*keshi- pai- paiming ye-*
but rank also
<‘But- (its) ran- ranking also-’
- 3L: *hen [gao*
very high
'(is) very [high.]’
- 4C: [*bian hen gao*
become very high
[‘is now very high.’
- 5T: [*yizhi tiao*
continuously jump
[‘(It’s been) continuously moving up (in the rankings).’

- 6C: [haoxiang-(.) dui. haoxiang zai jian- um:: jianguo::: [[gen na ge::
 seem right seem at (school) with that C
 [‘Seem-(.) Yeah. Seems to rank between Jian- um: Jianguo: [[and the ::’
- 7T: [[zhong
 (school)
 [[‘Zhong-’
- 8W:→ [bu keneng ying chenggong ba
 N possible win (school) PRT
 [‘(It) can’t be ranked higher than Chenggong!’
- 9C: [haoxiang bi-
 seem compare
 [‘Seems more-’
- 10T: [[meiyou la. meiyou
 no PRT no
 [[‘Not really. No.’
- 11C:→ [[haoxiang bi- haoxiang bi chenggong hai gao [[ou↑
 seem compare seem compare (school) even high PRT
 [[‘Seems more- seems to be ranked higher than Chenggong [OU↑.’
- 12T: [[keneng-
 probably
 [‘Probably-’
- 13T:→ yijing ying chenggong le ou↑
 already surpass (school) CRS PRT
 ‘has already passed Chenggon OU↑.’
- 14L: [ou zhende ou
 PRT really PRT
 [‘Oh, really?’

Here, it can be noted that C’s report of the ranking of Songshan Senior High, as between the most prestigious high school in the area (*Jianguo*) and another school, ends with a word search for the name of the latter (line 6). In response, W offers (line 8) a candidate understanding of the school being searched for; this proffered candidate understanding (*bu keneng ying chenggong ba* ‘(It) can’t be ranked higher than Chenggong’), however, is formulated negatively, conveying a strong epistemic stance on the part of the speaker that what is being entertained (that *Songshan* ranks higher than *Chenggong*) is not possible. In lines 11 and 12–13, C and T,¹⁸ respectively, move to disagree with W. These two disagreements, notably, are both *ou*-suffixed.

It is worth noting that the *ou*-suffixed utterances in examples (9) and (10) – like many others in the corpus – are similar not only in that they occur in a disagreement sequence, and specifically in a “dispreferred second turn” where a counter-informing is being made; they also share a common characteristic in that none of these *ou*-suffixed counter-informings are prefaced by “contrastive” markers, such as *danshi* or *keshi* (‘but’).

¹⁸ Here, T appears to be agreeing with W in line 10 (*meiyou la. meiyou* ‘Not really. No.’), but then revises his position and initiates an *ou*-suffixed disagreement in lines 12–13.

What these two characteristics suggest, then, is that the interactional work of disagreeing accomplished through these *ou*-suffixed utterances is not built to be confrontational or counteractive. It is rather more of a product of the strategic employment of *ou*-suffixed informing. That is, by bringing to the recipient's attention something that he/she is otherwise unaware or uninformed of, the speaker displays to the recipient that what the recipient has conveyed or stated in the prior turn is problematic with reference to this new information. The *ou* tokens in these examples, therefore, are not used to register disagreement per se, but can be understood in view of the emphatic "newsmarking" function noted earlier in Section 3. There, it may be recalled, final *ou* is used to mark the extraordinary character of the event being reported, whereas here – in responsive position – the use of final *ou* serves to alert recipients to some negatively-valenced interactional work currently in progress – by alerting them to the existence of a divergence between what they have conveyed or stated in a prior turn and what is conveyed or stated in the *ou*-suffixed utterance.

The exploitation of the emphatic newsmarking function of final *ou* is also observed in example (11). Here, the *ou*-suffixed utterance is produced in a turn with which the speaker declines a prior speaker's request. This sequence of talk begins with L's suggestion that W, who is studying in the US and is back home for a vacation, should try to install a certain piece of Chinese software (*Yitian*) in her computer after returning to the US (lines 1–4).

(11) (Tea Time R375A; s2a313)

- 1L: *baituo: xiaojie ni- ni- ni-*
 please miss you you you
 'Please: young lady, you- you- you-'
- 2L: *ni nong yidian yitian: de huiqu nide diannao limian- guan jinqu*
 you bring a:little (Chinese software)NOM back your computer inside install into
 'Why don't you you bring the Yitian with you and install it in- your computer.'
- 3L: *women yao da %e-mail% yong zhongwen gei ni jiu hao le. hh*
 we want send e-mail use Chinese to you then fine CRS (laugh)
 'Then we can %e-mail% you in Chinese. hhhh'
- 4L: *bu yao [jiao women xie*
 N need ask we write
 'Don't [ask us to write'
- 5W:→ *[xitong you- you- wenti ou↑*
 system have have problem PRT
 ['The system will have problems then OU↑'
- 6L: *[(...) ma*
 Q
 ['(...)??'
- 7F: *[%kam boe sai%*
 really N can
 ['%(It) won't work?%'
- 8W: *xitong de guanxi.*
 system ASSC matter
 '(It's because of) the problem of the system.'

9 (W elaborates the potential problems)

In this example, L's request is implicitly declined through an *ou*-suffixed utterance in line 5 (*xitong you- you- wenti ou*↑ 'The system will have problems then OU↑'), which brings to the interlocutor's attention the fact that some potential problems may occur as a result of this request. It is interesting to note that while this *ou*-suffixed utterance is double-edged, i.e., bringing in a piece of new information while at the same time declining a request, it is the former that seems to get attended to by both the interlocutor (in line 7) and the *ou* speaker (in line 8 and beyond).

But final *ou* figures not only in contexts where a request is implicitly declined. It can also be attached to a more explicit rejection of an expectation or a presupposition. Example (12), which is a continuation of the talk about the sunglasses incident discussed earlier, offers a case in point. Here, as the sequence of this incident is brought to a possible completion, one participant, H, turns to F (line 44), asking her whether or not she had already known about this accident, given that she has chosen to give W a book, "The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying," as a gift.¹⁹

(12) (Tea time, Sony tape 2 side a 226, simplified)

41W: *suoyi (nei)/(lei). <hao qiguai*
so PRT PRT very strange
'So. <How strange.'

42 (0.5)

43W: *zhe de hao hao de ei.*
fold CSC well well NOM PRT
'(They were) folded very well.'

44H: *(a)/(na) ni zhidao ma=*
PRT PRT you know Q
'(And/then) did you know?'

45H: =*[weisheme ni mai hh *xizang sheng sihh shu* hh=* (*to * infiltrated with laughter)
why you buy (laugh) Tibet life death book (laugh)
['Why did you buy *"The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying?"* hhh']

46F: = *[hahahaha.hhh.hhh =*
(laugh)
=[*'hahahaha.hhh.hhh'*]

47F:→ =*<wo zhidao- wo bu zhidao zhe jian shiqing ou*↑=
I know I N know this C thing PRT
=<'I know- I did not know this story OU↑'

48F: =*hhh *<°zhe jian shi-°>*
(laugh) this C thing
='hhh *< ° this event-°>'

¹⁹ Another concurrent conversation is not included in this excerpt.

- 49F: *ta che huo zhe jian shi wo bu zhidao** (*to * infiltrated with laughter)
 she car accident this C thing I N know
 ‘the event about her having had a car accident I didn’t know.’*

Here, it is notable that H’s question in line 44, built (through the use of the discourse marker ‘and/then’) as in some way connected to the just-prior storytelling sequence, is immediately followed by another question (line 45) which requests an account for why F has chosen the book that she had. In and through the very design and placement of these questions, H can be heard to build in these questions a tongue-in-cheek assumption that F must have previously learned about this accident – i.e., that her selection of a book with the theme of life and death as a gift and W’s having had a near-death experience is more than a coincidence. These assumption-implicated questions are first met with laughter (line 46), then a disconfirmation (line 47), and finally F’s reassurance of her prior ignorance of the matter in question (lines 48–49). Notice that the disconfirmation here is, once again, *ou*-suffixed.

What holds across the cases we have seen thus far is the existence of a contrast between what a prior speaker has displayed to have known or expected, and what has been conveyed or noted in the *ou*-suffixed utterance. The use of final *ou* in these excerpts, I suggest, serves to alert its recipients to just this kind of contrast, and to the potentially negative interactional work the manifestation of this contrast is meant to accomplish – interactional work such as disagreeing (e.g., examples (9)–(10)), declining a request (e.g., example (11)), and denying a presupposition (e.g., example (12)).

However, while the use of final *ou* in responsive position commonly serves to put its recipient on alert that some additional interactional work is being done through the *ou*-suffixed utterance, this kind of interactional work is not always predicated on a contrast resulting from a prior speaker’s otherwise displayed expectation or knowledge. In fact, final *ou* can be used to instruct its recipient in something that he/she has otherwise not expected, or has displayed to not expect. The traditional characterization of final *ou* as conveying an import of “warning” (Chao, 1968; Li and Thompson, 1981) appears to fall under this category. Examples (13) and (14) illustrate this usage.

In example (13), W is talking about a Filipino maid whom her family has hired.

(13) (Tea time Sony tape2 a315)

- 1W: *ta dou pian women shuo- (0.3)*
 she all lie we say
 ‘She had been lying to us that- (0.3)’
 2W: *ta dou pian women shuo ta bu- ta: zhiyou jia-*
 she all lie we say she N she only speak
 ‘She had been lying to us that she: couldn’t- she: only spo-’
 3W: *ta zhiyou hui jiang yi:diandian zhe yangzi*
 she only can speak a:little this way
 ‘she could only speak a little bit (of Chinese). Like that.’
 4W: *↑caihhh guai, hou, ta hui jiang hao duo*
 just strange(exclamation) she can speak very much
 ‘↑That’s not true (at all). Hey, she can speak a lot!’

- 5W: *ta hui ting hao duo ou*
 she can hear very much PRT
 ‘She can understand a lot!’
- 6L: *zhende ou=*
 really PRT
 ‘Really.’=
- 7W: =*suoyi wo jiu zai ta mian qian jiang*
 so I then at she face front speak
 =‘So I then said, in her presence.’
- 8W:→ *hei:: nimen dou buyao xiaokan ta ou↑*
 hey you all N belittle she PRT
 ‘“Hey::, don’t you guys belittle her OU↑”’
- 9W: *ta hui ting zhongwen*
 she can hear Chinese
 ‘“She can understand Chinese.”’
- 10L: *zhe yangzi ou=*
 this way PRT
 ‘Really.’=
- 11W: =*zai ta mian qian jiang*
 at she face front speak
 =‘Saying (so) in her presence.’

In this span of talk, W describes (lines 1–5) how this Filipino maid had lied about her ability to speak and understand Chinese (presumably to gain a favorable access to the content of people’s talk when the talk is conducted in a language – namely, Chinese – that they would otherwise not expect her to understand.) In line 8, W reports herself to have sounded a warning to people who had otherwise underestimated this Filipino maid’s Chinese proficiency (as well as her access to their talk); this warning is suffixed with a final *ou*.²⁰

Example (14), taken from a dinner party among a group of friends from college, is another example of an *ou*-suffixed utterance serving to issue a warning. This excerpt begins with the end of a larger story-telling sequence, in which X, a guy who is married but whose wife is not co-present in this conversation, is talking about a woman both he and his wife met at another party. Here, the *ou*-suffixed utterance occurs in line 10, and it is produced at a possible completion point of an embedded sequence, in which X is giving a report on this woman’s dress (lines 1–3) and an embarrassing situation she had to face in the party (i.e., sitting on the floor with a sexy dress on; lines 8–9):

²⁰ The production of final *ou* here may also be related to a twist that W apparently intends to convey and register in her story, namely, that she not only revealed to the Filipino maid that she had now discovered that the latter had been lying; she also revealed it in a pointed manner (i.e., in Chinese and in the presence of this Filipino maid, who would not have understood W’s accusation of her having been lying, had her Chinese proficiency been at the level at which she claimed it to be). Like many others in the data, then, this final *ou* token can be understood as serving here to point to some implication beyond what has otherwise been reported in the *ou*-suffixed utterance, conveying the sense that there is more here than meets the eye!

(14) (CS Party R876A)

- 1 [(Iconic gestures of the length of the skirt and the shape of a tank top)
- 2X: [*chuan duo duan a*, <*ranhou zhe ge chen- chuan zhe ge-*
wear how short PRT then this C blouse wear this C
[‘The (skirt) she was wearing was really short! <And she wore
this- blou- (She) wore this-’
- 3X: *jiaozuo shenme- xiao- [na zhong xiao beixin*
call what little that kind little blouse
‘what-is-this-called- this kind of tank- [tank top.’
- 4L: [*dui dui dui*
right right right
[‘Right right right.’
- 5L: [[*hhhh*
(laugh)
[[‘*hhhhhh*’
- 6C: [[*hhhh*
(laugh)
[[‘*hhhhh*’
- 7X: *dui a*
right PRT
‘Yeah.’
- 8X: *ranhou- na:bian- (.) you bu neng zuo yizi, you yao zuo dixia*
then there also N able sit chair also need sit ground
‘And then- there- (.) there were no chairs, (so she) had to sit on the floor,’
- 9X: *a:: ou:: you:de:meiyou:de. ou::, zhe yang*
(exclamation) stuff:like:that PRT this way
‘a::ou:: and all that. oh:: like this.’
- 10W:→ *you luyin ou*↑
have recording PRT
‘(You are) being recorded OU↑’
- 11 (people laugh)
- 12W: *yishang shi xiaoxu shuo de. [hhhhh*
above is (name) say NOM (laugh)
‘The preceding is reported by Xiao Xu. [hhhhh’
- 13C: [*hhhhh*
(laugh)
[‘*hhhhh*’
- 14X: *luyin mei guanxi a. wo laopo ye kandao le a*
recording N matter PRT my wife also see CRS PRT
‘It’s OK that (I was) recorded. My wife saw it too.’
- 15 (people laugh)

To understand how the *ou*-suffixed utterance in this example figures in its sequential environment, several features of this sequence need to be noted.

First, X's depiction of the event is allusive in character, probably with a sexually-charged implication that the woman had incidentally exposed her body to the eyes of those who were present, including X himself. Second, this report is delivered in a highly enthusiastic manner: It contains several tokens of emphatic exclamation (i.e., *aou*, *ou* in line 9) and is produced at a faster tempo (marked by "<" in line 2 in the transcript), with a lot of accompanying iconic gestures (line 1). X's report of the event in question and his display of enthusiasm about it were initially treated by two coparticipants as "laughable," as evidenced by the laugh tokens in lines 5–6. However, upon completion of his subsequent elaboration (lines 8–9), where the sexual nature of the event is more explicitly portrayed, another coparticipant, W, provides an *ou*-suffixed informing, to wit, that all of X's prior talk and behavior have been officially documented.

While W's informing here, with the suffixing of final *ou*, is meant to bring its recipient's attention to something that he has otherwise overlooked or had no knowledge of, exactly what this *ou*-suffixed informing is alluding to is left unsaid. It is worth noting that it is *the recipient* of the informing who subsequently explicates the interactional import of the *ou*-suffixed utterance: In line 14, recipient X first partially repeats what has been said in the *ou*-suffixed turn, i.e., *luyin* 'recording,' and then follows it with his comment, *mei guanxi* 'doesn't matter' – thereby dismissing his having been tape-recorded as anything worthy of concern. Important to note is that, by proposing such a dismissal, X actually displays that he understands the upshot of the *ou*-suffixed informing as a warning for some kind of trouble. Note also that, by following his dismissal with an account (i.e., that his wife was co-present on that occasion), X further shows that he not only understands the *ou*-suffixed utterance as a warning; he also knows specifically what kind of warning it is about – i.e., the possibility that his wife will be later informed (probably through availability of this videotape) of his enthusiasm for the sexual appeal of another woman, as conveyed through his prior talk.

Example (14) thus provides us with a nice instance in which final *ou* figures in a turn in which a warning is apparently issued by an *ou*-speaker, and a turn to which its recipient apparently orients as conveying an import of warning. As with example (13), the use of final *ou* in this example is well-fitted to our characterization of final *ou* as serving an emphatic newsmarking function – here, as I have suggested, final *ou* is used to bring its recipient's attention to something that he/she has otherwise not expected or has otherwise overlooked.

In this section, we have seen that in responsive position, final *ou* is regularly associated with utterances which are used as vehicles to accomplish potentially negatively-valenced interactional work. Such negatively-valenced interactional work, as we have seen, may range from disagreeing (examples (9)–(10)), declining a request (example (11)), and denying a presupposition (example (12)), to issuing a warning (examples (13)–(14)). We have also noted that, while these activities are commonly negatively-valenced, they are nonetheless not designed to be confrontational. Central to this wide range of activities is the fact that there exists a gap in knowledge, information, expectations, awareness, or orientation between a prior speaker and the *ou* speaker. I have suggested that the use of final *ou* – with its emphatic newsmarking quality – serves to alert its recipients to just this kind of gap, and, in the meantime, alerts them to the interactional project being accomplished when the existence of such a gap is being brought to the surface or is being underscored.

5. Conclusion

This paper has provided an empirical account of the use of a Mandarin final particle – final *ou* produced with a markedly high pitch, or with some kind of dynamic pitch movement – in sequentially first position and in sequentially responsive position. We have observed that despite its occurrence in two seemingly distinct positions, the use of final *ou* shares two common features: First, its use serves mainly to register a heightened sense of newsworthiness with respect to what is being reported in the *ou*-suffixed utterance. Second, the proper understanding of the proposed heightened news value frequently turns on the juxtaposition of another event or situation, which may or may not be subsequently invoked.

In the case when final *ou* is used in first position, its use is generally designed to underscore the fact that the event being reported in the *ou*-suffixed utterance contains information which was not only previously unknown to its recipient, but which is also extraordinary or allusive in character. We have also noted that the use of final *ou* in this position can operate reflexively – that is, it can be used to reflexively constitute and otherwise embody the emphatic force generally associated with its use, even though no contrasting background is overtly presented.

When final *ou* occurs in responsive position, we have observed that there commonly exists a gap in knowledge, information, expectations, awareness, or orientation between a prior speaker and the *ou* speaker. We have also noted that what is involved in the use of final *ou* here is a process of the strategic employment of *ou*-suffixed informing. That is, by bringing to the recipient's attention something that he/she is otherwise unaware or uninformed of through an *ou*-suffixed informing, the *ou* speaker in effect invites the recipient to see that what the recipient has conveyed, displayed, or stated in the prior turn is problematic with reference to this new information. And in doing so, the *ou* speaker also alerts the recipient to the potentially negatively-valenced interactional work currently in progress – interactional work such as disagreeing, declining a request, denying a presupposition, or issuing a warning. In such a sequential position, then, final *ou* can also be seen as marking a heightened sense of newsworthiness by reference to a situational background. Here, I have suggested, the ground to which an *ou*-suffixed utterance is intended to be juxtaposed is not a background event, but the immediately local configuration of the preceding action – that is, the talk or behavior by the recipient in a previous turn.

As noted at the beginning of this paper, it has been observed cross-linguistically that parties to talk-in-interaction do not always speak their minds straightforwardly; instead, they may utilize available resources in their linguistic or cultural repertoires – be they connectives, adverbials, prosody, confirmatory repeats, or formulating practices – to just hint at, or allude to, the actions they intend to accomplish. Our discussion of the various uses of final *ou* in Mandarin conversation suggests that the practice of *ou*-sufficing is just one such resource in Mandarin Chinese: This practice not only allows a speaker to point to a heightened sense of newsworthiness with regard to a particular event, and at the same time to point to the implication that the proper understanding of the proposed newsworthiness requires a juxtaposition of another event or other circumstances; this practice also allows a speaker to accomplish negatively-valenced interactional work in a

less confrontational or counteractive way. It seems cogent, then, to conclude from this discussion that the practice of *ou*-suffixing is a resource which a Mandarin speaker may draw on to highlight the salience and newsworthiness of a focal event – commonly by alerting his/her interlocutor to the implication that “there is more here than meets the eye!”

Acknowledgement

Portions of this paper were presented at the meeting of the “Language, Interaction, and Social Organization” Research Focus Group at UCSB on May 31, 2002. I am grateful to Emanuel Schegloff and Sandra Thompson for their guidance on the research project upon which this paper is based, and to Wayne Beach, Irene Koshik, Adrienne Lo, Sandra Thompson and an anonymous reviewer for their helpful comments on previous drafts.

Appendix A. Transcription conventions

The transcription conventions used in this article follow those developed by Jefferson (1984), with some modifications.

Overlapping talk

- [A left bracket indicates the point at which a current speaker’s utterance is overlapped by the talk of another, which appears on the next line attributed to another speaker. If there is more than one left bracket in an utterance, then the second indicates where a second overlaps begins. Both the utterance which is overlapped and the utterance which overlaps are indicated by this symbol.
- [[In cases where confusion may arise due to high frequency of overlaps among conversational coparticipants, a double left bracket will be used to resolve the possible confusion.

Silence

- (0.5) Numbers in parentheses indicate silence, represented in tenths of a second.
- (.) A dot in parentheses indicates a “micropause.”

Code-switching

- %oh% A pair of percentage signs indicates that the talk between them is produced in languages other than Mandarin, such as English or Taiwanese.

Various aspects of speech delivery

- :: Colons are used to indicate the prolongation or stretching of the sound just preceding them. The more colons, the longer the stretching.
- Underlining is used to indicate some form of stress or emphasis.

__:	Combinations of underlining and colons are used to indicate intonation contours.
-	A hyphen after a word or part of a word indicates a cut-off or a self-interruption.
.hhh	Hearable aspiration is shown where it occurs in the talk by the letter “h” – the more h’s, the more aspiration.
<	A left-facing arrow marks the onset where a stretch of talk is markedly rushed or compressed.
>	A right-facing arrow marks the onset where a stretch of talk is markedly slowed or drawn out.
=	Equal signs are used to mark that (1) there is no interval between adjacent utterances by different speakers, the second being latched immediately to the first; (2) different parts of a single speaker’s utterance constitute a continuous flow of speech although they have been carried over to another line, by transcript design, to accommodate an intervening interruption.
↑	An upward-pointing arrow marks rising shifts in intonation.
↓	A downward-pointing arrow marks falling shifts in intonation.
◦ ◦	Double degree signs indicate that the talk between them is quieter than the surrounding talk.

Other notation

()	When all or part of an utterance is in parentheses, this indicates uncertainty on the transcriber’s part.
→	An arrow sign of this type specifies the target of focus in the transcription.
⇒	An arrow sign of this type specifies the primary target of focus in cases where an arrow sign has already been deployed to direct readers’ attention to some turn structure in facilitating the interpretation of some overall sequential contexts.

Appendix B. Abbreviations

ASSC	associative (<i>-de</i>)
ASP	ASPECTUAL marker
BA	<i>Ba</i>
BEI	<i>Bei</i>
CRS	currently relevant state (<i>le</i>)
CSC	complex stative construction
C	classifier
N	negator
NOM	nominalizer (<i>de</i>)
PRT	particle
PRV	perfective (<i>-le</i>)
Q	question marker

References

- Atkinson, J. Maxwell, Heritage, John (Eds.), 1984. *Structures of Social Action: Studies in Conversation Analysis*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Chao, Yuen-ren, 1968. *A Grammar of Spoken Chinese*. University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles.
- Jefferson, Gail, 1981. The abominable “Ne?”: a working paper exploring the phenomenon of post-response pursuit of response. University of Manchester, Department of Sociology, Occasional Paper No. 6.
- Jefferson, Gail, 1984. Transcript notation. In: Atkinson, J. Maxwell, Heritage, John (Eds.), *Structures of Social Actions: Studies in Conversation Analysis*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. ix–xvi.
- Li, Charles, Thompson, Sandra A., 1981. *Mandarin Chinese: A Functional Reference Grammar*. University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles.
- Ohori, Toshio, 1995. Remarks on suspended clauses: a contribution to Japanese phraseology. In: Shibatani, Masayoshi, Thompson, Sandra (Eds.), *Essays in Semantics and Pragmatics: In Honor of Charles J. Fillmore, John Benjamins, Amsterdam/Philadelphia*, pp. 201–218.
- Park, Yong-Yae, 1999. The Korean connective *nuntey* in conversational discourse. *Journal of Pragmatics* 31, 191–218.
- Pomerantz, Anita, 1980. Telling my side: ‘Limited access’ as a ‘fishing’ device. *Sociological Inquiry* 50, 186–198.
- Schegloff, Emanuel A., 1992. In another context. In: Duranti, Alessandro, Goodwin, Charles, (Eds.), *Rethinking Context: Language as an Interactive Phenomenon*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 191–227.
- Schegloff, Emanuel A., 1995. *Sequence Organization*. Unpublished manuscript. University of California, Los Angeles.
- Schegloff, Emanuel A., 1996. Confirming allusions: toward an empirical account of action. *American Journal of Sociology* 102, 161–216.
- Schegloff, Emanuel A., 1998. Reflections on studying prosody in talk-in-interaction. *Language and Speech* 41, 235–263.
- Tanaka, Hiroko, 2001. Adverbials for turn projection in Japanese: toward a demystification of the “telepathic” mode of communication. *Language in Society* 30, 559–587.
- Wu, Ruey-Juan Regina, 2004. *Stance in Talk: A Conversation Analysis of Mandarin Final Particles*. John Benjamins, Amsterdam/Philadelphia.
- Wu, Ruey-Juan Regina, in preparation. Marking ‘newsness’ in Mandarin conversation. Unpublished manuscript.

Ruey-Juan Regina Wu is Assistant Professor in the Department of Linguistics and Oriental Languages at San Diego State University. She received her doctoral degree in Applied Linguistics from the University of California, Los Angeles. Her research interests include conversation analysis, discourse pragmatics, culture and social interaction in Chinese-speaking societies, functional linguistics, and language assessment.