A Study of Complaint Sequences on WeChat: a Chinese Instant Messaging Application

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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Abstract

Instant messaging as a type of Internet-mediated communication is prevalent in people's daily lives. It allows people to use various multimodal resources—e.g., images, emojis, audio, and videos—to interact with each other remotely (Herring and Androutsopoulos, 2015). This research focuses on one specific social action sequence—the complaint sequence—in Chinese instant-messaging interactions. Specifically, this research explores third-party complaint sequences on WeChat, one of the most popular instant messaging applications among Chinese speakers.

Adopting the methodology of conversation analysis (CA), interactional linguistics (IL), and multimodal analysis, this study investigates the sequential organization and multimodal design of complaint sequences. Complaint sequences consist of the initiating action of the complaint (hereafter referred to as a complaint) and the response to the complaint (hereafter referred to as a response). This is also how a complaint sequence is consisted in WeChat interactions. The data used in this study are 36 excerpts of complaint sequences on WeChat. An examination of the data shows that complaints consist of two parts: problem presentation and display of negative affect. Based on the order of the two components, complaints exhibit two structure patterns: 1) problem presentation + display of affect, and 2) display of affect + problem presentation. In terms of the response to complaints, three types of responsive action have been identified: display of affiliation, consolement, and suggestion. Displays of affiliation are accomplished through four practices: exclamations and expletives, assessments, expressions of empathy, and rhetorical questions. Regarding the design of complaint sequences, both complaints and responses are accomplished through a variety of multimodal resources. For example, in

complaints, participants may use images in problem presentations and emojis in displays of negative affect. In responses, hug emojis are used by complainees to show their consolement. The findings of this study contribute to our understanding of how people make and respond to complaints in Chinese instant messaging interactions.

Acknowledgement

First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge and express my deepest thanks to my supervisor, Professor Xiaoting Li, for her support and guidance throughout my two years of study and research at the University of Alberta. Her encouragement and suggestions have been invaluable to me. I would like to extend my gratitude to Professor Elisabeth Le and Professor Tsuyoshi Ono for serving on my thesis committee and offering valuable critiques and enlightening suggestions to help me improve my research. Also, I would like to express my big thanks and love to my friends, especially Xinlei, Vivian, and Martin, for their warm help and support. Last but not least, I want to thank my cat friend, Huzi, for his company throughout the years.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

When people experience trouble in their lives, they often complain about it to others. In instant messaging conversations, complaining is a frequent social action. The following study investigates complaint sequences in instant messaging interactions on WeChat, a Chinese instant messaging application. This chapter introduces the background of the current study. Section 1.1 looks at the organization of complaint sequences, Section 1.2 looks at the Chinese Internet-mediated instant messaging application, WeChat, and Section 1.3 outlines how the subsequent chapters are structured.

1.1 Complaint Sequences

Dersley and Wooten (2000) and Heinemann and Traverso (2009) found that a complaint sequence has two components: an initiating action of complaint (hereafter referred to as a complaint) and a responsive action to a complaint (hereafter referred to as a response to a complaint).

A complaint refers to the action of bringing an initially private, upsetting experience into a public arena for discussion (Emerson and Messinger, 1977). It is a type of "face-threatening act" which deals with blaming, fault-addressing, and disapproval of one's behavior (Drew and Holt, 1988). According to Skogmyr Marian (2021), there are usually two parts to a complaint in face-to-face interactions: 1) invoking issues of displeased experiences, and 2) displaying affects of frustration or indignation. In this study, I refer to these two parts as 1) problem presentation, and 2) display of negative affect. After one participant makes a complaint, the recipient of that complaint may take a variety of responsive actions in the next turn, such as displaying affiliation

and consolement (Dersley and Wootton, 2000). Excerpt 1.1 taken from Traverso (2009:2387) demonstrates the complaint sequence in face-to-face interactions.

Excerpt 1.1 (Traverso, 2009: 2387)

1 A: I'm fed up with this house   (complaint)

2 B: You poor thing, I really feel sorry for you   (response)

In Line 1 in Excerpt 1.1, A expresses their dissatisfaction with a house, which is a complaint. In Line 2, B responds to that complaint by displaying their affiliation with A.

In this study, I will show how I observed the same structure of complaint sequences in the instant messaging interactions.

As per Dersley (1998), there are three interactional roles in complaint sequences: a complainer, a complainee, and a complainable. The complainer is the person who makes a complaint. The complainee is the complaint recipient. The complainable is the target of the complaint. The complainable in complaint sequences can be either the complainee or a non-present third party. The different complainables lead to two types of complaint sequences: direct complaints and indirect or third-party complaints (Boxer, 1993, 1996). If the complainable is also the complainee, then the complaint is a direct complaint; if the complainable is not physically present in that particular interaction, the complaint is identified as an indirect or third-party complaint.

This study focuses on the design of indirect or third-party complaints. The use of the term "third-party complaint sequences" in this study is justified by the transparency of the term.

1.2 WeChat—a Chinese Instant Messaging Application

WeChat, or *微信 (Weixin)* in Chinese, is a Chinese instant messaging application launched in 2011 by Tencent Holdings Ltd. Through more than 10 years of rapid growth among the Chinese-speaking community, WeChat is currently one of the most widely used Internet-mediated multi-purpose instant messaging applications (Statista, 2023). WeChat, just like other instant messaging applications, allows geographically distanced people to communicate asynchronously. In addition to the convenience of communication brought by the instant messaging function, WeChat is also popular among Internet-users because of its versatility. WeChat users can make posts on Moment (a function similar to Twitter), make audio as well as video calls, store files, and access mini programs. The latter function acts as a shortcut to other applications (Sandel et al., 2019).

Another feature of WeChat that attracts users is that it is a relatively private chatting platform: users can chat only with others who are already included in their WeChat contacts (Harwit, 2017). This is because the online social network of WeChat is based mostly on a user's offline social network. In other words, generally, people use WeChat to maintain an online connection with their existing friends, family members, or people they know from an offline setting (Shen and Gong, 2019; Zhang, Yang and Jung, 2023).

When communicating on WeChat, users are able to utilize different multimodal resources besides texts (Gu, 2021). Accessible multimodal resources on WeChat include but are not limited to images, emojis, voice, audio, video, and hyperlinks (Zhang, 2018; Gu, 2021). Among these, the most widely employed non-text modalities are visual modalities such as images and emojis (Gu, 2021: 728). These two modalities are also found in complaint sequences in my data.

Images are used in instant messaging conversations to supplement texts or convey information that would not be possible to deliver through text alone (Voida and Mynatt, 2006).

Based on Gu (2021) and my data, three types of images are used in instant messages on WeChat: memes from the Internet (see Figure 1.1), screenshots (see Figure 1.2), and photos taken by participants (see Figure 1.3).

(1) Image type 1: Memes

Figure 1.1 A meme saying *We are 伐木累* 'We are family'. (Gu, 2021: 729)

This image of two people wrapping their arms around each other's shoulder, with a caption saying 'we are family,' is used to display friendliness in chat.

(2) Image type 2: Screenshots

1

Figure 1.2 A screenshot of a Taobao (online shopping platform) product interface (Zhang, 2018: 86)

2	这	本	作为	写作教材		如何	呢,?
	Zhe	*ben*	*zuowei*	*xiezuojiaocai*		*ruhe*	*ne*
	This	CL	as	textbook for writing		how	Q

How about using this book as the textbook for writing?

This image in line 1 shows the referent of the deictic expression, 这本, *zheben* (This book), in the subsequent message in line 2, 这本作为写作教材如何呢,?, *Zheben zuowei xiezuojiaocai ruhe ne* (How about using this book as the textbook for writing?).

(3) Image type 3: Photos taken by participants themselves

Figure 1.3 A selfie photo taken by the interaction participants (Voida and Mynatt, 2006: 429)

The image of two smiling people sends a message of joy to and announces the recipient that there are two people sharing the same account in that interaction.

These three examples represent images that are used in instant messaging to deliver various types of messages.

Another widely employed modality on WeChat is emojis, especially facial expression emojis. Facial expression emojis are designed to resemble human faces (Walther and D'Addario 2001). According to Ekman and Friesen's (1978) facial action coding system (FACS), human facial emotional behaviours can be broken down into separate face action units. FACS is adopted in emoji design, as it contains data about how a human face expresses different emotions.

All emojis developed by WeChat have unique emoji codes which indicate the meaning of each emoji. This makes it easier for researchers to recognize emojis. The emoji code is often enclosed in square brackets. Examples of emojis and their corresponding emoji codes are shown below:

Emoji:

Emoji code: [scream]

Emoji:

Emoji code: [surprise]

Sections 1.1 and 1.2 have described the organization of complaint sequences as well as the Chinese instant messaging application, WeChat. The research in this thesis focuses on the sequential organization and multimodal design of complaint sequences in instant messaging interactions on WeChat.

1.3 Organization of the Thesis

The structure of this thesis is as follows: Chapter 2 reviews the existing literature on instant messaging interactions and research on complaint sequences in non-mediated and mediated interactions; Chapter 3 provides an overview of the data, and discusses the methodologies and transcription system used in this research; Chapter 4 examines the sequential organization and multimodal design of the initiating action of complaints; Chapter 5 investigates the practices and multimodal design of the responses to complaints; and Chapter 6 summarizes the study and discusses its implications and limitations.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This chapter reviews the existing literature pertaining to instant messaging interactions and complaint sequences that served as the backdrops for this study. Section 2.1 provides an overview of the previous research on instant messaging interactions in general. Section 2.2 discusses the research on Chinese instant messaging interactions in particular. Section 2.3 reviews studies on complaint sequences in both non-mediated and mediated interactions. Section 2.4 summarizes the chapter.

2.1 Instant Messaging Interactions

The Internet has become "a natural background part of everyday life" (Bargh and McKenna, 2004). Instant messaging, as a type of Internet-mediated communication (Yus, 2011), has made it possible for people who are geographically distanced to communicate with each other in "real-time" (Ramirez Jr and Broneck, 2009). Research on interactions in instant messaging applications has grown in recent decades. There are two main research directions in the studies on instant messaging interactions. The first compares instant messaging interactions with face-to-face interactions in linguistic features (Setlock, Fussell, and Neuwirth, 2004; Pierce, 2009; Tang and Bradshaw, 2020). The second explores the multimodal design of instant messaging interactions.

The first body of research focuses on comparing features of instant messaging interactions and those of spoken interactions in different languages. For example, Baron, Cresskill, and Press (2005) studied discourse structure as well as utterance breaks in English instant messaging interactions. They found that the structure of instant messaging interaction more closely resembles spoken interaction than written communication. Lanchantin, Simoës-Perlant, and Largy (2012)

examined the lexical and syntactic structures of French instant messaging interactions. They also found that semantically as well as syntactically, the lexis and syntax of messages in instant messaging interactions have more similarities with spoken communication than written communication. Degand and Van Bergen (2018) reviewed and contrasted Dutch utterance-final discourse markers in instant messaging interactions and face-to-face interactions. Their study demonstrates that utterance-final discourse markers in instant messaging interactions function as a turn-transition mechanism, the same as in face-to-face interactions.

The second body of research investigates the various multimodal resources used in instant messaging interaction. Herring and Androutsopoulos (2015) discussed the features of English-language instant messaging interactions and other types of Internet-mediated interactions. They found that instant messaging applications enable users to access a rich variety of modalities to accomplish social interaction via the Internet. Emojis are one of the most heavily studied Internet-based semiotic systems in this body of work (Riordan, 2017; Gülşen, 2016; Harun, Razak, and Fadil, 2021; Koch, Romero, and Stachl, 2022). Gülşen (2016) investigated the role of emojis as conceptual tools in the narratives in instant messaging interactions and addressed the role that emojis play in conveying emotion in instant messaging interactions. Gumperz (1982) called emojis "contextualization cues" in instant messaging interactions. Riordan (2017) examined emojis used in instant messages and found that because linguistic cues are limited in Internet-mediated conversations, interaction participants frequently use emojis to show emotions and reduce the possibility of being misunderstood. Harun, Razak, and Fadil (2021) examined how human facial features (i.e., the shape of the eyes and the angle of the mouth) graphically represent human emotions. They found that these features are reproduced in designs to give emojis meanings based on emotions, thus creating an Internet-based semiotic system. Koch, Romero, and Stachl (2022)

studied how English-speaking individuals of different ages and genders use emojis in WhatsApp (an instant messaging application) interactions. They found that younger users tend to use more emojis in instant messaging interaction than older users, whereas females use emojis more often than males.

This section has discussed research on the features of instant messaging interaction in compared to features of spoken interaction, and the multimodal resources used to construct interactions via instant messaging. In the next section, I discuss the research on Chinese instant messaging interactions.

2.2 Chinese Instant Messaging Interactions

The use of Chinese instant messaging applications like QQ, WeChat and Dingtalk has recently expanded quickly among Mandarin speakers. These applications let individuals use texts, images, emojis, audio, videos, and other types of semiotic resources to interact with each other regardless of where they are geographically and thus have attracted many users (Cui, 2016).

Recent studies on Chinese instant messaging interactions have targeted two aspects: 1) linguistic forms of text messages, and 2) multimodal resources.

A large body of research into Chinese instant messaging interactions focuses on the linguistic features of text messages. For instance, Sandel et al. (2019) analyzed the orthography of text messages in WeChat instant messaging interaction. They discussed how users can send texts using standard and non-standard Chinese characters along with a combination of the two. Mak and Lee (2015) studied the uses of expletives in workspace instant messaging interactions and how emotion is conveyed through expletives. Stewart, Setlock, and Fussell (2007) compared how Chinese and American participants carry out decision-making tasks in instant messaging and face-to-face

interactions. They found that both Chinese and American groups prefer to use more aggressive language in instant messaging interactions than in face-to-face interactions. Stewart, Setlock, and Fussel (2007) found that using more aggressive and direct language in instant messaging interaction is a cross-cultural phenomenon.

There is an increasing body of research into how multimodal resources are used in instant messaging interactions. Zhang (2017) examined the usage of Arabic numerals that are homophones of Mandarin words and onomatopoeias in instant messaging interactions. For example, in *8 喜欢, 8 xihuan* 'don't like,' 8 is used as a homophone of the negation 不, *bu* in Mandarin (Zhang, 2017:4). Additionally, symbolic numeric conventions such as the Internet laughter *233* also occur in Chinese instant messaging interactions. Zou and Luo (2022) explored the pragmatic functions of tilde (~) punctuation in WeChat interactions. Their research explains the the multimodal function by which the tilde reproduced prosody and intonation in instant messaging interaction. Researchers have also studied the use of other multimodal resources such as emojis and images in Chinese instant messaging interactions. Cui (2016) reported about WeChat users constructing turns by using various multimodal resources, comprising but not restricted to texts, images, audio, videos and emojis. Cui found that WeChat's wide functionality (which allows users to send messages by different means) provides the opportunity to engage in a variety of social interactions via instant messaging applications. Zhang (2018) also investigated how people use multimodal resources during turn-taking in instant messaging discussions. She found that multimodal resources such as images, hyperlinks, emojis, and files can be used individually as a single turn in instant messaging interactions. Qiu, Chen, and Haugh (2021) studied the multimodal design of jocular flattery along with its responses in multi-party chat groups. According to their

study, emojis in jocular flattery are used to show humor and indicate that the on-going interaction is in a non-serious interaction vein.

To sum up, the existing research into Chinese instant messaging interactions is focused on comparing them to spoken interactions and examining the uses of multimodal resources such as punctuation marks and emojis.

2.3 Complaint sequences

Boxer (1993, 1996) classified complaint sequences into two types, based on the complainable in the ongoing interaction. If the complainable is also the complainee in the ongoing interaction, then it is a direct complaint; if the complainable is absent from the ongoing interaction, it is a third-party complaint. Li et al. (2006) and Yuan (2007) adopted Boxer's classification of complaint sequences in the studies of complaint actions in Chinese face-to-face interactions. These two earlier studies compare the way that Chinese and non-Chinese speakers make complaints. Li et al. (2006) examined the factors affecting the level of severity in complaints made by Chinese-speaking and English-first-language Mandarin learners in Mainland China. They found that cultural background, educational background, interaction context, and age are the main factors influencing language usage in complaints. Yuan (2007) analyzed the differences in syntactic, semantic, lexical, and discourse organization between American and Chinese students' complaining strategies. His analysis shows that the social relationship between complainers and complainees has the biggest impact on word choice.

In following Section 2.2.1, I review studies of third-party complaint sequences in non-mediated interactions. In Section 2.2.2, I review studies of third-party complaint sequences in mediated interactions.

2.3.1 Third-Party Complaint Sequences in Non-Mediated Interactions

Non-mediated interactions refer to interactions that are not mediated through the Internet. They include telephone and face-to-face interactions. Researchers began studying third-party complaint sequences in the 1980s. At the time, these sequences were referred to as trouble-telling sequences (Jefferson, 1980; 1988; Jefferson and Lee, 1981). Jefferson (1980; 1988) examined the sequential organization of trouble-telling sequences and reported that trouble-telling consisted of five interactional segments: A) approach (pre-sequences that open trouble-telling sequences); B) Arrival (announcements of the troubles, which initiate trouble-telling sequences); C) delivery (eruptions of the trouble and displays of affect as trouble-telling base sequences); D) work-up (a series of sequence expansion including diagnosis, prognosis, and repairs); E) Close-implicature (close-implicative elements that smooth complainers' emotions); and F) Exit (close trouble-telling sequences). Jefferson and Lee (1981) examined the specific phenomenon of the rejection of advice in trouble-telling sequences. They found that the complainer's rejection of given advice will lead to a shift in action from trouble-telling to a service encounter. Jefferson and collaborators' earlier work (Jefferson, 1980, 1988; Jefferson and Lee, 1981) identified the general organization and design of trouble-telling sequences within telephone interactions and lay the foundation for later research on complaint sequences.

In more recent research into third-party complaint sequences in non-mediated interactions, scholars mostly pay attention to sequence organization. Drew and Walker (2009) found that the complainer may not overtly complain until the recipients have done so first in face-to-face English-language interactions. They contend that because face-to-face interaction is a highly collaborative activity, complaint sequences are more likely to be an extended set of sequences rather than just one base sequence. Beltrán Palanques (2016) studied the macro-structure of complaints in

conversation and found that a complaint usually contains the following elements: pre-complaint, topic negotiation, and post-complaint. Beltrán Palanques argues that a pre-sequence before a complaint base sequence is used to attract co-participants' attention as well as to assign roles to co-participants. Along a similar line, Ruusuvuori et al. (2019) analyzed the organization of third-party complaint sequences between employees (complainer) and managers (complainee) in English-language workplace interactions. They noted that in workplace settings, participants frequently worked more cooperatively to develop epistemic and affective stances toward the complainable in a pre-sequence before entering into the complaint base sequence.

A few studies have been done on the two parts of a complaint base sequence. Those parts are the initiating action (the complaint itself) and the responsive action (responding to a complaint). Olshtain and Weinbach (1993) categorized different types of complaint actions including below-the-level reproach, expression of annoyance or disapproval, explicit complaint, accusation, warning, and immediate threat in English-language complaint interactions. Traverso (2009) analyzed third-party complaint sequences among English-speaking individuals who are friends. According to the study, in response to complaints, a complainee may either agree with the complainer's comment or express an immediate affiliation with the complainer.

Third-party complaint sequences in Chinese non-mediated interactions have not been fully studied. According to my knowledge, there are only two studies on complaint sequences in Chinese-language interactions. Kang (2013) compared the language usage in direct and third-partly complaints among Mandarin-speaking people. She described the six measures that might be taken in response to Chinese third-party complaint sequences: 1) affiliate with the complainer, 2) disaffiliate with the complainer, 3) provide suggestions, 4) question, challenge, or make a retort to the complainable, 5) apathy, and 6) zero response. Hao (2020) studied the organization of

complaint sequences in Mandarin face-to-face interactions. She lists three complaint organizations in order: 1) pre-sequence + base sequence, 2) base sequence + post-sequence, and 3) pre-sequence + base sequence + post-sequence.

2.3.2 Third-Party Complaint Sequences in Mediated Interactions

Mediated interactions refer to communication mediated through the Internet. They are also known as Internet-mediated or computer-mediated communications (CMC) (Romiszowski and Mason, 2013). As per Whittaker's (2003) classification, asynchronous interactions (through emails, instant messaging, and online forums) and remote synchronous ones (thorough video calls) are all examples of mediated interactions. The majority of previous studies on third-party complaint sequences in mediated interactions have targeted on two aspects: the "directness" of complaint sequences, and the difference between complaint sequences in mediated and non-mediated interactions.

The first body of research focuses on the language used in third-party complaints in mediated interactions. Researchers in this discipline are particularly fascinated by the "directness" of complaint sequences. Depraetere et al. (2021) study the "directness" of the language usage as well as overall organization of complaint sequences in French-written tweets on Twitter. They argue that the discourse formed on the Internet application is different from face-to-face interactions as the former represents a unique linguistic pattern. As per the findings of the study, the language used in Twitter complaint sequences seems to be more accessible and direct, and there are fewer considerations of politeness compared to what occurs in face-to-face ones. The sequential organization of mediated and non-mediated complaint sequences is also a key distinction. Depraetere et al. (2021) observed an overall trend that complaint sequences on Twitter don't have

pre- and post-sequences, which are also less likely in face-to-face interactions. Vladimirou and Kádár (2021) wrote about the turn design of complaint sequences in Twitter interactions in English. According to their research, people are more likely to display overly aggressive and intensive moods when making complaints on social media. A study conducted by Vladimirou, House, and Kádár (2021) also identified "directness" in the language used in complaint sequences in mediated interactions.

The second body of research focuses on the difference between complaint sequences in mediated as well as non-mediated interactions. Stommel and Van der Houwen (2014) analyzed how English-speaking individuals conduct complaint in E-mails. They found that an E-mail complaint is formed completely differently from a spoken complaint, as E-mail conversation is an entirely asynchronous process, and the complainers can take enough time to consider how to manage their face and organize their language before communicating. In a subsequent study (2015), Stommel and Van der Houwen investigated the problem presentation in E-mail complaint sequences and face-to-face complaint sequences in English. In that study they found that in spoken complaints, the problem presentation is a process that is more cooperative as both the complainer and complainee participate in the topic (problem) negotiation process, while in complaints through E-mails, complainers prefer to organize one long narrative by themselves to address the problem.

Section 2.3 provides an overview of the research on structures of complaint sequences in non-mediated interactions and mediated interactions.

2.4 Summary

This chapter discussees the existing research on instant messaging interactions in general and Chinese instant messaging interactions in particular, and complaint sequences in non-mediated and

mediated interactions. The review of the existing research discloses two gaps in the literature. First, there is limited research on the sequential organization of complaint sequences along with the design of complaints and their responses in mediated interaction. Second, there is also limited research on Chinese instant messaging interactions and complaint sequences in Chinese instant messaging interactions. We have limited knowledge of the structure and design of complaint sequences in Chinese instant messaging interactions. This study intends to fill these gaps by analyzing the sequential organization as well as the multimodal design of complaint sequences in Chinese instant messaging interactions.

Chapter 3 Methodology

This chapter provides an overview of the data and an account of the research methods used in this study. Section 3.1 discusses the data. Section 3.2 introduces the three methodologies applied in the analysis in this paper: conversation analysis, interactional linguistics, and multimodal analysis. Section 3.3 summarizes the chapter.

3.1 Data

Section 3.1.1 provides an overview of the data. Section 3.1.2 provides a discussion of the data collection process and introduces the transcription system used in the study.

3.1.1 An Overview of the Data

In this study, the data are complaint sequences in the participants' chats on the instant messaging application WeChat. This application provides a messaging function, allowing users to send texts, images, and emojis to other users on their contact lists. Through these multimodal resources, users can conduct their interactions remotely. Figure 3.1 is a screenshot of a chat excerpt containing a complaint sequence sent by a participant in the study. Figure 3.2 provides the English translation of the texts on the screenshot.

Figure 3.1. A screenshot of a chat excerpt containing a complaint sequence on WeChat
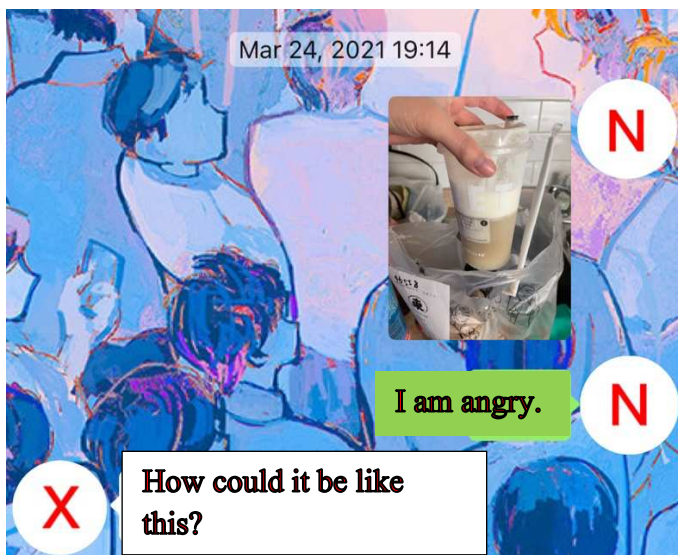
Figure 3.2. Translation of Figure 3.1

In this interaction in Figure 3.1, N (the complainer) sent X (the complainee) two messages. The first is an image of a leaky plastic up of bubble tea, and the second message, 我怒, *wonu,* 'I am angry.' The text message and the image constitute an initiating action of complaint. X responds to

N's complaint with 怎么会这样, *zenme hui zheyang,* 'How could it be like this?' The two components establish a complaint base sequence (Drew and Holt, 1988).

A total of 23 native Mandarin speakers (17 females and six males) participated in this study. At the time of this study, their ages ranged from 20 to 45. According to the information they disclosed, WeChat is the most or one of the most frequently used instant messaging applications in their daily lives. A total of 36 complaint sequences were collected from chats conducted by the 23 participants.

3.1.2 Data Collection

Prior to collecting the data, a research ethics certificate was obtained for this study from the Research Ethics Board (REB)-2 at the University of Alberta (research ethics ID: Pro00121436). After securing the research ethics certificate, a total of 23 participants who are native speakers of Mandarin were recruited. They were asked to either take a screenshot or use the "combine-and-forward" function to send what they deemed as complaint sequences in their WeChat to me. The combine-and-forward function is a WeChat forwarding function that lets a user share multiple chat messages, in bulk, with another user. Specifically, participants were instructed to collect all complaint sequence excerpts in which they were either the complainers or the complainees. This aligns with the Conversation Analysis (CA) methodology in that analytical categories, here known as complaint sequences, are established based on participants' perspectives (Markee, 2000).

Upon receiving complaint sequence excerpts from participants, I screened the data based on my definition of complaint sequences in this study. Among all the excerpts I received, only one was excluded from the data collection, because it was a request sequence rather than a complaint sequence. As a result, the research data consist of 36 excerpts of complaint sequences on WeChat.

3.1.3 Data Transcription

The data were transcribed using the transcription system GAT-2 (Selting et al., 2009) with modifications adapted to Mandarin (Li, 2014). GAT-2 has been used extensively to transcribe spoken interactions in Interactional Linguistics (IL), one of the theoretical and methodological frameworks employed in this study. It has also been adapted to transcribe Mandarin-spoken interactions (Li, 2014, 2019). In transcribing Mandarin-mediated interactions in this study, I made one additional modification to the GAT-2 transcription system. Specifically, I organized transcripts of excerpts from WeChat interactions based on the messages. Each message—regardless of whether it was an image, a text, or a combination of images and texts—was transcribed as one individual line. If one message was excessively long and more space was needed for notating that message, it continued onto the next line without assigning a new line number.

Excerpt 3.1 is from the transcribed data following the GAT-2 transcription system with the aforementioned modifications. Under this excerpt, in Fig. 3.1, is the original screenshot of an excerpt of an interaction on WeChat. This is followed by the transcription of the same interaction in the four-line transcription format for Mandarin data (Li, 2019).

Figure 3.1. A screenshot of a chat that contained a complaint sequence

Excerpt 3.1 ("Drink")

1　N:

2　　　我　　怒

　　　　Wo　nu

　　　　1SG　angry

　　　　'I am angry.'

3->X:　怎么　　会　　这样！

```
Zenme  hui  zheyang

How   can    this

'How can this happen!'
```

Figure 3.1 shows the original screenshot of the interaction on WeChat. In the transcript (Excerpt 3.1), the first column from the left shows the line numbers, representing the sequence of every message. The arrow attached to the line numbers indicates the target line. The second column lists pseudonyms for the participants. If the same participant sent multiple messages, the pseudonyms would appear only in the first line/message. The third column comprises the contents produced by the participants in their chat messages. If a message contained texts, their linguistic structures were transcribed using the four-line transcription format (Li, 2019). Regarding the four lines, the first is Chinese characters; the second is *Pinyin*—a Romanized spelling system of Chinese characters based on their pronunciation; the third is a word-by-word English glossing; and the fourth is a free translation.

3.2 Methodology

This study adopted three methodologies: conversation analysis (CA), interactional linguistics (IL), and multimodal analysis. Sections 3.4.1, 3.4.2, and 3.4.3 describe the three methodological frameworks in detail.

3.2.1 Conversation Analysis

CA is an approach developed by Sacks and Schegloff in the 1960s. It studies language in social interaction and focuses on the participants' orientation in social interactions. Drew (2004) observed that CA researchers are interested in four underlying characteristics of talk-in-interaction:

1) Turn-taking, 2) Turn design and construction, 3) Sequence and sequence organization, and 4) Action. It is worth noting that CA investigates talk-in-interaction, including how participants take turns, construct conversations, and accomplish social actions. ==This approach== to studying language usage itself also involves the organization of interactions within their social contexts (Goodwin and Heritage, 1990). CA has been extensively applied in studies of daily interactions (Adler, Adler, and Fontana,1987; Schegloff, 1996), institutional interactions (Luff, Hindmarsh, and Heath, 2000; Teas Gill and Roberts, 2012), as well as Internet-mediated discourses (Garcia and Jacobs, 1999; Schönfeldt and Golato, 2003; Meredith and Stokoe, 2014). On top of that, CA has been utilized in studying online interactions like chat room interactions (Neuage, 2005; Meredith, 2019), forming "digital CA" (Giles et al., 2015).

Using the CA methodology, and particularly sequence organization and participant's perspective in CA, this study examines how people make complaints and respond to complaints about a third party in Chinese instant messaging interaction. This study aims to investigate (a) the sequential organization of complaint sequences and (b) the design of both the complaint and its response in a complaint sequence.

3.2.2 Interactional Linguistics

Interactional linguistics (IL) is an approach that is focused on the use of language in interactions, studying "how languages are shaped by interaction and how interactional practices are molded through specific languages" (Couper-Kuhlen and Selting, 2001:3). It was developed based on three interrelated fields: discourse-functional linguistics, CA, and anthropological linguistics (Selting and Couper-Kuhlen, 2001; Couper-Kuhlen and Selting, 2018; Fox et al., 2013). IL aims to understand linguistic practices in the context of specific social actions in talk-in-interaction

(Couper–Kuhlen, 2014). By adopting the participant's perspective and focusing on the structure of social interactions, IL explores the way in which linguistic patterns serve social goals in naturally occurring spoken interactions (Barth-Weingarten, 2008; Lindström, 2009).

This study applies IL to examine how linguistic resources are used to build complaints and responses to those complaints.

3.2.3 Multimodal Analysis

Multimodal analysis examines how different semiotic resources or modalities are used to create meaning in social interactions (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996; Li, 2019). It considers human interactions as multimodal events involving language, the body (e.g., gesture, gaze, posture), the surroundings, and other visual semiotic systems such as images (Li, 2019; Ledin and Machin, 2020). Multimodal analysis of interaction seeks to examine the function of individual modalities (e.g., language) in social interactions and how various multimodal resources work together to accomplish social actions. This form of analysis is applied in both face-to-face interactions and Internet-mediated interactions (e.g., instant messaging) (LeVine and Scollon, 2004).

In this research, participants used texts, images, and emojis in WeChat interactions. All three were considered multimodal resources that can be used to construct complaint sequences on WeChat. Multimodal discourse analysis (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996; Van Leeuwen, 2006) was employed to investigate how those semiotic resources or modalities were used to produce complaint sequences in Chinese instant messaging interactions on WeChat.

3.3 Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of my data and discussed the data collection process. The data for the study are a total of 36 excerpts of complaint sequences on WeChat collected from 23 participants. Participants were instructed to only collect what they deemed as complaint sequences. This study used a GAT-2 data transcription system with modifications for Chinese interactions and instant messaging interactions (Li, 2014). The methodologies used in this study are CA, IL, and multimodal analysis. Complaint sequences in Chinese instant messaging interactions were constructed using multimodal resources such as texts, images, and emojis. Chapters 4 and 5 will discuss the organization and design of complaint sequences in the data.

Chapter 4 Initiating Actions of Complaints in Complaint Sequences

A complaint sequence consists of two parts: an initiating action of complaint and a response to the complaint. This chapter focuses on the sequential organization and multimodal design of complaints in complaint sequences. Section 4.1 discusses the overall structure of complaints. Section 4.2 examines the multimodal resources used to construct complaints from the data.

4.1 The Overall Structure of Complaints

An examination of the data reveals that a complaint consists of two components: problem presentation and display of negative affects. In this study, problem presentations refer to the complainer's report of a perceived offense or a cause for concern. Displays of negative affects refer to the displays (through texts or other visual means such as emojis) of a negative affective stance toward the problem reported in a complaint. The most frequent displayed affects in complaints are frustration, indignation, and anger.

Most of the complaints in the data exhibit two structural patterns based on the order of the two components. The specific representations of the two structural patterns are as follows:

Complaint structure I:

Problem presentation + Display of negative affects

Complaint structure II:

Display of negative affects + Problem presentation

Sections 4.1.1 and 4.1.2 elaborate on these two structural patterns respectively.

4.1.1 Complaint Structure I: Problem Presentation + Display of Negative Affect

In the first type of complaint structure found in the data, problem presentation appears first, followed by a negative affect display. Excerpts 4.1 and 4.2 illustrate this complaint structure.

Excerpt 4.1 demonstrates how the complainer first reports a problem and then displays a negative affective stance towards the problem presented. The excerpt is from a chat between two friends, TX and RL. In line 1, TX complains to RL about TX's friend (a non-present third party referred to as 我朋友, *wo pengyou* 'my friend'). TX and her friend plan to have dinner together, but as becomes evident in 01-04, that friend is an hour late, leaving TX feeling frustrated (5).

Excerpt 4.1 ("waiting")

```
1->TX:  我   和    我    朋友 吃饭
        Wo   he   wo   pengyou chifan
        1SG  and  1SG  friend  have dinner
        'My friend and I planned to have dinner together.'


2->     我   先         去         拿了   号
        wo   xian       qu        nale   hao
        1SG  at. first  go        take   number
        'I went to the restaurant first to get a table.'


3->     在    饭店      干     等了    一   个    钟头
        zai  fandian   gan   dengle  yi   ge   zhongtou
        at   restaurant bord  waited  one  CL   hour
        'And I waited for her at the restaurant for an hour.'


4->     然后     她   说    她    睡     过头      了
        Ranhou  ta  shuo  ta   shui   guotou    le
        Then    3SG say   3SG  sleep  overtime  PRT
        'Then she said that she had overslept.'
```

Problem
Presentation

```
5->      我        当时       就    想      爆炸
         Wo     dangshi     jiu  xiang   baozha
         1SG    at that moment just want  explode
         'At that moment, I felt like I was going to explode.'
```

<div style="text-align:right">Display of Negative Affect</div>

```
6   RL: 靠   不   能    再    懂🚬
        Kao  bu  neng  zai   dong
        KAO  NEG can   more  understand
        'Oh no, I can't agree with you more🚬.'
```

```
7       真的      是    难受
        Zhende   shi   nanshou
        Really   be    suffered
        'It's really suffering.'
```

TX's complaint in lines 1-5 has two components (also indicated in the excerpt above). The first component is the problem presented in lines 1–4, where TX reports on her friend's extremely late arrival at the restaurant and her excuse. The second component of TX's complaint displays her extremely negative affective stance toward the problem reported in line 5. TX's exaggerated expression 想爆炸 *xiang baozha* 'want to explode' in Line 5 displays her extreme frustration about the reported problem.

Excerpt 4.2 is another example of complaint structure I. W and H are friends and colleagues teaching at the same junior high school. H teaches art, W teaches history. They converse about a poster design task that their school principal, referred to as 王校 *Wang Xiao* 'Principal Wang' in Line 1, has assigned H to do. H is annoyed (Line 3) by this task because H must work overtime to complete it (Line 2).

29

Excerpt 4.2 ('poster task')

```
1->H:  王      校     怎么  又  给  我   布置       海报任务

       wang  xiao  zenme  you  gei  wo  buzhi    haibaorenwu

       (NAME)principal how   again give  me  assign  poster design task

       'How come the principal Mr. Wang assigned me a poster design

        task again.'


2->    今天    又       要       加班        咯

       Jintian you    yao     jiaban        lo

       Today   again  going to  work overtime   PRT

       'I have to work overtime again today.'
```

Problem Presentation

```
3->    烦么         烦死

       Fanme       fansi

       Annoyed   annoyed to death

       'I am annoyed to death.'
```

Display of Negative Affect

```
4   W:  杯具      啊

       Beiju     a

       Tragedy  PRT

       'It's a tragedy.'
```

Similar to Excerpt 4.1, H's complaint in Lines 1–3 consists of two components: the problem presentation in Lines 1–2, followed by a display of negative affect in Line 3. The problem of receiving extra work from the school principal 王校 *Wang Xiao* 'Principal Wang' is reported in Lines 1–2 by H. Immediately after reporting the problem, H expresses the extreme annoyance at

the after-hours work through a hyperbolic idiomatic expression 烦么烦死 *fanme fansi,* and translated, literally, as "annoyed, annoyed to death," in Line 3.

In this section, Excerpts 4.1 and 4.2 illustrate the complaint structure I, in which a problem is reported first, followed by a negative affect displayed by the complainer.

4.1.2 Complaint Structure II: Display of Negative Affect + Problem Presentation

The second structural pattern of the complaint is one in which a negative affective stance is displayed before the problem is presented.

The second structural pattern of complaints observed in the data is illustrated in Excerpt 4.3. This excerpt is from a chat between two friends, JL and N. JL is ill and visits a doctor. JL fails to use her health insurance to cover her patient registration fee because according to the registration system, the healthcare card she has used for registration is not hers (Line 2). She ends up spending 100 RMB and neither sees a doctor nor receives treatment (Lines 3-4).

Excerpt 4.3 ("Hospital")

```
1->JL：  我      真的       呕

        Wo    zhende     ou

        1SG   really    puke

        'I am disgusted.'
```

Display of Negative Affect

```
2->     手机    上    挂号          当日       说    我    用    的

        Shouji shang  guahao       dangri     shuo  wo yong  de

        Phone   on  registration  on that day  say  1SG  use  NOM

        不是    我    本人    医保卡        就       自费              了

        Bushi  wo  benren   yibaoka      jiu      zifei            le

        NEG    1SG   own   health card  then  pay by one's self    PRT
```

Problem Presentation

'I used my phone to register as a patient, but there was a
problem with my health care card, so I had to pay the fee myself.'

3->   挂号   五十 打的 五十   啥   都   没 干 100 没
       Guahao   wushi dadi wushi   sha   dou mei gan 100 mei
       Registration fifty taxi fifty anything all NEG do 100 spend
       了   回家   骑   共享单车   了
       le   huijia   qi gongxiangdanche   le
       PRT go back home ride public bicycle   PRT
       'The patient registration costed fifty yuan, the taxi costed fifty
       yuan, I did nothing but already spent one-hundred yuan. I am going
        to riding a public bicycle to get back home.'

4->   病   也   没   看   成
       Bing   ye   mei   kan   cheng
       Sick   also NEG   see   finish
       'I even didn't get my illness treated.'

5   N: ？？

6   怎么   这样   啊
        Zenme zheyang   a
        How   this   PRT
        'How can this be?'

07   好   苦
        Hao ku
        So   tough

'So tough.'

The complaint is in Lines 1–4 of the excerpt. Instead of first reporting on a problem encountered, JL begins by expressing her strong negative emotion of disgust in Line 1. Then in Lines 2–4, JL reports on her problem. After spending much money and time, she has not received any treatment for her illness. This excerpt demonstrates that complaint structure II is structured so that a negative affect display (in this case, disgust in Line 1) comes before a problem presentation (Lines 2–4).

The following excerpt, 4.4, exhibits the same structural pattern. This excerpt is from a chat between two friends, J and N. Before this excerpt, Z and N are discussing their lunch plans. However, N's apartment suddenly loses power as she prepares her lunch (Lines 2–3).

Excerpt 4.4 ("Power Outage")

```
01->N:  我    死了

        Wo    sile

        1SG   dead

        'I am dead.'
```

Display of
Negative
Affect

```
02->    我们      楼        停电              了

        Women    lou       tingdian         le

        1PL      building  power outage     PRT

        'Our apartment had a power outage.'


03->    我    刚     准备      做饭

        Wo    gang   zhunbei   zuofan

        1SG   just   prepare   cook
```
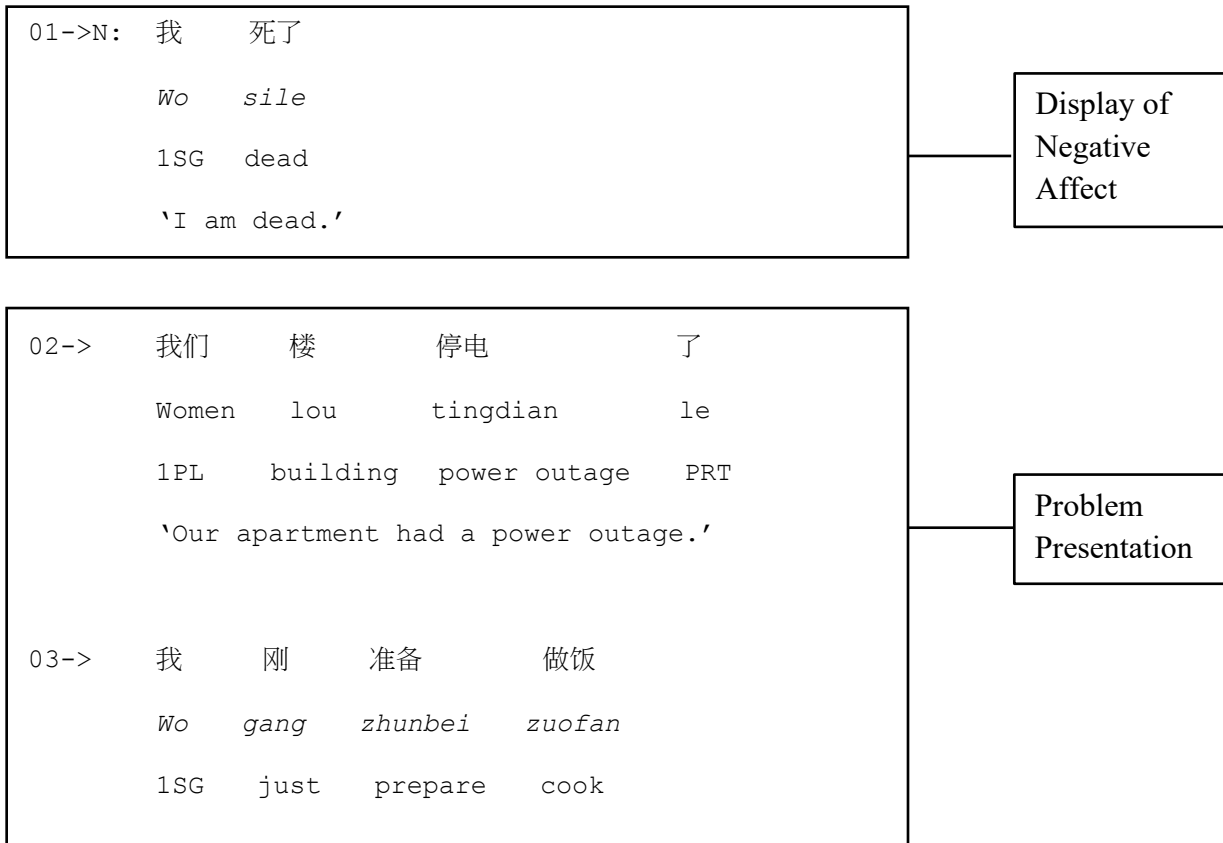
Problem
Presentation

```
04  J:  惨      惨

        Can    can

        Awful  awful

        'That's awful.'
```

This sequence begins with N's exaggerated emotive expression in Line 1 that she is 死了 *sile* 'dead.' The idiomatic expression of 我死了 *wo sile* 'I'm dead' in Line 1 conveys N's astonishment. Then, in Lines 2–3, N immediately reports on the problem that prompts her astonishment: a sudden, unannounced power outage (Line 2) just as she is about to cook (Line 3).

To sum up, in Section 4.1, I have discussed two main structural patterns of the initiating action of complaint in complaint sequences. First, a complaint can consist of a problem presentation followed by a negative affect display; second, a complaint can be initiated by a negative affect display followed by a problem presentation.

4.2 The Multimodal Design of Complaints

Following an analysis of the structure of complaints, Section 4.2 contains a discussion about the multimodal design of complaints. Instant messaging interactions are considered text-based interactions. With the advancement of technology, instant messaging application users composing a message now have access to various multimodal resources in addition to texts. The data shows that three distinct multimodal resources are used to make complaints. Text is the first type of multimodal resource, and has been used in both problem presentation and display of negative affect. The second type of multimodal resource is image, which can be used solely to present a problem in the data. The third type of multimodal resource is emojis for displaying affects. According to

research, emojis, particularly face emojis, denote feelings in instant messaging conversations (Sadia, 2018). Emojis depict negative emotions such as sadness, anger, and anxiety in complaints in the data.

In Sections 4.2.1 and 4.2.2, I discuss the multimodal design of the two structural components of complaints. Section 4.2.1 examines the multimodal design of problem presentation through texts and images. Section 4.2.2 discusses the use of texts and emojis in negative affect displays.

4.2.1 The Multimodal Design of Problem Presentation

Problems or troubles in complaints in the data are presented in three ways: text only, image only, and a combination of texts and images. The following is a discussion of the three multimodal designs of problem presentation in complaints:

I.   Problem Presentation Through Texts

In this section, I discuss problem presentations produced solely by texts. Here, Excerpt 4.1 is reproduced as Excerpt 4.5.

Excerpt 4.5 ("Waiting")

```
1->TX:  我  和      我      朋友  吃饭
        Wo   he   wo   pengyou  chifan
        1SG  and  1SG  friend   have dinner
        'My friend and I plan to have dinner together.'


2->     我    先          去      拿了    号
        wo   xian        qu    nale   hao
        1SG  at. first   go     take   number
        'I went to the restaurant first to get a table.'


3->     在      饭店     干      等了      一    个    钟头
```

<pre>
        zai fandian   gan   dengle   yi   ge zhongtou
        at   restaurant bord waited   one CL hour
        'And I waited for her at the restaurant for an hour.'

4->   然后   她   说   她   睡   过头   了
        Ranhou   ta shuo ta   shui   guotou   le
        Then   3SG say 3SG sleep overtime PRT
        'Then she said that she had overslept.'

5   我   当时   就   想   爆炸
        Wo   dangshi   jiu xiang   baozha
        1SG   at that moment just want   explode
        'At that moment, I felt like I was going to explode.'

6 RL: 靠   不   能   再   懂🚬
        Kao   bu   neng   zai   dong
        KAO   NEG can   more understand
        'Oh no, I can't agree with you more🚬.'

7   真的   是   难受
        Zhende   shi   nanshou
        Really   be   suffered
        'It's really suffering.'
</pre>

In this excerpt, N complains to RL that N's friend is very late for dinner (Lines 1–5). The reported problem in Lines 1-4 is delivered through texts.

Excerpt 4.6 is also an example of a complainer reporting a problem using only texts. It is an excerpt from a chat between two friends, T and A. In Line 1, JC is the name of the company for which T works. JC has business issues (Line 1), and T is anxious about whether that will affect her job (Line 2).

Excerpt 4.6 ("Anxious")

1->T: 哎　　现在　　JC　　出　　　状况　　　　了

Ai　xianzai　JC　chu　zhuangkuang　le

Uh　　now　　JC　　occur　trouble　　PRT

'Uh, now JC (company) got into trouble.'

2　　搞得　　我　　　每天　　　　都　　　好　　焦虑

Gaode　wo　　meitian　　dou　　hao　　jiaolü

Make　1SG　every day　always　very　anxious

'It makes me feel very anxious every day.'

3　　好　　烦　　额

Hao　fan　　e

So　annoying　PRT

'So annoying.'

4　A: 焦虑　　　正常　　　　啦　　没　　关系　　的

Jiaolü　zhengchang　la　　mei　guanxi　de

Anxious　　normal　　PRT　NEG　mind　PRT

'It is normal to feel anxious. It's okay.'

5　　你　　现在　　　　焦虑　　不　　是　　什么　　坏　　事

Ni　xianzai　jiaolü　bu　shi　shenme　huai　shi

2SG　now　　anxious　NEG　be　any　bad　thing

'Feeling anxious now is not a bad thing.'

6　　有　　紧张感　　是　　好　　的!

You　jinzhanggan　shi　hao　de

```
Have    tension    be     good     PRT
```

'Feeling a bit tense is good!'

In Line 1, T informs A that her company, JC, is experiencing issues. This problem (Line 1) is reported entirely through texts.

Excerpts 4.5 and 4.6 demonstrate that a problem in a complaint may be presented solely through texts.

II.   Problem Presentation Through Images

In this section, I discuss the complainers' use of images in presenting a problem. Photos (Excerpt 4.7) and screenshots (Excerpt 4.8) taken by complainers are the most commonly used image types in complaints in the data.

Excerpt 4.7 exemplifies the use of a photo to show a problem. This excerpt is between N and X, two friends. Prior to this excerpt, N informs X that she ordered a drink from a food delivery service. When the drink arrives, it has spilled everywhere, leaving N with only half a cup, as depicted in the image in Line 1.

Excerpt 4.7 („drink")

1-> N:

2 我   怒

   Wo *nu*

   1SG angry

   ‘I am angry.’

3 X: 怎么 会 这样！

   Zenme *hui* *zheyang*

   How can this

   ‘How can this happen!’

In Line 1 of this excerpt, N sends X an image of a half-spilled drink to demonstrate the problem she has encountered. In problem presentations in the data, freestanding photos without accompanying texts frequently depict the problem straightforwardly. As with the half-spilled drink in this excerpt, an image enables complainers to comprehend the problem by directly seeing it.

In a complaint, screenshots and photo images are used to present a problem. Excerpt 4.8 is an example. This excerpt is between F and Z, two friends. F resides in Shanghai (southeast China), while Z resides in Liaoning Province (northeast China). When F is chating with Z, there is an extreme heat wave in Shanghai. F takes a screenshot of the weather forecast application interface with the weather of the Changning District in Shanghai (Line 1), circles *体感温度 tiganwendu* ' feels like,'   51° Celsius, and sends it to Z as a complaint about the extremely hot weather. A translation of the texts on the screenshot in line 1 is provided beside line 1 as Figure 4.1.

Excerpt 4.8 ("51 Degrees")

1-> F:

Figure 4.1. The translation of the screenshot image in line 1.

2   我   想   死

       Wo xiang si

       1SG want   die

       'I want to die. '

3 Z: 妈   呀

       Ma   ya

       Mom PRT

       'Gosh. '

4   51   度...

       51   du

       51 degree

       '51 degrees Celsius…'

5   真   是   要   疯   了

       Zhen   shi yao   feng le

       Really be   gonna mad   PRT

       'It really drives people mad.'

Here, F illustrates her problem of living in an area with extremely high temperatures by showing a screenshot of the weather application interface in which she has circled the local temperature. Z's response in Lines 3–5 and, in particular, Z's repetition of the highlighted temperature in the screenshot, *51 度51 du* '51 degrees' (Line 4), shows that Z recognizes F's problem as depicted in the screenshot and strongly identifies with F.

Excerpts 4.7 and 4.8 are examples of using only images to present problems in a complaint.

III.   Problem Presentation Through Texts and Images

A combination of texts and images is used to depict the third type of problem presentation. Images frequently depict the referents of deictic expressions in texts when texts and images are used together to present problems. Some examples of this include the Mandarin demonstratives *zhege* 'this,' and *zheme* 'like this.' Excerpts 4.9 and 4.10 illustrate how problem presentation in complaints is accomplished through texts and images.

In the interaction in Excerpt 4.9, T and A are friends. Prior to this excerpt, A informs T that the water in A's apartment's water has been shut off for the day. The water is scheduled to be turned back on at noon, but the shut-off lasts all day (Lines 1–2). Before A initiates the complaint beginning in Line 1, the water flow is still restricted (Lines 3–4).

Excerpt 4.9 ("Water Shut-off")

```
1->A:   本来          说好      就        停水            一      上午

        Benlai      shuohao  jiu    tingshui         yi   shangwu

        Originally scheduled just  water shut-off     one   morning

         'The water shut-off is scheduled to end at noon.'


2->     到      现在     都    没     来    水

        dao  xianzai   dou   mei    lai    shui

        till   now    still  NEG   come   water

         'But there is still no water coming out of the taps at the moment.'
```

```
3->
```

```
4->    就    这么    一   咪咪    水
       Jiu  zheme   yi  mimi    shui
       Just  this   one  CL    water
       'Just a low water flow like this.'
```

```
5      昏迷
       Hunmi
       Stunned
       'I am stunned.'
```

```
6  T:  太   惨   了
       Tai  can   le
       So  awful  PRT
       'It's so awful.'
```

A presents the problem in Lines 1–4 using a combination of texts (Lines 1–2 and 4) and an image (Line 3). The texts *report* the problem of restricted water flow resulting from the

unanticipated and prolonged water cutoff. The image *shows* the problem of a water faucet with minimal water flow. This image shows the referent of the expression 这么 *zheme* 'like this' in Line 4.

Excerpt 4.10 also demonstrates using texts and images to present a problem by combining the two. This excerpt is from a conversation between two friends, J and R. Before this excerpt, J and R chat via WeChat voice call, and J informs R that her upper right arm is very itchy. After they hang up, J asks her mother about the itchiness. Her mother says that the itchiness is caused by shingles and J may need to see a doctor (Lines 4–5).

Excerpt 4.10 ("Shingles")

```
1   J:  吐      了
        Tu      le
        puke    PRT
        'I am disgusted.'


2->     我      妈      说      这个    是       带状疱疹
        Wo      ma     shuo    zhege  shi     daizhuangpaozhen
        1SG    mother  say     this    be      shingles
        'My mom said that these were shingles.'
```

3->

4->   要   去   医院   看
      Yao   qu   yiyuan   kan
      Need   go   hospital   see
      'I need to go to the doctor.'

5->   我   妈   说   严重   的话
      Wo   ma   shuo   yanzhong   dehua
      1SG mother   say   serious   if
      要   吊水
      yao   diaoshui
      need take intravenous therapy
      'My mother says if things get worse, I am going to need an intravenous therapy.'

6   R: 啊   怎么   这样   啊
      A   zenme   zheyang   a
      Ahh   how   this   PRT
      'Ahh, how can this be?'

```
7        这么      严重        吗

         Zheme    yanzhong     ma

         This     serious      Q

         'Is it so serious?'
```

In this excerpt, in texts in Lines 2–4 and 5 and an image in line 3, J presents her problem. The texts report J's itching due to shingles and that she may need to see a doctor or receive intravenous treatment. The photo of rashes on J's upper right arm shows the referent of the demonstrate 这个 *zhege* 'this' in Line 2.

In summary, Section 4.2.1 discusses and provides examples of three types of multimodal problem presentation designs in complaints. Complainers may use only texts, only images, or a combination of texts and images to present a problem when making complaints. Next, I discuss the multimodal design of negative effect displays.

4.2.2 The Multimodal Design of Display of Negative Affect

Displays of negative affect in complaints in the data can be accomplished in two ways: texts and emojis. This section discusses, respectively, these two types of multimodal design.

I.   Display of Negative Affect Through Texts

Excerpt 5.11 illustrates how a display of affect can be achieved solely through texts. The following is a reproduction of Excerpt 4.7 as Excerpt 4.11.

Excerpt 4.11 ("Drink")

1   N:

2->   我   怒

         Wo   nu

         1SG angry

         'I am angry. '

3   X: 怎么   会   这样！

         Zenme hui zheyang

         How   can   this

         'How can this happen!'

Here, the image in Line 1 depicts the problem: a partially spilled drink. In line 2, N displays her negative affective stance toward the problem by directly expressing her anger, 我怒 *wo nu* 'I am angry.'

Excerpt 4.12 is also an example of using only texts to display the complainer's negative feelings about a problem. This excerpt is from a chat between two friends, L and P. Before this excerpt, L has just completed her final exam and is going to eat lunch at a restaurant. However,

after walking to the restaurant in the rain, she is informed that she must wait for a table (Lines 1–3).

Excerpt 4.12 ("Drenched")

1 L:　　我　　　考完　　　了， 刚　 到　　 吃饭的　　 地方

　　　　　Wo　　 kaowan　　 le　gang　dao　 chifande difang

　　　　　1SG　 finish exam PRT just　 arrive　 eat　 place

　　　　　hai　 yao　paidui

　　　　　还　　　要　　　排队

　　　　　Still　 need　line up

　　　　　'I just finished my exam. I arrived at the restaurant, but I still need
　　　　　to wait for a table.'

2　　　　主要　　　还　下着　　雨

　　　　　Zhuyao　 hai　 xiazhe　　 yu

　　　　　Mainly　 still　 falling　 rain

　　　　　'The situation is that it's still raining outside.'

3　　　　我　 淋着　　　雨　　 过来　　 的

　　　　　Wo　 linzhe　　 yu　 guolai　　 de

　　　　　1SG　 drenched　　 rain　 come　　 PRT

　　　　　'I got drenched in the rain when walking to the restaurant.'

4->　　 气　 死　 我　 了

　　　　　Qi　 si　 wo　 le

　　　　　Angry　 die　 1SG　 PRT

　　　　　'I am angry to death.'

48

```
05  P:  俺      的    天
        An    de   tian
        1SG   ASSC  god
        'Oh my god.'
```

In Line 4, L displays her negative affect through the text 气死我了 *qi si wo le* ' I am angry to death.' This expression shows her outrage at getting drenched and have to waiting for a table for lunch..

Excerpts 4.11 and 4.12 demonstrate that complainers can display negative affects through texts only.

II. Display of Negative Affect Through Emojis

Emojis are also used in texts to express the negative emotions of complainants. According to my analysis of the data, two emojis are used to display negative affects in complaints: 😫 [scream] and 😡 [angry]. According to Ekman and Friesen's (1978) facial action coding system (FACS) and Fugate and Franco's (2021)'s modification adapted to emojis, the first emoji, 😫 [scream] depicts a face with furrowed eyebrows, closed eyes, and a wide-open mouth. Mouth-opening and eye-closing are facial expressions associated with pain (Craig and Patrick, 1985); thus, this emoji conveys the emotion of experiencing pain. The second emoji, 😡 [angry] depicts a face with furrowed eyebrows and tensed lips and chin. Eyebrow furrowing and lip tightening are facial expressions associated with anger (Hamm et al., 2011).

The data show that a complainant's message may contain one or more emojis. In those latter instances, the complainant is conveying an emotion emphatically. The following excerpts, 4.13 and 4.14, illustrate using a single emoji and multiple emojis to convey negative affects.

Excerpt 4.13, which uses a single emoji, is from a conversation between two friends, N and A. Prior to this excerpt, N slips and twists her ankle while getting into the tub for a shower (Lines 1–2).

Except 4.13 ("Slipped")

```
1   N:  我     刚刚       洗澡        在     浴缸   里     摔了一跤
        Wo  ganggang   xizao     zai  yugang  li   shuaileyijiao
        1SG  just    take a bath  in   bathtub  in    slipped
        'I just went to take a bath but slipped in the bathtub.'


2       现在        瘸     了
        Xianzai   que    le
         Now    lame    PRT
        'Now I am limping.'
```



```
3->


4   A:  嘶      心疼      了
        Si     xinteng   le
        SI     worry    PRT
        'Gasp! I am worried about you.'


5       这会儿     好点     没
```

> *Zhehuier   haodian   mei*
>
> Now   better   Q
>
> 'Are you feeling better now?'

N reports the problem of falling in the bathtub and subsequent injury in Lines 1–2. In Line 3, N uses a single emoji, [scream], to convey her feelings of pain and distress, and show that she is taking a negative stance toward the problem.

Excerpt 4.14 illustrates the use of multiple instances of the same emoji to display negative affects. This excerpt is taken from a chat between two friends, T and A. T wants to play video games, but she spends all night performing system and game updates (Lines 1–4).

Excerpt 4.14 ("Update")

1   T: 我   就   想   玩   个   游戏

    Wo   jiu   xiang   wan   ge   youxi

    1SG   just   want   play   CL   game

    'I just wanted to play games.'

2   打开   提醒   我   更新   主机

    Dakailaile tixing   wo   gengxin   zhuji

    Opened   notify   1SG   update   game console

    'When I opened (the game console) it asked me to update the console system.'

3   更   完   了   要   我   更新   游戏

    Geng   wan   le   yao   wo   gengxin   youxi

    Update finish PRT need   1SG   update   game

    'After the system update was finished, it asked me to update

```
          the game.'


4         一      晚上     全     浪费      在      更新      了
          Yi    wanshang quan   langfei  zai    gengxin   le
          One    night    all    waste    on     update    PRT
          'I wasted the entire night on updates.'



5->          😡 😡 😡


6   A:   ？有     点     惨     了
          you    dian   can     le
          have   CL     tragic  PRT
          'It's a bit tragic.'
```

In Line 5, T uses three "red face" emojis, 😡 [angry] , with furrowed eyebrows, clenched jaws, and closed lips with a downturned mouth to express how she felt about having to perform endless system and game updates instead of doing what she really wanted: to play a game. The repetition of the "red face" emoji three times indicates that T's anger is extreme.

Excerpts 5.13 and 5.14 demonstrate how 😖 [scream] and 😡 [angry] emojis are used to convey complainers' negative affects in complaints.

In conclusion, Section 4.2 investigated the multimodal design of problem presentations and displays of negative affects in complaints as revealed by the data. The presentation of a problem can be achieved through texts only, images only, or a combination of texts and images. In addition, a display of negative affects can be accomplished through texts or emojis.

4.3 Summary

Chapter 4 addressed the structural patterns and multimodal design of the initiating action of complaints in the sequences of complaints in the data. Problem presentation and affective display are the two components of complaints. Depending on the order of the two components, there are two distinct structural patterns for complaints. The first is a problem presentation + a display of negative affects; the second is a display of negative affects + a problem presentation.

A problem presentation can be produced through texts, images, or a combination of the two, according to the multimodal design of the two components of complaints. Images frequently reference deictic expressions in texts, such as *zheme* 'like this' (Excerpt 5.9) and *zhege* 'this' (Excerpt 5.10). A complainant may use either texts or emojis to express negative emotions such as pain and anger.

Chapter 5 Responses to Complaints in Complaint Sequences

Immediately after complaints, various responsive actions (hereafter referred to as responses) may be produced by complainees. An examination of the data demonstrates three types of responses to the complaint in complaint sequences: the display of affiliation, consolement, and suggestion. Chapter 5 investigates these three types of responses in detail.

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the frequency of occurrence of every action in the data. Then I discuss the practices used to accomplish each of the responsive actions.

According to Jefferson (1988), the primary function of responsive actions in the context of trouble-telling (referred to as "complaints" in this study) is to display affiliation with the previous speakers' affective stance. Displaying affiliation is also the most frequently used type of response to the complaint in the data. It is further accomplished through four practices: exclamations and expletives, assessments, expressions of empathy, and rhetorical questions. The second type of responsive action—consolement—is accomplished through verbal expressions, hug emojis, or a combination of verbal expressions and emojis. The third type of response involves making suggestions to resolve the problems or troubles reported in complaints. The linguistic structures used to perform suggestions as a responsive action include A-not-A questions and imperatives in the data. A response may consist of only one responsive action or a combination of multiple practices of different responsive actions, for example, exclamation + assessment, expletive + consolement, and several other combinations.

Table 5.1 itemizes the frequencies of occurrences of these three types of responsive actions in 36 complaint sequences.

Table 5.1 Occurrence of Each Responsive Actions Type

Type	Occurrence	Percentage
Display of affiliation	51	83.7%
Consolement	4	6.5%
Suggestion	4	6.5%
Others	2	3.3%
Total	61	100%

As shown in Table 5.1, displays of affiliation occur 51 times in the data, accounting for 83.7% of the responses to complaints. Consolements and suggestions occur four times each, accounting for 6.5% of the responses in each case. This table shows that according to the data, display of affiliation is the most frequently used response (83.7%, n=51) in complaints in instant messaging interactions. This is consistent with the high frequency of its use in responses to face-to-face complaints (Jefferson, 1988). The "Others" category contains the hard-to-identify instances where the responsive actions cannot be clearly categorized.

As discussed earlier, display of affiliation was further accomplished through four practices in the data: exclamations and expletives, assessments, expressions of empathy, and rhetorical questions. Table 5.2 presents the frequency of the four practices of display of affiliation in the data. Note that the numbers shown below include all instances of each practice, whether they are used alone or are combined with another practice in response to complaints.

Table 5.2 Occurrences of Each Practice of Display of Affiliation

Practice	Occurrence	Percentage
Exclamations and expletives	22	43.1%
Assessments	13	25.4%
Expressions of empathy	9	17.7%
Rhetorical questions	7	13.8%
Total	51	100%

It is remarkable that among the four practices, exclamations and expletives are the most frequently used (43%, n=22) to display the recipient's affiliation with the complainer in a response (Table 5.2). The number of occurrences of exclamations and expletives is almost twice as high as that of assessments, which is the second most frequently used practice. In order of the number of occurrences, the next ones are the expressions of empathy (17.7%, n=9) and rhetorical questions (13.8%, n=7).

After providing an overview of the three types of responses, I will discuss them in detail in the subsequent sections. Section 5.1 examines the most frequent responsive action type–display of affiliation—in responses to complaints in the data. Section 5.2 shows consolements as responses to complaints. Section 5.3 illustrates how participants give suggestions as responses to complaints.

5.1 Display of affiliation

Display of affiliation refers to the conversational action of endorsing another participant's already conveyed stance (Stivers, 2008). Section 5.1 shows how complainees display their affiliation with the complainer by using four types of practices: exclamations and expletives (Section 5.1.1),

assessments (Section 5.1.2), expressions of empathy (Section 5.1.3), and rhetorical questions (Section 5.1.4).

5.1.1 Exclamations and Expletives

As shown in Table 5.2, exclamations or expletives are the most frequently of the four practices for displaying affiliation (42.1%, n=22). Exclamations and expletives in the data include surprising and swearing interjections. Both of them express intense emotions of unexpected or feeling shocked about the complainable in the complaint sequences.

Excerpt 5.1 displays how an exclamation is used as a way to display one's affiliation with the complainer as a response to a complaint. This excerpt is extracted from a chat between two friends, B and Q, who are international students studying in the United States. In this excerpt, B describes purchasing a mystery bag on Instagram but never receiving it, and then being blocked by the seller (Lines 1-4). Line 5 shows Q's response to the complaint.

Excerpt 5.1 ("Mystery Bag")

```
1   B:   我      之前     买    福袋          被      骗      了
         Wo    zhiqian  mai   fudai        bei    pian    le
         1SG   before   buy   mystery bag  BEI    defraud PRT
         'I got scammed when I bought mystery bags last time.'


2        骗了            我    150   刀
         Pianle        wo   150   dao
         Defrauded     1SG   150   dollar
         '(They) defrauded me of 150 dollars.'


3        还      把    我    拉黑    了
```

```
           Hai   ba   wo   lahei   le

           Also  BA   1SG  Block   PRT

           'And also blocked me.'


4          真     tm    服        了

           Zhen  tm    fu        le

           Really fuck surrender PRT

           'I am fucking tired of it.'


5->Q:   老天爷

           Laotianye

           God

           'God.'
```

Q's response in Line 5 is an exclamation word 老天爷 *laotianye* 'God.' The word sums up Q's heightened astonishment about the problem reported by B in Lines 1-4. Q uses the exclamation to support B's affective stance, thereby displaying an affiliation with B (Stivers, 2008).

Excerpt 5.2 illustrates how expletives are used in displaying affiliation as a response to complaints. This excerpt is extracted from a chat between two friends, V and LE. V has purchased something on Xianyu (a used goods e-commerce web platform in China) but never receiving it. The seller does not respond to V's messages for more than two months and refuses to issue V a refund. V has mentioned this problem several times with LE prior to this excerpt. In Lines 1-2, V is complaining again, as she feels she is being scammed. In Lines 3-4, LE responds to the complaint.

Excerpt 5.2 ("Scammed")

```
1   V:   我   现在        就  是    一   个   很    崩溃的      状态
```

```
          Wo  xianzai  jiu  shi   yi  ge   hen  bengkuide  zhuangtai
          1SG  now    just be   one  CL  very devastated   state
          'I am really devastated right now.'


2         我    现在    压根   不   知道 我  是   不   是   被   骗   了
          Wo  xianzai yagen  bu  zhidao wo  shi  bu  shi  bei pian le
          1SG  now    at all NEG know 1SG  be  NEG  be  BEI  scam PRT
          'At this moment, I have no idea if I got scammed or not at all.'


3-> LE: Wc
          fuck
          'Fuck.'


4         不过    也   不    是   都   会    被   骗
          Buguo   ye  bu    shi  dou  hui   bei  pian
          But    also NEG   be   all  will  BEI  gyp
          'But it does not necessarily mean you got scammed.'
```

LE's response in Lines 3 and 4 is a combination of the expletive *wc* (Line 3), an acronym of the Chinese internet curse word 卧槽 *wocao* 'fuck,' and a consolement (Line 4). This section focuses only on the first part, the expletive *wc*. Expletives, particularly swear words like "fuck" or its Mandarin equivalent, 卧槽 *wocao,* express an extreme emotion (Andersson and Trudgill, 1990). Thus, using them in the responsive action suggests that the complainee has an intense emotional affiliation with the complainer. In this excerpt, LE's high degree of affiliation with V's complaint in Lines 1-2 is delivered through the expletive 卧槽 *wocao,* in Line 3.

Excerpts 5.1 and 5.2 highlight how exclamations and expletives are used to respond to complaints. These expressions convey complainees' shock about the problems reported by the complainers and become a means to display their affiliation with the complainer and their negative affective stance.

5.1.2 Assessments

The data showed that assessments are the second most frequently used type of practice to display affiliation as a response to a complaint in complaint sequences. Assessments represent the complainees' negative evaluative stance toward the complainable, which supports the complainer's stance. Excerpts 5.3 and 5.4 are examples from the data that show how assessments are used in responses to complaints.

Excerpt 5.3 was taken from a chat between two friends, J and R. Prior to this excerpt, J and R discussed how cold it was outside. In Lines 1-5, J begins to complain about she had no hot water during the previous winter because her heater had broken. In Lines 6-7, R responds to J's complaint.

Excerpt 5.3 ("Heater Breakdown")

```
1   J:  我      去年        热水          坏        了

        Wo    qunian    reshui      huai      le

        1SG   last year  hot water   breakdown  PRT

        'Last year, my water heater broke down.'


2       洗了      一    个      冬天的        冷水澡

        Xile    yi   ge    dongtiande  lengshuizao

        Washed  one  CL    winter        cold bath

        'I could only take cold baths during the entire winter.'
```

3　　　　都　　　　是　拿　锅　和　　热水壶　　　烧　　　热水

　　　　　Dou　　　shi　na　guo　he　reshuihu　　shao　　　reshui

　　　　　Always　be　use　pot　and　kettle　　boil　　hot water

　　　　　'I always used a pot and a kettle to boil hot water.'

4　　　　光　　　　　烧　　　热水　　　　就　　　　烧　　一　个　　小时

　　　　　Guang　shao　reshui　　jiu　　shao　yi　ge　xiaoshi

　　　　　Just　　boil　hot water　already　boil　one　CL　hour

　　　　　'Just boiling hot water took me an hour (every time).'

5　　　　真的　　　　　吐　　　了　　　去年

　　　　　Zhende　tu　　　le　　　qunian

　　　　　Really　throw up　PRT　　last year

　　　　　'I felt disgusting last year.'

6　R:　额　　滴　　老天爷

　　　　E　　di　　laotianye

　　　　1SG　ASSC　god

　　　　'My god.'

7->　　这　　也　　　太　　离谱　　　了

　　　　Zhe　ye　　tai　　lipu　　　le

　　　　This　even　so　ridiculous　PRT

　　　　'This was so ridiculous.'

R's response in Lines 6-7 consists of two practices for displays of affiliation. Line 6 is an exclamation (discussed in 5.2.1) and Line 7 is an assessment, which latter is the focus of this section. J's assessment 这也太离谱了 *zhe ye lipu le* 'This is so ridiculous.' is a negative

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evaluation of the complainable in Lines 1-4. Through this negative evaluation, R adopted the same negative affective stance toward the same complainable conveyed by J in Line 5.

Excerpt 4, which also exemplifies this point, is taken from a chat between two friends, T and N. Prior to this excerpt, T was waiting for photography for her passport application, and she had to wait for a long time because the photographer was on a lunch break. T complains about this situation to N in Lines 1-4. In Line 5, N responds to T's complaint with an assessment.

Excerpt 5.4 („Passport photo")

```
1   T:  我      麻      了
        Wo      ma      le
        1SG     numb    PRT
        'I feel numb.'


2       我      现在      办      护照
        Wo     xianzai   ban     huzhao
        1SG     now      apply   passport
        'I am applying for my passport.'


3       这个      点      还      是      人工      拍
        Zhege   dian    hai    shi    rengong     pai
        This     time    still   be    manual   take photo
        'Now it's still photographers manually taking photos.'


4       等     生     等     死     人      去     吃饭      了
        Deng  sheng  deng   si    ren    qu    chifan     le
        Wait   live   wait   die   person  go  have lunch  PRT
        'I waited for so long. Then the photographer just went to lunch.'
```

```
5->N:    太      恐怖        了      吧

         Tai    kongbu      le      ba

         So     horrific    PRT     PRT

         'So horrific!'
```

Unlike Excerpt 5.3, the assessment in this excerpt is used independently as the response to the complaint (Line 5). The assessment, 太恐怖了吧 *tai kongbu le ba* 'so horrific' conveys an extremely high degree of negative emotion in the evaluation of T's experience. The display of a strong negative affective stance toward the complainable demonstrates N's emotional affiliation with T.

Excerpts 5.3 and 5.4 prove that, in responsive actions, assessments convey a complainee's affiliation with the complainer by expressing the same negative affective stance toward the same complainable.

5.1.3 Expressions of Empathy

In the data, the practice of expressing empathy was used nine times in responses to complaints. Though the frequency of this practice is not as high as exclamations and expletives and assessments, it also accounts for a fair proportion (17.7%, n=9 as shown in Table 5.2). Expressions of empathy convey complainees' feelings from the standpoint of complainers to attain the goal of showing affiliation with complainers.

Excerpt 5.5 depicts how expressions of empathy convey affiliation as a response to a complaint. This excerpt is from an interaction between two friends, N and J. It was Halloween weekend, and N attended a party. The taxi fee was particularly high because of the holiday, so N

could not return home and had to sleep at a friend's house (Lines 1-4). In line 6, J provides a response to N's complaint in Lines 1-5.

Excerpt 5.5 ("Halloween")

1   N: 昨天   晚上   万圣节   车费   巨   贵

         Zuotian *wanshang* *wanshengjie* *chefei*   *ju*   *gui*

         Yesterday night   Halloween   taxi fare super   expensive

         'Since last night was Halloween, the taxi fare was super expensive.'

2   我   回家   没   回   成

         Wo   *huijia*   *mei*   *hui*   *cheng*

         1SG   return home   NEG   back   successful

         'I didn't get back home at the end.'

3   睡   我   朋友   家   了

         Shui   *wo* *pengyou*   *jia*   *le*

         Sleep 1SG   friend   home   PRT

         'I slept at my friend's place.'

4   昨天   晚上   1 km的   路   要   20   刀

         Zuotian   *wanshang* 1 *kmde*   *lu*   *yao* *20*   *dao*

         Yesterday   night 1 km   distance   cost 20   dollar

         'Last night, the taxi fare for one kilometer distance was 20 dollars.'

5   我   吓   死   了

         Wo   *xia*   *si*   *le*

```
            1SG     scare     die     PRT

            'I am scared to death.'


6->J:   我      也      吓        死      了

        Wo      ye      xia      si      le

        1SG     also    scare    die     PRT

        'I am scared to death too.'
```

In line 6, 我也吓死了 *wo ye xia si le* 'I am scared to death too' is a direct expression of J's feeling about the problem that N reported in Lines 1-4. J shows that she feels the same as N by repeating N's display of affection in Line 5, adding the adverb 也 *ye* 'also.' The subject 我 *wo* 'I' in Line 6 is further evidence supporting the argument that N's response in Line 6 is a display of empathy, as the entire utterance is about J's feeling toward the complainable.

Excerpt 5.6 also shows how an expression of empathy was used in responses. This excerpt is taken from an interaction between two friends, T and A. T's wisdom teeth are causing her pain, and in Lines 1-5, she complains to A about how the pain is affecting her daily life. In lines 6-7, A responds to T.

Excerpt 5.6 ('wisdom teeth')

```
1    T:   我    这次      回去    还得    去   把   我     剩下的       两    颗

          Wo   zheci   huiqu  haidei  qu  ba  wo  shengxiade liang  ke

          1SG  this time back  also    go  BA  1SG    rest    two   CL

          智齿              拔         了

          zhichi            ba         le

          wisdom teeth  extract     PRT
```

'When I get back, I've got to remove the remaining two

wisdom teeth.'

2   因为   我   有   一   颗   是   横着   长   得

      Yinwei   wo   you   yi   ke   shi   hengzhe   zhang   de

      Because   1SG   have   one   CL   be   horizontally   grow   PRT

      'Because one of them is growing horizontally.'

3   肯定   得   拔

      Kending   dei   ba

      Absolutely have to extract

      'It definitely needs to be removed.'

4   我   每天   吃饭   都   卡   东西   在   那里

      Wo   meitian   chifan   dou   ka   dongxi   zai   nali

      1SG every day   eat   always   stuck   thing   in   there

      'Every day I get something stuck in there.'

5   真的   折磨   我

      Zhende   zhemo   wo

      Really   torture   1SG

      'It really tortures me.'

6 A: Omg

7->   听着   就   好   痛

      Tingzhe jiu   hao   tong

      Hear   then   very   painful

```
'It sounds very painful.'
```

In Line 7, A expresses her empathy for T by directly identifying the feeling of 好痛 *hao tong* 'painful.' In Lines 1-5, A makes it clear that she understands and feels bad about what T is going through. This shows that she affiliates with T.

Overall, Excerpts 5.5 and 5.6 illustrate how complainees produce expressions of empathy to display their direct feelings or attitudes toward complainables. These expressions, which mirror the complainers' feelings, show the complainees' affiliation with the complainers.

5.1.4 Rhetorical Questions

Rhetorical questions, which occurred seven times in the data, were the least frequently used practice of displays of affiliation. Multiple types of rhetorical questions were present in Chinese, such as *bush…ma* '…or not?' (Tao, 2020), *nandao* 'could it be that…?' (Xu, 2012), *daodi* 'is it…?' (Chou, 2012), and *zenme* 'how come…?' rhetorical questions (Chou, 2012). In the data, *zenme* rhetorical questions were the only type used in responses to the complaints. A *zenme* rhetorical question is equivalent to a *how-come* question in English. It is composed of an interrogative *zenme,* meaning "how," and a demonstrative. The following Excerpt 5.1.4 (a) illustrates the form of a *zenme* rhetorical question.

5.1.4(a)

X:　怎么　　会　这样

Zenme　hui　zheyang

How　can　this

'How come it be like this!'

According to Li and Thompson (1981), rhetorical questions are those in which the questioner already has an assumption about the answer. Rhetorical questions are less about seeking an answer than about giving the speaker an opportunity to express an opinion or attitude in the form of a question (Frank, 1990). Cohen (2007) examined the function of rhetorical questions and argued that they were used to display incredulity, disbelief, and astonishment. In a 2010, Quan and Ren examined rhetorical questions as a means to express anxiety and anger in Chinese interactions. The rhetorical question in 5.1.4 (a) was used to deliver X's disbelief and anger rather than seek an answer.

Excerpt 5.7 shows how a *zenme* rhetorical question is used to display affiliation in the responses to complaints. This excerpt is from a chat between two friends, U and CL. In Lines 1-3, U is complaining about getting a traffic ticket and having to pay 200 Chinese dollars. CL gives her response in Lines 4-5.

Excerpt 5.7 ("Traffic ticket")

```
1 U:    U   吃了    人生的      第一    张     罚单！

        U   chile  renshengde  diyi   zhang  fadan

        U   got    life        first  CL     traffic ticket

        'U (I) got the first traffic ticket in my life!'


2       200  刀     就    没    了

        200  dao    jiu   mei   le

        200  dollars then  NEG   le

        '200 dollars were just gone.'


3       我    好    难过     啊

        Wo   hao   nanguo    a
```

```
         1SG   so   sad    PRT

         'I am so sad.'


4   CL: 天        惹

         tian    re

         God    PRT

         'God.'


5->      怎么     会      这样

         Zenme   hui   zheyang

         How    can    this

         "How come it be like this?"
```

The *zenme* rhetorical question in Line 5, 怎么会这样 *zenme hui zheyang* 'How come it turned out to be like this' conveys CL's astonishment toward the problem reported in Lines 2-3, which affectively affiliates with U's affect of 难过 *nanguo* 'sad' in Line 3.

The following excerpt, 5.8, also illustrates the use of a *zenme* rhetorical question in the response turn to present the complainee's affiliation with the complainer. Excerpt 4.8 is shown here as Excerpt 5.8. This excerpt is from a chat between two friends, N and X. N orders a drink through an online food delivery platform and when the drink arrives, half of it has been spilled. N takes a picture of the drink and sends it to X to complaint. X's response is shown in Line 3.

Excerpt 5.8 ("Drink")

```
1  N:
```



```
2      我    怒

       Wo   nu

       1SG  angry

       'I am angry.'



3->X:  怎么   会   这样！

       Zenme  hui  zheyang

       How   can   this

       'How can this happen?'
```

Line 3 *怎么会这样！ zenme hui zheyang* 'How can this happen' displays X's astonishment, further expressing emotional affiliation with the complainer, N.

In summary, Section 5.1.4 discusses the use of *zenme* rhetorical questions as a practice for displaying affiliation in responses to complaints. This is accomplished by using rhetorical

questions to demonstrate disbelief about the complainable and thereby an emotional affiliation with the complainers.

5.2 Consolements

In the data, the use of consolements in responsive action takes place four times, accounting for 6.5% (n=4) of responses (Table 5.1). According to Burleson's definition, a consolement or comforting is a type of action intended to alleviate the negative emotions of others (1984). The two types of consolements in face-to-face interactions are verbal and non-verbal (e.g., eye contact or physical touch) (Dolin and Booth-Butterfield, 1993). In the data collected for this study, a consolement can be expressed verbally through texts and nonverbally through emojis in instant messaging interactions. The specific emoji used in consolements is [hug].

Section 5.2.1 elaborates on consolements expressed verbally through texts. Section 5.2.2 provides an account of the consolements expressed through emojis.

5.2.1 Text Consolements

Among the four instances of consolements, only one was accomplished by only text. Excerpt 4.6 is shown here as Excerpt 5.9. The JC mentioned in Line 1 is the pseudonym of the company where T works. JC has issues (line 1), and T feels anxious about whether that will affect her work (Line 2). In Lines 4-6, A produces a consolement to comfort T.

Excerpt 5.9 ("Anxious")

```
1  T:   哎      现在    JC      出      状况          了
        Ai    xianzai  JC    chu  zhuangkuang    le
        Uh     now     JC    occur  trouble      PRT
        'Uh, now JC (company) got into trouble.'
```

2   搞得   我   每天   都   好   焦虑

Gaode   wo   meitian   dou   hao   jiaolü

Make   1SG   every day   always   very   anxious

'It makes me always feel very anxious every day.'

3   好   烦   额

Hao   fan   e

So   annoying   PRT

'So annoying.'

4->A: 焦虑   正常   啦   没   关系   的

Jiaolü   zhengchang   la   mei   guanxi   de

Anxious   normal   PRT   NEG   mind   PRT

'It is normal to feel anxious. It's okay.'

5->   你   现在   焦虑   不   是   什么   坏   事

Ni   xianzai   jiaolü   bu   shi   shenme   huai   shi

2SG   now   anxious   NEG   be   any   bad   thing

'Feeling anxious now is not a bad thing.'

6->   有   紧张感   是   好   的！

You   jinzhanggan   shi   hao   de

Have   tension   be   good   NOM

'Feeling a bit tense is good.'

In Lines 4-6, to make T feel better, A puts a positive spin on T's anxiety by saying, "Feeling anxious now is not a bad thing" (Line 5). This shows that A shares T's feelings and is affiliating with T.

5.2.2 Consolements Containing Emojis

The other three instances of consolement all contain the hug emoji [hug]. This emoji is a visual expression of the physical act of giving a hug. In face-to-face interactions, a hug is a comforting social-emotional touch that gives emotional feedback and support (Dolin and Booth-Butterfield, 1993). In instant messaging, a hug emoji depicts the physical action of hugging. In the data, it can be used alone or combined with a text consolement.

In Excerpt 5.10, the consolement is accomplished solely by the hug emoji. The excerpt is from two friends, X and N. X's flight is delayed due to technical issues and she is stuck on the airplane for more than three hours. She complains to N in Lines 1-4. In her response, in Line 5, N sends three hug emojis.

Excerpt 5.10 ('flight')

```
1   X:   倒霉

         Daomei

         Unlucky

         'Unlucky.'


2        我      每次       出去      玩      都      好      折磨

         Wo     meici     chuqu    wan     dou     hao     zhemo

         1SG    every time  go out  travel  always  so      torturous

         'Every time when I travel, it's full of torture.'
```

3   这次   么 又   航班   飞   不   走

Zheci   me   you   hangban   fei   bu   zou

This time PRT   then   flight   fly NEG   leave

'This time, the situation is that the plane can't take off.'

4   在   飞机   上   坐 仨 小时   了

Zai   feiji shang zuo sa xiaoshi le

On   airplane on   sit three hour   PRT

'(I) have sat on the plane for three hours.'

5->N: 🤗🤗🤗

6   能   不   能   让 他们   安排   你们   下   飞机

Neng bu neng rang tamen anpai nimen xia   feiji

Can NEG can let 3PL   assign 2PL leave airplane

'Can (you) let them let you get off the plane?'

The use of only hug emojis in Line 5 shows N's consolement—she is giving X comforting hugs. Using the same emojis multiple times conveys a heightened degree of consolement.

Excerpt 5.11 serves as an example of consolement through a combination of emojis and texts. This excerpt is taken from two friends, Z and D. Z is planning several personal activities before Christmas. However, due to the holiday, several stores and offices are closed, and she accomplishes nothing on her list (Lines 2-3). After complaining about this to D, D offers a consolement in Line 4.

Excerpt 5.11 ("Christimas")

1 Z 没   心情   吃饭   了

   Mei xinqing   chifan   le

   NEG   mood   have dinner   PRT

   'I am not in the mood for dinner.'

2   今天   又   啥   都   没   干   成

      Jintian you   sha   dou mei   gan   cheng

      Today   again anything all NEG finish   done

      'I did nothing today.'

3   白   跑   一   天   都   不   开门

      Bai   pao   yi   tian   dou   bu   kaimen

      In vain   go   one   day   all   NEG   open

      'I went to a lot of places today, but they are all closed.'

4->D 没事   过了   圣诞   都   会   好   的！

      Meishi   guole   shengdan dou hui   hao   de

      It's okay   pass   Christmas   all can   well   PRT

      'It's okay! Everything will be fine after Christmas.'

In this excerpt, D's consolement is conducted through a combination of texts, including 没事 *meishi* 'it's okay' and 过了圣诞节都会好的 *guole shengdanjie dou hui hao de* 'everything will be fine after Christmas' and an hug emoji, , in Line 4. The text part provides an optimistic projection of the future scenario, and the emoji suggests a comforting hug and expresses D's emotional support for Z.

In short, Excerpt 5.2 exemplifies the form and use of a consolement in response to a complaint. The function of consolements is to smooth out the complainers' negative effects and provide emotional support. Both texts and hug emojis can be used as consolements. Using the hug emoji is like representing the comforting social-emotional hug to give complainers emotional support.

5.3 Suggestions

The third type of response in complaint sequences is suggestions, in which complainees present accounts that will benefit complainers. In the data, a suggestion can be accomplished through imperatively-formatted suggestions and *neng-bu-neng*-formatted suggestions.

Section 5.3.1 describes imperative-formatted suggestions, and Section 5.3.2 describes suggestions with the *neng-bu-neng* polar interrogative structure.

5.3.1 Imperative-Formatted Suggestions

In the data, complainees may offer imperative-formatted suggestions to aid in solving complainers' problems.

Excerpt 5.12 shows how such a suggestion is used in response to complaints. This excerpt is taken from a chat between two friends, T and L. T travels to the city where L lives but gets sick during the trip and has to cancel the trip (lines 2-4). After T complains about this problem in Lines 1-4, L responds to T with a combination of a consolement (Line 5) and a suggestion (Line 6).

Excerpt 5.12 ("Sightseeing")

```
1   T:  烦        死   了
        Fan      si   le
        Annoyed  die  PRT
        'I am annoyed to death.'
```

2 这 次 太 不 顺 了

Zhe ci tai bu shun le

This time so NEG lucky PRT

'This trip was full of bad luck.'

3 前 几 天 不 舒服

Qian ji tian bu shufu

Before some day NEG well

'I was sick a few days ago.'

4 好多 原定的 地方 都 没 去 到

Haoduo yuandingde defang dou mei qu dao

many scheduled place all NEG go arrive

'I didn't have a chance to visit those places that are originally on my plan.'

5 L: 没关系

Meiguanxi

It's okay

'It's okay!'

6-> 下 次 再 来！

Xia ci zai lai

Next time again come

'Come next time!'

77

The imperative-formatted suggestion in Line 6 is a response to T's complaint about having to change her travel plans after she got sick (Lines 1-4). Through the suggestion, L offers a solution: T can visit again next time.

5.3.2 *Neng-bu-neng*-Formatted Suggestions

Neng-bu-neng 'can-not-can' polar interrogatives are a type of A-not-A question in Chinese (Li and Thompson, 1981). In the data, those were used to make suggestions to complainers as responses to their complaints.

Excerpt 5.13, below, is from a conversation between two friends, W and Y, and demonstrates a *neng-bu-neng*-formatted suggestion as a response to a complaint. W is a university student who shares the dormitory with her classmate, referred to as CX in Line 1. In Lines 1-4, W complains about CX using W's mask throughout the semester without asking W for permission. In Lines 5-6, Y responds to W through a combination of an exclamation (Line 5) and a *neng-bu-neng*-formatted suggestion (Line 6).

Excerpt 5.13 ("Mask")

```
1   W:   CX    之前     用了     我     一     个      学期的      面膜

         CX  zhiqian  yongle  wo    yi     ge   xueqide    mianmo

         CX   before   use   1SG    one    CL   semester    mask

         'CX used my mask for the entire semester.'


2        我    用的    都     没     她     多

         Wo   yongde  dou   mei    ta     duo

         1SG   use   even   NEG    3SG    much

         'I even didn't use my mask as much as she used it.'
```

```
3        给      我      用      完      了

         Gei     wo      yong    wan     le

         Give    1SG     use     finish  PRT

         '(She) used up all of it.'


4        真           无语           了

         Zhen        wuyu           le

         Really      speechless     PRT

         '(I am) really speechless.'


05  Y:   好家伙

         Haojiahuo

         Oh boy

         "Oh boy."


6->      能      不      能      拒绝     她      啊

         Neng    bu      neng    jujue    ta      a

         Can     NEG     can     refuse   3SG     PRT

         'Can you refuse her?'
```

In Line 6, Y uses the n*eng-bu-neng* polar interrogative structure to suggest that W should refuse to allow CX to use her masks. In this case, Y's response centers on giving W a suggestion in order to resolve the problem reported by W in lines 1-4.

Excerpt 5.11 is presented here as 5.14, which also illustrates the use of the *neng-bu-neng* polar interrogative to make a suggestion as a part of a response to a complaint.

Excerpt 5.14 ("Flight")

1   X: 倒霉

　　　　Daomei

　　　　Unlucky

　　　　'Unlucky.'

2   我   每次   出去   玩   都   好   折磨

　　　　Wo   meici   chuqu   wan   dou   hao   zhemo

　　　　1SG   every time go out   travel always so   torturous

　　　　'Every time when I travel, it's full of torture.'

3   这次   么   又   航班   飞   不   走

　　　　Zheci   me   you   hangban   fei   bu   zou

　　　　This time   PRT   then   flight   fly   NEG   leave

　　　　'This time, the situation is that the plane can't take off.'

4   在   飞机   上   坐   仨   小时   了

　　　　Zai   feiji   shang   zuo   sa   xiaoshi   le

　　　　On   airplane   on   sit three hour   PRT

　　　　'(I) have sat on the airplane for three hours.'

5   N:

6->   能   不   能   让   他们   安排   你们   下   飞机

　　　　Neng   bu   neng   rang   tamen   anpai   nimen   xia   feiji

　　　　Can   NEG   can   let   3PL   assign   2PL   leave   airplane

　　　　'Can (you) let them let you get off the plane?'

In Line 6, N offers a suggestion through a *neng-bu-neng* polar interrogative, that X should ask the crew members to allow passengers to disembark. N provides this suggestion to help solve X's problem of staying on the airplane for more than three hours.

This section addressed the use of suggestions as a response to complaints. Suggestions has two types based on the forms: imperative-formatted suggestions and *neng-bu-neng*-formatted suggestions. In responses, the function of suggestions is to propose solutions that will solve the complaints or problems and benefit complainers.

5.4 Summary

Chapter 5 reports on the various types of responses to complaints and their multimodal designs. This chapter provides relevant examples to show how a responsive action is produced through different responsive actions and practices. The three types of responses are display of affiliation, consolement, and suggestion. For display of affiliation, the four types of practices used to convey a response in complaint sequences are expletives and exclamations, assessments, displays of empathy, and rhetorical questions. Exclamations and expletives convey the complainees' intense feelings of shock about the complainable. An assessment presents the complainees' negative evaluation of the complainable, which establishes an emotional affiliation with the complainers. Displaying empathy conveys a direct message of "feeling the same". Rhetorical questions highlight the complainees' negative stance toward the complainable. All of the four practices aim to display the complainee's affiliation with the complainer's affective stance in distinct ways. Consolements alleviate the complainers' negative emotions, and suggestions may be proposed to solve complainers' problems for the complainers' benefit.

The majority of responses from the data in this study are in texts. Only consolements involve both texts and emojis, where hug emojis are used to recreate a social-emotional hug for the purposes of giving complainers emotional support.

In responsive actions that combined multiple practices, no significant sequential pattern was observed. However, the data in this study showed a notable preference for producing an exclamation or an expletive as the first component, followed by the other practices.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

Section 6.1 of this chapter summarizes the findings of this study, while Section 6.2 discusses the implications and limitations of the study.

6.1 Findings

By applying conversation analysis (CA), interactional linguistics (IL), and multimodal analysis frameworks, this study investigated the sequential organization and multimodal design of complaint sequences, including the initiating action of complaint (complaint) and its responsive action (response) in WeChat instant messaging interactions.

In Chapter 4, I analyzed the two sequential structures of complaints according to the order of their two components: problem presentation and display of negative affect. Complaint structure I is the problem presentation + display of negative affect; complaint structure II is the display of negative affect + problem presentation.

Then I discussed the multimodal structure of the two elements of complaints. Three multimodal designs have been found in problem presentation: 1) text only, 2) image only, and 3) a combination of texts and images. Texts can be used to report problems in complaints. Images can be used to show problems. The images used in problem presentations in the data are screenshots or photos taken by complainers. To highlight the complaint, the complainer can edit the image by cropping or circling specific information on the image. When a problem is presented by combining texts and images, the images show the referents of deictic expressions (such as the demonstratives *zhege* 'this' and *zheme* 'like this') in the text problem presentation.

Display of affect can be accomplished using texts or emojis. The complainer may use texts or emojis of [scream] or [anger] to express their frustration or indignation.

In Chapter 5, I outlined the three primary types of complaint responses. They are displays of affiliation, consolements, and suggestions. The most prevalent of these three responsive actions are displays of affiliation (43.1% of responses; n = 22). Displays of affiliation can be divided into four categories based on their practices. Afiliation can be demonstrated in response to complaints through exclamations and expletives, assessments, expressions of empathy, and rhetorical questions.

The data shows that with the exception of consolements, the responses are formed through texts only. As stated earlier, consolements involve texts and emojis. Notably, the hug emoji [hug] is used in three of the four consolement responses I collected for this study.

Many responses in the data involve multiple responsive actions or practices. Though no significant pattern is shown in how different practices are combined in one response, there is a preference for producing exclamations and expletives as the first component of responses to complaints.

These findings regarding the sequential organization and multimodal design of complaint sequences in WeChat interactions contribute to our understanding of how people make and respond to complaints through instant messaging interactions.

6.2 Implications and Limitations

This research is significant in two ways. First, to my knowledge, this is the first study to investigate the sequential organization and multimodal design of complaint sequences in Chinese instant messaging interactions. Second, based on empirical data, this study documents the responsive actions and their design in complaint sequences in Internet-mediated interactions. This study's findings have implications for future studies of direct and third-party complaint sequences in

instant messaging interactions in particular, and Chinese Internet-mediated interactions in general. This study also contributes to our understanding of the differences and similarities in how social actions are accomplished in instant messaging interactions and face-to-face interactions.

This study is not without limitations. First, most of the data consists of everyday interactions between friends. Complaints in workplace settings can be very different from those in everyday interactions on WeChat. Second, most of the participants in this study are young women. As discussed in Chapter 2, other studies that looked at the age and gender of emoji users showed that young women use emojis more. The multimodal design of the complaint sequences may produce different outcomes for other age and gender groups. Third, this research focuses solely on visual modalities, such as texts, images, and emojis. WeChat users can also send audio messages. The audio modality in instant messaging interaction awaits future research.

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Appendix A

Glossing Conventions

1PL	First person plural
1SG	First person singular
2PL	Second person plural
2SG	Second person singular
3PL	Third person plural
3SG	Third person singular
BA	*ba*
BEI	*bei*
CL	Classifier
NEG	Negation
NOM	Nominalizer (*de)*
PRT	Particle
Q	Question (*ma*)