

Projecting the Unanticipatory: The Mandarin Particle *Ei* and its Projectability in Daily Conversation

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In daily interaction, one of the most important human conducts is to constantly foreshadow or project what unit or action will come next in the unfolding speech. The present paper deals with one such minimal component in Mandarin Chinese, the particle *Ei*, in rising contour, and its projectability in everyday conversation. By taking a conversation-analytic approach, this study attempts to explore the sequential environments in which the particle *Ei* regularly occurs and the interactional actions it accomplishes in talk-in-interaction. Based on interactional data, it is found that the particle commonly occurs in two major sequential environments: in turn-initial position and in a storytelling or reporting. It is proposed that *Ei*-prefacing serves as a turn design, projecting the upcoming unit to be something unanticipatory.

1. Introduction

In daily interaction, one of the most important human conducts is to constantly foreshadow or project what unit or action will come next in the unfolding speech (Sacks et al. 1974; Schegloff 1980, 1990, 2007; Streeck 1995). By such projection, the interactants prepare one another for possible trajectories in speech, allowing them to collaborate with each other to organize coordinated actions in the subsequent course of interaction, and to ensure that the interaction can be successfully accomplished. The components available to foreshadow or project, aka ‘prefaces’, can range from non-verbal resources, such as gesture or eye gaze (Kendon et al. 1976; Goodwin 1986), to verbal resources; the latter can range from minimal units like *uh* and *well* (Pomerantz 1984; Schegloff & Lerner 2004) to fully developed pre-sequences such as, *can I ask you a question?* (Drew 1984; Schegloff 1980, 1990).

The present paper deals with one such minimal component in Mandarin Chinese, the particle *Ei*, in rising contour¹, and its projectability in everyday conversation. The

¹ This particle can be pronounced in different intonation contours: rising, falling and flat contours. The target particle under investigation in this study is *ei* with a rising contour. *Ei* with flat contour is usually understood to be a hesitation marker and falling *ei* an attention getter or a response token.

particle *Ei*, as a minimal non-lexical token², is commonly characterized as an interjection, showing speaker's inner state of mind, and is regarded as an independent unit from the other parts of the speech. In terms of its function, it has been described as a token that shows a speaker's puzzlement, doubt or surprise (Chao 1968; Liu et al. 1996; Liu 2002). However, as it is used in spontaneous conversation, the particle *Ei* cannot be fully captured without considering its interactional function. By taking a conversation-analytic approach, this study attempts to explore the sequential environments in which the particle *Ei* regularly occurs and the interactional actions it accomplishes in talk-in-interaction.

This study is based on two hours of video data consisting of recordings of ordinary conversations and some short clips taken from television shows or news report. All of the participants are native speakers of Mandarin Chinese from Taiwan. The video recordings consist of the conversations taking place in natural social settings, mostly in gatherings among friends. Through the conversation-analytic approach, this study attempts to address an interactional issue of pervasive relevance, both to participants and to analysts, namely: 'Why that now?' (Schegloff and Sacks 1973; Schegloff 2007). That is, why is the particular token, in this case the Mandarin particle *Ei*, produced in certain particular sequential environment. In order to answer this question, this study will address the following questions: (1) Are there any specific sequential environments in which the particle occurs? (2) In such environments, what particular interactional action does the particle implement?

2. Previous analysis and the particle *Ei* in conversation

In previous studies of Chinese linguistics, the particle *Ei*, is traditionally characterized as a *yuqi ci* 'mood particle' or *tan ci* 'interjection' (Chao 1968; Liu et al. 1996; Liu 2002), which is proposed as a token expressing a speaker's emotion and inner state of mind, and as a unit that is naturally independent from the other parts of the talk. Like many other interjections, the particle *ei* is a non-lexical vocal token. As such, it has not been the subject of much research and has received nothing more than a few oversimplified general descriptions.

Chao (1968) characterizes the token as 'indicating puzzling surprise' (p404). Liu (2002), with a focus on the acquisition of Mandarin interjections by non-native speakers, enumerates several interjections and classifies *Ei* as a token 'indicating surprise, astonishment or doubt and disbelief toward a thing or a person'. Liu et al. (1996) focus more on its interactional function, considering it a token that 'do[es] greeting and draw[s] people's attention' (p238). Among previous studies, Wu (1997) first deals with minimal

² The particle is considered as non-lexical in the sense that *ei* is not a conventionalized meaningful sound in Mandarin and there is no character to represent this sound in the Mandarin writing system. Even though some characters with similar pronunciations have been borrowed to represent it, there is no accepted systematic way of doing so. In written texts, this token can be represented by several following Chinese characters '嘖', '欸' and '誒', which none of them is listed with the pronunciation *ei* in the dictionary.

tokens like *Ei* by reference to their sequential position and the actions they complement in talk-in-interaction. On the basis of the turn-initial particle *Ei* and *A*, she notes that a turn-initial particle plus an additional turn component serve as a linguistic resource for a marginal party to make themselves focal or for participants to incorporate a not actively participating party. Following this line, in this article I examine a specific turn-design in which *Ei* is produced.

The major finding of this study concerns the projectability of the particle and evidence from the conversational sequences shows that the particle *Ei* projects the upcoming talk to involve in some kind of shift and to be something unanticipated. It is proposed that by using the turn-initial particles *Ei*, the speakers show their orientation and alert the co-participants to such projection. Based on conversational data, the corpus shows us two common recurrent environments in which the particle *Ei* figures: in a turn-initial position and in storytelling or reporting. It should also be noted that the particle *Ei* in these two environments is usually followed within the same intonation contour by additional elements³. The proposal will be demonstrated by considering the particle's placement in the two major distinguished types of conversational environments mentioned above.

3. The Particle *Ei* in turn-initial position

A major sequential environment in which the particle *Ei* frequently occurs is in a turn-initial position. In addition, particle *Ei*, as mentioned earlier, is followed within the same intonation contour by additional elements and the follow-up element in this environment commonly appears in an interrogative form. That is to say, turn-initial *Ei* very often prefaces questions, projecting a particular type of inquiry. In this article, I treat *Ei*-prefacing as a turn design and try to explicate and exemplify one of the practices of *Ei*-prefacing: projecting an unanticipated line of talk, an inquiry that concerns affiliated but non-focal aforementioned issues. Therefore, the *Ei*-prefaced question exhibits close association with the inquiries that build on the preceding talk, yet explores certain previously non-focal part/ dimension of what has just been produced. Let us first take a look at example (1).

Example (1) is taken from a dinner table conversation among four participants: Bill, Ann, Irene and Jack. The conversation takes place at Bill and John's residence in LA, with Ann and Irene as their guests. Ann is Irene's friend, visiting from other state. Before the excerpt, Ann mentioned that she transferred at St. Louis when she flied to LA. Bill thus in the beginning of the excerpt asks Ann about interesting places in St. Louis.

(1) Winter Break Dinner_A concert place⁴

³ It should be noted that the Mandarin particle *Ei* can be a free standing token and produced as a complete Turn Constructional Unit (TCU) in its own right.

⁴ 1/2/3 S= first/ second/ third single pronoun; 1/2/3 PL= first/second/third plural pronoun; ASP= aspect marker; CL= classifier; COM= complement; COP= copular; FP= final particle;

TSAI: PROJECTING THE UNANTICIPATORY

- 01 Bill: St. Louis shenme haowan.
St. Louis what interesting
‘What’s interesting in St. Louis?’
- 02 (0.5)
- 03 Ann: ta you yige [nage:-
3S have one that
‘It has uhm-’
- 04 Bill: [>ta you yige nage yuande nage
3S have one that round that
‘It has uhm the round thing.’
- 05 Ann: dui a. ranhou chang zai nali ban yinyuehui.
right FP then often in there hold concert
‘Right. And there are concerts there very often.’
- 06 [jiushi nage qiao. haoxiang hen youming.
COP that bridge seem very famous
‘That bridge ((arch)) seems to be very famous.’
- 07 Bill: [oh:.
‘Oh.’
- 08 Ann: =naci wo wen nage uncle de. ta jiushi nian na de.
that_time 1S ask FILL uncle FP 3S COP study there FP
‘I asked Uncle last time. He used to study there.’ ((To Irene))
- 09 Irene: oh, ta shi nian St. Louis de ou.
Oh 3S COP study St. Louis DE FP
‘Oh, he studied at St. Louis?’
- 10 Ann: hm.
‘hm.’
- 11 Irene: oh:.
‘Oh.’
- 12 Bill: chule nage jiu meiyou shenme haowan de.
besides that then NEG something interesting NOM
‘Besides that, is there anything else interesting (there)?’
- 13 (1.6)
- 14 Ann: renjia gen wo jiang hen piaoliang. keshi wo mei [qu guo.
people to 1S tell very beautiful but 1S NEG go ASP
‘I heard that (it’s=St. Louis is) very beautiful. But I haven’t been there.’
- 15 Bill: [°hen piaoliang.
very beautiful
‘Very beautiful.’

FILL=filler; NEG= negator (negation words); NOM= nominalizer; PAR= particle; PROSS= progressive

- 16 (3.7)
- 17 Jack:→ °ei: bushi (.) you yi-ge difang guding hui you nage-
ei NEG have one-CL place fixed will have FILL
- 18 (2.3) um: (tsk) <E hip hop E> de nage
um hip hop NOM FILL
- 19 (1.2) haishi <E rock E> yinyuhui.
or rock concert
'Ei, isn't there a place which regularly has um- um: (tsk) hip
hop- or rock music concerts.'
- 20 (0.8)
- 21 Jack: lu- lutiande.
outdoor.
'Outdoor.'
- 22 Bill: ((shaking his head.))

((Jack continues to describe the concert in his mind and the participants extensively engage in identifying the place thereafter.))

The target lines are line 17-19 in which Jack selects himself, initiating the turn with the particle *Ei* and posing a question with several hitches, seeking help from the others to locate a supposedly famous place that regularly holds music concerts. Lines 1-7 comprise the first spate of talk, in which Bill and Ann talk about interesting places in St. Louis and reach a consensus that the Gateway Arch is a landscape of St. Louis ('the round thing' in Bill's line 4 and 'the bridge' in Ann's line 6). Bill makes another attempt to seek more information (line 12), to which Ann fails to respond, resulting in a long pause of 1.6 seconds (line 13). In the end, Ann offers a concluding remark, referencing a general second-hand description and demonstrating her lack of authority to answer the question (line 14). Bill registers the receipt of Ann's remark by repeating *hen piaoliang* 'very beautiful' and closes the current sequence. No one proactively selects themselves to talk afterwards and thus a long silence of 3.7 seconds follows (line 16). After the silence, Jack poses the target *Ei*-prefaced question (lines 17-19) at this juncture. Failing to get any response (0.8 seconds in line 20), Jack adds *lutian de* 'outdoors' as additional information in line 21. Bill in the end responds to Jack by shaking his head, showing his lack of the knowledge required to answer.

Considering the fact that the earlier line of talk has recognizably focused on St. Louis, Jack's action of launching a new sequence on a particular place famous for outdoor concerts can arguably be said to be rather unanticipated. Yet the line of talk is not totally out of blue since the idea of outdoor concerts does not come from nowhere, but is mentioned by Ann when she introduces famous spots in St. Louis in line 5, in which she describes the Gateway Arch as an interesting spot and a place that often holds concerts. The element *yinyunhui* 'concerts' in line 5 is recognizably reused in the

TSAI: PROJECTING THE UNANTICIPATORY

- 011 Linda: kukude. hh. ((talking about the food))
bitter
'(It tastes) bitter.'
- 012 (.)
- 013 Irene: → ei: xiang Susan nage fangzu, ta haoxiang shuo
ei like Susan that rent 3S seem say
- 014 shibushi liu bai haishi qi bai.
Q six hundred or seven hundred
'Ei: like Susan's rent, did she say it's about six or seven hundred dollars?'
- 015 Linda: liu qi wu, suoyi [qishi-
six seven five so actually
'Six seventy five, so (it's) actually-'
- 016 Irene: [liu qi wu.
six seven five
'Six seventy five.'
- 017 (.)
- 018 Linda: chabuduo.
about_the_same
'about the same (as our rent).'
- 019 Irene: keshi tamen- tamen jiuhui shuo, ni kan ni yi-ge yue
but 3PL 3PL then say 2S see 2S one-CL month
- 020 sheng liang bai ye. hh.
save two hundred FP
'But people will say, look, you can save up to two hundred a month.'
- 021 Linda: keshi qishi meiyou shengdao liang- mm.
but actually NEG save two mm
'But you won't save up to two-'
- 022 Jess: yinwei ta [haiyou utility.
because 3S plus utility
'Because the utility is not included.'
- 023 Linda: [haiyou utility.
plus utility
'Utility not included.'

In line 1, Jess poses a question regarding why some students are able to find a residence with a monthly rent as low as five to six hundred dollars. In line 3 Linda offers a possible explanation for this phenomenon, after which Jess shows her alignment with Linda by uttering agreement token *dui* 'yeah' (line 5) and attempting in line 7 to collaboratively complete Linda's line 6 (Lerner 1987, 1991, 1998). Since Jess's question was responded to and both participants reached a consensus as well, the sequence launched by Jess in line 1 seems to come to a possible closure in line 7. It is likely that Linda has reached such a conclusion; she begins to comment on the food they are eating

(lines 8 and 10), a line of talk that receives no uptake or feedback from Irene and Jess. After a micro pause (line 11), which ostensibly indicates the possible closure of the comments about food, Irene undertakes to lead the talk back to the discussion of monthly rent.

Note that Irene accomplishes such undertaking by an *Ei*-prefaced question (line 12-13). In this case, Irene's inquiry into Susan's monthly rent stays within the same framework of the previous discussion on rent prices. In addition, if we look into the details of the utterance, as in Examples (1), we can observe the reuse of the element in the prior utterances (*Susan nage fangzu* 'Susan's rent' in line 12 versus *fangzu* 'rent' in line 6). Nevertheless, the question shifts the focus to concern an affiliated issue to the preceding talk, i.e. Susan's rent and leads the talk from the discussion of how some people can find a residence with low rent (line 1-6) to a new direction of discussion of whether the rent they are currently paying is reasonable or not: while Irene expresses the idea that Susan's rent is much cheaper than theirs (lines 18-19), Linda insists that the amount does not differ that much since utility is not included in Susan's rent (lines 20, 22).

It is interesting to note that examples cited above occur in a post-completion position, i.e. after the previous line of talk comes to a completion. When the *Ei*-marked question builds on part of the preceding talk in the post-completion position, it is based on the prior talk but advances the conversation at the same time. The new/different take on the earlier talk very often make the utterance the next topic. Such phenomenon of drawing on the prior utterances to move the conversation forward to the next topic is considered being done in a 'stepwise' fashion (Jefferson 1984).

Besides post-completion, turn-initial *Ei*-prefaced question can also occur in post-telling or post-informing position. In the post-telling or post-informing position, the *Ei*-initiated question shifts to address a particular aspect of the earlier talk in order to reconfirm or to clarify. Following this line, such inquiry particularly figures in the contexts where a misunderstanding or lack of shared knowledge is involved. In terms of the sequences, the *Ei*-prefaced questioner very often withholds their responses to the telling or informing, for example, information uptake or assessments, addressing the immediately preceding talk in order to secure a level of relevant understanding among the participants and establish the resources necessary to proceed with the conversation.

Example (3) and (4) illustrate this. Example (3) involves two participants, Hans and Lucy, at an afternoon get-together. Before the excerpt, Hans has been complaining about a mutual friend of theirs, Rachel, and venting his rage about her being inconsiderate and selfish. Attempting to comfort Hans, Lucy suggests that he take it lightly and let it go (lines 1 and 3). Nevertheless, Hans continues his complaining and calls attention to the last time they met Rachel (lines 4-5) – at a gathering in which they were eating Taiwanese cuisine.

TSAI: PROJECTING THE UNANTICIPATORY

(3) Movie_ Rachel [00:35:52]

001 Lucy: na jiu suan le a.
then then forget_it ASP FP
'Then, forget it.'

002 Hans: [zuihou yi ci-
last one time
'The last time-'

003 Lucy: [na ye bu yiding yao lian[luo a.
then also NEG have_to need contact FP
'(You two/ we) don't have to stay in touch.'

004 Hans: [zuihou yi ci
last one time

005 jianmian jiushi zai- zai taicai na ci. wo=
meet COP in in Taiwanese_cuisine that time 1S

006 jiu jide. > ni hai jide ma.<
just remember 2S still remember FP
'The last time we met (her), it's- we were having Taiwanese
cuisine. I remembered. Do you remember?'

((10 lines deleted, in which the two participants are trying to reach a consensus which gathering of Taiwanese cuisine Hans is talking about))

017 Hans: na shi women zuihou yici gen ta jianmian.
that COP 1PL last time with 3S meet

018 shi qunian [xx.
COP last_year
'That's the last time we saw her (Rachel). That's last year.'

019 Lucy: → [ei: na yici, (0.4) na yici=
ei that time that time

020 =Rachel you qu ma?
Rachel have go FP
'Ei, that time, (.) did Rachel go that time?'

021 (0.8) ((Hans nodding vigorously))

022 Han: Wendy jiushi yao qu shopping. Sheila ye shi a.
Wendy just want go shopping Sheila also COP FP
'(That time) Wendy wanted to go shopping. Sheila did, too.'

023 >ranhou, (.) jiushi na yici, ta bushi jiu
then COP that time 3S NEG then

024 yizhi baoyuan sanmin xinshui hen di.=
keep complain Sanmin salary very low
'And then that's the time that she (Rachel) complained how
low her salary was.'

- 025 =ranhou Sheila hen shengqi a.
 then Sheila very angry FP
 ‘And Sheila was mad.’
- 026 Luc: shi ou. ((smiling))
 COP FP
 ‘Really.’
- 026 Han: hm ((nodding)) Sheila gen wo baoyuan ma.
 hm Sheila to me complain FP
 ‘Hm, Sheila complained to me.’
- 027 ta shuo, (.) ta xinshui bi wo hai gao ye.
 3S say 3S salary more 1S even higher FP
- 028 ranhou Sheila hen shengqi a
 then Sheila very angry FP
 ‘She said, her (Rachel’s) salary is even higher than mine (but she complained to me).’

As soon as the agreement regarding which gathering Hans is referring to is reached in line 16, Hans instantly resumes the line of conversation that was left off and continues his telling in lines 17 and 18, concluding that the gathering in question was the last time they saw Rachel and that it has been one year since then. Hans’ telling in lines 17-18 seems to be designed as a return to the on-going activity (complaining about Rachel) that has been interrupted, and this return presumably attempts to solicit Lucy’s uptake or alignment. Nevertheless, Lucy poses an *Ei*-prefaced question in lines 19 and 20. As in other examples Lucy uses a topicalizing device to bring that particular gathering - the one on which a consensus has just been reached - into focus, and turns to ask with specific interest whether Rachel showed up. It seems that it is essential for Lucy to confirm that Rachel did in fact show up at the event before she can respond to Hans’s telling.

Lacking the feedback from the recipient, the speaker of the telling usually relapses to an earlier telling after the *Ei*-prefaced question and makes another attempt to seek the relevant next. In this case, right after mentioning one episode reminiscent of that gathering (Wendy and Sheila, two participants in the gathering, wanted to go shopping (line 22)), Hans immediately relapses into his complaining about Rachel by the connector *ranhou* ‘then’ (line 23) and brings up an episode in that particular gathering in which Rachel complained about her salary and made the co-present Sheila uncomfortable (line 23-25), thereby demonstrating the selfishness of which Hans accuses Rachel.

Example (4) is taken from a dinner table conversation among the same four participants as in example (1); in this excerpt, however, Bill does not participate.

(4) Winter Break Dinner_April Rhapsody

001 Ann: biye deshihou women tongxue dajia you-
 graduate time 1PL classmate all ASP

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- 002 jiu kaihui jiu qu pai.
 then discuss then go shoot
 ‘When (we were) graduating, my class decided to take photos there.’
- 003 ranhou women jiu shuo, wow, haoxing ren(h)ji(h)ansiyue[t(h)ian. hhh.
 then 1PL then say wow like April_Rhapsody
 ‘And we said, wow, it’s just like April Rhapsody (a TV drama).’
- 004 Irene: dui a, na paiqilai hai bucuo ye.
 right FP that shoot quite good FP
 ‘Yeah, it’s quite nice to take photos there.’
- 005 Ann: dui a. jiushi nage men, hai man guseguxiang.
 right FP that_is that door still pretty antique_style
 ‘The door is really antique.’
- 006 Irene: dui. jiushi ni pai- wo shangci shi kan guo shui
 right that_is 2S shoot 1S last_time COP see ASP who
- 007 de. bu zhidao shi wo yi-ge tongxue haishi shui,
 NOM NEG know COP 1S one_CL classmate or who
 ‘Right. If you take- Last time, I saw someone’s (photos). I don’t know it’s my
 classmate or whoever it is,’
- 008 [ta jiu zai-
 3S just in
 ‘S/he (took the photos) in-’
- 009 Jac: → [en: nimen nage shihou ganghao shi renjiansiyuetian
 PAR 2PL that time happen_to_be COP April_Rhapsody
- 010 deshihou.
 time
 ‘En, that was at the time April Rhapsody was on?’
- 011 (0.8)
- 012 Ann: [chabuduo.
 close
 ‘(It’s) about that time.’
- 013 Ire: [yanjiusuo.
 graduate_school
 ‘(Around) graduate school.’
- 014 Ann: dui dui dui.
 right right right
 ‘yeah, yeah, yeah.’
- 015 Jac: yanjiusuo.
 ‘Graduate school.’

((5 lines deleted, in which Irene and Ann are collaboratively trying to figure out which specific year in graduate school the drama was broadcast on TV))

021 Jac: ni zhidao nage shihou, nage- ehem yiqian Zhang-
 2S know that time that ehem before Zhang
 Zhangzhongmou shi taijidian de dongshizhang.
 NAME COP NAME POSS chairman
 ‘You know, around that time, um ehem Zhang used to- Zhang was the founding
 Chairman of Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company.’

((Storytelling continues and the story is about how the celebrated businessman, Chairman Zhang, who was famous for working long hours, had to rush home by 8 o’clock at night to join her wife to watch the TV drama – April Rhapsody.))

Before this conversation takes place, Ann and Irene talk substantially about places that are good for taking photos, especially university campuses. In lines 1-4, Ann describes her experience of taking photos with her classmates on a campus famous for its scenery. Aligning with Ann, Irene chimes in, from lines 4 to 8, to appraise with Ann conjointly the famous campus for taking the photos. Irene’s line 8 somehow becomes weaker and slower, and this is the juncture that Jack comes in. Interrupting Irene’s utterance, Jack in target line 9 launches his turn by the particle *Ei*⁵ and poses a question to confirm a piece of background understanding- that is, the temporal relation between *nage shihou* ‘that time’ and *Renjian Siyuetian deshihou* ‘the time of April Rhapsody’; the former refers to Irene and Ann’s graduation time (line 1) and the latter the time the drama *Renjian Siyuetian* April Rhapsody’ (line 4) aired on TV. Although Ann has mentioned these two elements earlier, their temporal relation is implicit and obscure. As a result, Jack poses the question, dealing with this aspect of prior talk and marks this type of question by the turn-initial particle *Ei*. Faced with Jack’s questioning, Ann and Irene collaborate to respond (lines 12-14).

It is interesting to note that while Jack brings up the question, he at the same time withholds his response to Ann and Irene’s talk about photo taking. As a matter of fact, the line of photo taking has never been taken up afterwards, even though there are opportunities, in line 21 with short silence of 0.3 seconds and in line 24 with a long silence of 4.2 seconds, for the participants to do so. In the end, Jack launches a story, from line 26, about the TV drama and a celebrated businessman. Similar to example (1) and (2), the *Ei*-initiated question seems to serve as a device to shift the topic in a stepwise fashion from photo taking to the TV drama. In this case, however, the prior sequence has not naturally come to a completion, rather it is intercepted by the *Ei*-prefaced question. In addition, it should be noted that this case also involves a shift in the participation framework (Goodwin 1986, 2000)⁶. Given that Ann and Irene talk exclusively to each

⁵ In the example, the token *Ei* is transcribed as *en* (line 9) since it is hearably produced in a reduced form. The token is so transcribed in attempt to capture the reduced fashion of the production, yet it is considered as the same token as *Ei*.

⁶ Similar phenomena have been proposed in Egbert (1997) and Wu (1997). In Egbert (1997), it is proposed that other-initiated repair can be used as “an entry and exit device to a conversation and to transformations in the participation framework” (p611). Wu (1997) suggests that, in terms of

other before Jack joins the conversation, Jack plays a relatively peripheral role in the current talk. Therefore, when he takes the initiative to interrupt Irene and raise the question, he seems to become a more focal participant in the current talk and what his question addresses is oriented to as prominent as well.

In this section, examples illustrate how participants orient to the turn-initial *Ei*-prefacing. Turn-initial *Ei* can occur in post-completion position or in post-telling/post-informing position. The particle *Ei* in these segments serves as a device to alert the recipients and make projection: *Ei*-prefacing projects the upcoming unit to be a question with an unanticipatory feature - that is, it projects an inquiry that shifts to concern particular non-focal element or aspect of the prior talk and pursues less anticipatory conversational trajectory. In such context, the *Ei*-marked question observably builds on the preceding talk but advances the conversation at the same time.

4. The Particle *Ei* in storytelling or reporting

The second major environment in which the particle *Ei* occurs is to be produced amidst a storytelling or a reporting, both of which involve an extensive sequence of narration. One observation is that the vocal token *Ei* are produced in a much clear manner in storytelling than those in the turn-initial position and *Ei* in storytelling always precedes a statement. Similar to the proposal mentioned earlier, the particle *Ei* also registers and projects an unanticipatory talk to come. Such upcoming unit can be something unexpected twist in terms of the story line or something uncommon, which sometimes serve to be the climax of the story or the important point in the reporting. By using the particle, the speaker also indicates their stance towards the upcoming unit and prepares the participants to treat the unit in the same way. Example (5) and (6) demonstrate this type of particle *Ei*.

In example (5), participants are talking about that the search engine Google can be a very good resource in learning a foreign language. Will in lines 1-4 shares his experience in using Google to facilitate his English writing: when he is not sure if his English expression is ok or not, he types in his expression and search in Google to see if anyone else uses the same expression. Iris, as the main recipient, actively aligns with Will by the agreement token *dui* 'yeah' in line 2 and 4.

(5) Scholarship_Google

001 Will: [wo ye hui. [wo xianzai da yingwen. [wo ye jiu zhijie-
 1S also will 1S now type English 1S also then directly
 'I do (that), too. Now (when) I type in English, I just (go) right to(Google)-'

particles *ei* and *a*, a turn-initial particle plus an additional turn component serve as a linguistic resource for a marginal party to make itself focal or for participants to incorporate a not actively participating party.

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- 002 Iris: [dui dui dui. [wo ye hui. wo hui- [wo ye shi.
yeah yeah yeah 1S also will. 1S will 1S also COP
'Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I (do that), too. I'll- Me, too.'
- 003 Will: wo jiu bu- bu queding zheyangzi yingwen kebukeyi.
1S then NEG NEG sure such English Q (ok)
'When I am not- not sure if English like that is ok or not,
- 004 (.) de shihou, jiu da jingqu kan youmeiyou ren zheyang [yong.
DE time then type enter see Q (have) people such [use
'I will type it in and see if anyone uses (the word) that way.'
- 005 Iris: [dui a.
right FP.
'Yeah.'
- 006 Will: kexi wo mei-ci da de dou shi, birushuo , in the street.
pity 1S every_CL type DE all COP for_example in the street
'The sad thing is every time I type, for example, "in the street"'.
007 → ranhou, ei, jiu zhi shengxia ^str(h)eet,
and_then ei just only leave street
'And then, ei , only "street" gets searched.'
- 008 Iris: [huhuh.
- 009 Sean: [huhhuh.
- 010 Will: [yinwei in gen [the dou b(h)ei shan(h)diao le huhuh.
because in and the all PASS delete ASP
'because "in" and "the" are all dropped (by the search engine).'
- 011 wo yao street zuo shenme.
1S get street do what
'I don't need the usage of 'street' at all.' (Lit: What do I have 'street' for?)

From line 1 to line 5, Iris and Will observably align with each other that searching the English expression in Google is a very useful way to check their English writing. Will, however, turns to launch a short telling as to illustrate that this kind of search can also fall short of expectation and the search result can be disappointing. In fact, Will frames the story in the very beginning by starting the story with *kexi de shi* 'the sad thing is..' (line 6) to indicate that the story will be a counter example to the benefits of Google they have talked about. The target line is line 7, in which, right after the time adverb *ranhou* 'and then', Will introduces an unexpected result that we might get from the search engine: the words are not searched as the word string that has been keyed in (*in the street*) but the search engine separates the words and only some words get searched (*street*). Note that the introduction of the surprising search result is preceded by the particle *Ei*. The particle *Ei* in this case is believed to serve as a token to project and prepare the recipients for such surprising and unanticipated result.

The projection nature of the token can be further underscored by a close look at the manner the token is produced and the gesture that accompanies it. First, the token is produced in high pitch and in a very clear manner. Also, when producing the token, Will puts his index finger up in the air in somewhat exaggerated way. This shows that Will has designed this small part of his telling to embody a stance towards the type of the story he is telling. By using the token *Ei* along with the prosody and gestures, Will frames the story as a laughable story with a laughable unexpected ending.

The final example is taken from a clip of a piece of TV news, which reports the recovery status of a celebrity who was severely injured in a car accident a while ago. In the news report, a doctor is being interviewed to comment on the recovery of the patient.

(6) New report_recovery

001 Reporter: buzhi jiyili huifu, xianzai geng jinbu dao (.) na bi xiezi.
 not_only memory recover now even improve reach take pen write
 'Not only did she regain her memory but also she is well enough to take pens and write something.'

((The shot is switched from the celebrity patient to the doctor))

002 Doctor: ta ^lian xie:zi (.) dou xiangdang bucuo. suoyi zhengge-
 3S even write all pretty good so whole
 'She can even write pretty well. So the whole-'

003 → (.) suoyi wo ganggang jiang shuo, ei, ruguo da fenshu dehua,
 so 1S just talk say ei if give grade if

004 dagai keyi dao, dagai jiushi fen le la hon. dangran
 about can give about 90 point ASP FP FP of_course

005 haimei dao man fen de jingjie.
 not_yet reach full point DE level
 'So I just said that, ei, if I need to give her a grade, I can give her about 90 points.
 Of course, it's not 100 points yet.'

The target line is in the doctor's talk in line 3 when he is commenting on the patient's recovery. In this case, the *Ei*-prefaced clause is embedded in a self-reported speech, which observably does not genuinely recite what has been said before but serves to illustrate the recovery status of the patient. That is, the doctor seems to attempt to give the audience a more specific idea about the patient's condition by analogy with the grading system. Since grading is not normally the way a doctor does to the patient, the doctor seems to produce the utterance in a humorous way and he marks such unanticipated analogy by the particle *Ei*.

In short, the particle *Ei* can also occur amidst a storytelling or a reporting. In such environment, the particle *Ei* appears to register and project an unanticipated line of talk to come, which is commonly an unexpected twist in a story or something uncommon. By using the token, the speaker at the same time indicates their stance towards the upcoming unit and prepares the participants to treat the unit in the same way.

5. Conclusion

This study investigates Mandarin speakers' practices of employing the turn-initial particle *Ei* in ordinary conversations, with special regard to the kind of interactional work that they accomplish through these practices. This paper demonstrates that, unlike previous analyses which treat the token *Ei* as an interjection, reflecting speaker's inner state of mind and emotions, it is more frequent for the token to be manifest in two sequential environments: in turn-initial position and in a storytelling or reporting. It is proposed that *Ei*-prefacing in daily conversation should be considered as a turn design to indicate conversational projection and achieve a variety of interactional actions. The study suggests that turn-initial *Ei*-prefacing projects and launches a particular type of inquiry - an inquiry that shifts to concern certain aspect of prior talk and pursues an unanticipatory line of talk. The particle *Ei* in the story or reporting, on the other hand, is constructed and projects an unanticipatory outcome of the story or something uncommon. The speaker places such token in order to indicate their stance towards the upcoming unit and orient the recipient to such stance taking.

The findings of this study indicate that the particles like *Ei*, are far from being mere reflections of a speaker's inner state of mind; instead, the deployment of such non-lexical interjections should be examined in reference to the sequential environments in which they figure and the interactional jobs they accomplish in daily talk-in-interaction. This further implies that we may better understand these interjections or non-lexical minimal tokens if we can revisit them within an interactional framework to study the interactional actions they can accomplish.

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