

The *ta* Phenomenon in Chinese Social Media

by

Kerry Sluchinski

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

Master of Arts

Department of East Asian Studies
University of Alberta

©Kerry Sluchinski, 2017

Abstract

Pronouns serve a variety of functions in everyday language use. They not only function as reference, but also reflect the values of language users. This research focuses on the uses of a non-standard form of third-person pronoun in Chinese social media. There are three third person singular pronouns in Mandarin Chinese: 他 (*ta* ‘he’), 她 (*ta* ‘she’), and 它 (*ta* ‘it’). Although they have different written forms, their pronunciations are identical (*ta*). The romanized form *ta* is considered a non-standard spelling of the third person singular pronouns in Chinese social media.

There are three variants of the non-standard spelling *ta*: TA, ta, and Ta. This research adopts qualitative and quantitative methods in analyzing the texts from Chinese social media platform Sina Weibo (the equivalent of Twitter in China). Through examining 1,273 Sina Weibo texts, this study explores (i) the interactional usage of *ta*, and (ii) the textual structures in which *ta* is found. There are six types of accounts from Sina Weibo as categorized by the study: personal-commoner, personal-public figure, institutional, related essays, undefined, and converted. This study specifically focuses on the institutional data set. This study has found that *ta* is used by institutions as a personalization device to achieve engagement in a variety of interactional settings. The intended gender referent of *ta* is largely correlated with the sentence type in which it is embedded. When used in a declarative sentence, *ta* often corresponds to neuter gender, i.e. the standard character 它 for ‘it’. Likewise, when *ta* is used in interrogatives or imperatives it corresponds to either male or female gender (他 or 她) depending on a reader’s interpretation. The texts where *ta* appears (*ta*-texts) have four main environments and two main purposes. The

ta-texts are used by institutions to (i) promote tangible products to consumers for profit purposes, and (ii) promote engagement with intangible objects such as ideologies, public services, brand images, and their services. This research contributes to our understanding of the use of the non-standard form of third-person pronoun *ta* in Chinese social media. It also sheds light on how language is shaped by socio-interactional needs in Chinese social media.

Key Words: Non-standard spelling of third person pronoun, Sina Weibo, Chinese social media, Rhetorical Move Analysis, TA

Acknowledgements

I would first, and foremost, like to take this opportunity to thank my outstanding supervisor and role model, Dr. Xiaoting Li. Throughout my time in the MA program at the University of Alberta, Professor Li has shown me an undying amount of attention, patience, guidance, and compassion. I will forever be grateful for her endless dedication of time and effort which has helped me excel to where I am today and where I will be in the future, academically, professionally, and personally. From countless thesis revisions and reference letters to conferences and research collaborations, Professor Li has always gone above and beyond for me in so many ways. There are no words to adequately and concisely express the impact that Professor Li has had on the various aspects of my life.

I would also like to extend my gratitude towards Dr. Tsuyoshi Ono of the Department of East Asian Studies, and a former teacher of mine. I thank Professor Ono for his continued academic and career advice, his outstanding support with regards to grant applications, and his willingness and patience to review this thesis. With his honesty and straightforwardness Professor Ono showed me that not all academic paths are linear, and that not all of these paths need to be pursued.

For unlimited patience and compassion I would also like to acknowledge and thank Dr. Elisabeth Le of the Department of Modern Languages and Culture Studies. In addition to contributing to the process of this thesis, Dr. Le was a former teacher and mentor whom I will also be forever grateful for. With her patience and understanding Dr. Le showed me that I was capable of writing a literature review and producing work worth publishing. I thank Dr. Le for her continued support and encouragement of my current and future academic endeavors.

For giving me the opportunity to travel to China for the first time, I would like to extend my gratitude to Dr. Daniel Fried of the Department of East Asian Studies. Through the one month Harbin Intensive Summer Program, I was able to experience the culture, food, and climate of China, a place of which I had only read about yet in whose language I specialize. In Harbin I was

able to meet someone who has thus far changed my life for the better, and to this I am grateful to Dr. Fried.

To my friend and confidant, Zhuorui Chen, I would like to acknowledge and thank her for the long-lasting friendship and encouragement she has shown me during our time in the MA program together. Without her companionship, the countless eight hour days spent in the grad-room would have been less than entertaining. Without her support and kindness I would have not been able to overcome some of the most recent and darker times of my life.

In finality, I would also like to extend my gratitude towards the administrative staff involved in the department of East Asian Studies. It is because of Heather McDonald, Lora Slobodian, Gail Mathew, and Elizabeth French that my experience at the department has been relatively smooth and without mishap.

Table of Contents

List of Tables.....	viii
Chapter 1 Introduction	1
1.1 The <i>ta</i> Phenomenon.....	1
1.2 Chinese Third Person Pronouns and Their History.....	2
1.2.1 The Generic/Male <i>ta</i> (他).....	4
1.2.2 The Female <i>ta</i> (她).....	4
1.2.3 The Neuter <i>ta</i> (它).....	5
1.3 Internet in China and Sina Weibo.....	6
1.4 Computer Mediated Communication (CMC).....	8
1.5 Overview of Chapters.....	9
Chapter 2 Literature Review.....	10
2.1 Non-Standard Spelling <i>ta</i> in Chinese Social Media.....	10
2.2 Non-standard Spellings in Chinese CMC.....	16
2.3 Non-standard Spellings in Other Languages.....	21
2.4 Summary.....	26
Chapter 3 Methodological and Theoretical Background.....	27
3.1 Data.....	27
3.1.1 Main Corpus.....	27
3.1.2 Data Segmentation and Categorization.....	29
3.1.3 Institutional Data Set.....	30
3.2 Methodology.....	31
3.2.1 Qualitative Analysis.....	31
3.2.2 Textual Analysis.....	33
3.3 Summary.....	33

Chapter 4 The Function of the <i>ta</i> Phenomenon.....	34
4.1 Introduction.....	34
4.2 <i>Ta</i> as a Personalization Device.....	34
4.2.1 Personalization Through Unspecified Gender of the Referent	36
4.2.2 Personalization Through Specified Gender Reference.....	40
4.2.2.1 Gender of Referent is Specified via Attached Image.....	45
4.2.2.2 Gender of Referent is Specified via Co-text.....	48
4.2.2.3 Gender of Referent is Implied Through Socio-cultural Context.....	52
4.3 <i>Ta</i> as a Personalization Device in Different Sentence Types.....	54
4.3.1 <i>Ta</i> in Declarative Sentences used to Promote Tangibles.....	54
4.3.2 <i>Ta</i> in Interrogative and Imperative Sentences used to Promote Intangibles.....	58
4.4 Summary.....	60
Chapter 5 The Structure of <i>ta</i> Texts and Their Function.....	61
5.1 Introduction	61
5.2 <i>Ta</i> as an Engagement Device in Different Textual Environments.....	61
5.2.1 <i>Ta</i> -Texts that aim to Generate Profit.....	62
5.2.1.1 M1 and M2 are Both Explicit.....	63
5.2.1.2 M2 is Explicit and M1 Implied.....	73
5.2.2 <i>Ta</i> -Texts that aim to Generate Engagement.....	85
5.2.2.1 M2 and M3 Generating Engagement to Promote an Ideology.....	85
5.2.2.2 M2 and M3 Generating Engagement to Promote a Service.....	92
5.3 Summary.....	99
Chapter 6 Conclusion.....	101
6.1 Findings.....	101
6.2 Significance and Implications of the Study.....	103
References.....	104
Appendix A: Coding Symbols.....	113

List of Tables

Table 1. An Overview of <i>Theta</i> Phenomenon in the Corpus.....	29
Table 2. Gender of <i>ta</i> Referents and Tokens (%).....	36
Table 3. Distribution of <i>tas</i> with specified gender based on their sentence types.....	37
Table 4. Specified Gender Referents (%).....	41
Table 5. Specified and Unspecified Gender Results Compared.....	42
Table 6. Structure of <i>ta</i> -texts in terms of Rhetorical Moves.....	43
Table 7. Structure of <i>ta</i> -texts in terms of Rhetorical Moves.....	100

Chapter 1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the *ta* phenomenon (Section 1.1) as well as the history of third person pronoun formation in Chinese (Section 1.2). The chapter then proceeds to introduce the discourse background of the *ta* phenomenon outlining the history of the Internet in China (Section 1.3) and moves on to a brief discussion on computer mediated communication (CMC) in Section 1.4. Section 1.5 provides an overview of the chapters in the thesis.

1.1 The *ta* Phenomenon

There are three third person singular pronouns in Mandarin Chinese: 他 (*ta* ‘he’), 她 (*ta* ‘she’), and 它 (*ta* ‘it’). Although they have different written forms, their pronunciations are identical (*ta*). The research specifically focuses on the *ta* phenomenon, which refers to the process where the romanized alphabet *ta* is used in place of the Chinese character as a non-standard spelling for the third person singular pronoun in Chinese social media. There are three variants of the non-standard spelling *ta*: TA, ta, and Ta. The study has observed that the gender referent of these three *ta* variants are independent of orthographic appearance. The study has also observed that when there is more than one main subject of the text that different variants are used for each in a systematic way of referencing. This is shown in the example below¹.

Ex 1) 瞳萱_Bunny

TA 并不是没有处理好事情的能力，只是 **TA** 不大喜欢 **ta** 而 **ta** 刚好和 **Ta** 关系较好，所以让 **TA** 有了所谓的理由。相较而言 **ta** 的简单比 **TA** 看着更让人舒心。群居生活中，有时普遍的小矛盾小念叨皆因 **TA** 而起。

1

http://weibo.com/u/2309842551?profile_ftype=1&is_all=1&is_search=1&key_word=TA%E5%B9%B6%E4%B8%8D%E6%98%AF%E6%B2%A1%E6%9C%89%E5%A4%84%E7%90%86%E5%A5%BD%E4%BA%8B%E6%83%85%E7%9A%84%E8%83%BD%E5%8A%9B#_0

Ex 1) tóng xuān_Bunny

It is not like **TA** does not have the ability to deal with things, rather it is that **TA** does not really like **ta**. Furthermore **ta** just happens to be in a good relationship with **Ta**. This situation has given **TA** a so called justification [for not dealing with the problem]. Comparatively speaking, it appears that **ta**'s easy going [attitude] makes people more comfortable than [that of] **TA**. In this life that we all live together, now and then there are common conflicts and strife simply because of [someone like] **TA**.

This example illustrates that **TA** and **Ta** refer to two different persons, and **ta** refers to a third person.

However, this discovery remains observational and further research is needed in order to systematically investigate the possibly different reference of the three variants.

Zhan (2013) and Zhong (2015) draw the same conclusions that the character for the female third-person pronoun 她 (*ta*) did not exist prior to 1915. This language change appears to emulate a change in the mind frame of Chinese society with regards to gender and how it was viewed. This is also seen in connection with current Chinese society where social media users are modifying the language to reflect their ideals in the 21st century with the *ta* phenomenon. The following section and its sub-sections provide a brief account of the historical development of each third person Chinese pronoun *ta*: male 他, female 她, and neuter 它.

1.2 Chinese Third Person Pronouns and Their History

The emergence of a masculine *ta* (他)/*tamen* (他们), a feminine *ta* (她)/*tamen* (她们), and a neuter *ta* (它)/*tamen* (它们) from the previously generic *ta* (他)/*tamen* (他们) into the modern Chinese language of today is a result of Europeanization. Chan (2011) explored the development of third person pronouns in the Chinese language from 1904-2003. Chan (2011:13) created three distinct time periods of focus within the 100 year time span: (1) 1904-1919, (2) 1952-1953, and

(3) 2002-2003. Chan (2011:14) signals out these three specific periods as periods where “pronominal innovations” had occurred, categorizing the first period as a stage of pre-change and the later two periods as stages of post change.

Gender distinction of the third person pronoun in Modern Written Chinese (*baihua*) is connected with the May Fourth Movement of 1919 (Chan, 2011; Zhan, 2013; Zhong, 2015; Zhang, 2007; Wang, 2010). The May Fourth Movement of 1919 was an organized protest by the Chinese against unfair treaties signed with the West at the end of World War I (Chan, 2011:25). The Movement coincided with the time period where western trained Chinese scholars were calling for a change from the traditional classical Chinese writing system (*wenyan*) to a more accessible and simple vernacular language (*baihua*) in order to stimulate the circulation of knowledge among the common people and resolve illiteracy. This act of language reform later became known as the New Culture Movement and achieved great success (Chan, 2011:25). The full standardization of the Chinese language to a universal vernacular did not occur until the victory of the PRC in 1949 and their official implementation of Putonghua, Mandarin Chinese, in 1956.

Chan (2011:14) and Wang (2010:78) claim that the gender distinctions in the third person pronoun were first introduced in one of Liu Bannong’s poems in 1920. Prior to 1920, the third person pronoun *ta* (他) and its plural *tamen* (他们) were entirely gender-free (generic) and used to refer to males, females, and neuter objects. As a result of the reform in 1920, the male gender was applied to the previous existing gender-free generic characters 他 *ta* and 他们 *tamen*, and new orthographic forms were created to represent female (她 *ta/她们 tamen*) and neuter objects (它 *ta/它们 tamen*). The act of translation of western, specifically English, texts is also another main driving factor in the creation and distribution of gendered third person pronouns in Chinese (Chan, 2011:23). The following sections will first present a focus on the generic *ta* (他) which latter becomes assigned the male gender, then presents history on the female *ta* (她), and finally focuses on the neuter object *ta* (它). As the plural forms are subsequent of the singular forms, they will also be discussed in their relevant sections.

1.2.1 The Generic /Male *ta* (他)

Early textual evidence supports that *ta* was originally an indefinite demonstrative during the Qin Dynasty (221-206 BC) with the three orthographic forms of 他, 它, and 佗 (Chan, 2011:84). Prior to the Tang Dynasty, *ta* was a demonstrative pronoun, with a primary function as a “pronoun of discrimination” with the English equivalents of “another” and “other” (Chan, 2011:83-84). As of the late Tang Dynasty (618-907 AD), *ta* acquired the features of referring to a definite person (Chan, 2011:83), making it a genuine third person pronoun. With the success of gender dividing the third person pronoun category following the works of prominent writers such as Lu Xun and Qu Qiubai after the 1920’s, the generic *ta* naturally took on the male gender as a primary connotation.

1.2.2 The Female *ta*(她)

The first beginnings of a female *ta* can be seen in the 1918 translation work of Zhou Zuoren, which combined the generic character 他 with the character for female 女 and that he emphasized was only a temporary solution (Chan, 2011:85). Later in 1919, Zhou and another prominent contributor by the name of Qian Xuantong proposed characters for the female third person pronoun *ta* (Chan, 2011:85). Qian proposed 他女 (*tanv*—literally he-woman) as an imitation of the Japanese 彼女(かのじょう - *kanojyou*) for “woman”, *tuo* (a combination of 它 and 女), the English word *she*, and the European word *si*, while Zhou proposed the usage of *yi* 伊 (Chan, 2011:86).

A year later in August of 1920, Liu Bannong wrote 她字问题 *taziwenti* (Liu, 1920), the issue of the female character *ta*, and proposed the use of 她 for feminine (Chan, 2011:86). Liu is said to have supported the need for a female *ta* and believed that Old Chinese had no place for the feminine *ta*, yet it would be much needed in the future (Chan, 2011:86). Historically, the female character that eventually became used for *ta* (她) can be traced back to ancient *Yupian* written in the Liang Dynasty (502-556AD) (Chan, 2011:87).

1.2.3 The Neuter *ta*(它)

The intended usage of neuter *ta* was originally first and foremost to refer to inanimate objects. This is demonstrated in 她字问题 *taziwenti*, the issue of the female character *ta*, where Liu Bannong proposed the use of 牠 for neuter “it” to refer to inanimate objects (Chan, 2011:86-87). It has been noted that in the reprints of Liu Bannong’s works and those of other scholars from 1920’s-1950’s, the character 它 was often used concurrently with the character 牠 and is said to be the simplified form of 牠(Chan, 2011:88). In 1955 the government declared 牠 as a variant and ban its use in the mainland which resulted in the 它 character becoming the officially established character to convey neuter gender (Chan, 2011:91). This caused a unique situation in the mainland as opposed to in Taiwan and Hongkong, where both 它 and 牠 are actively used with distinctive purposes: 牠 for animate and 它 for inanimate(Chan, 2011:91). This distinction of usage is nonexistent in the mainland, where 它 can be seen as bending syntactic rules and referring to both inanimate and animate.

The neuter *ta*(它)is said to have gained rampant popularity among editorial publishers during the second time period of post change in 1952-1953 (Chan, 2011:62). This time period came shortly after the success of the PRC and the implementation of Putonghua, and coincides with the Korean War (1950-1953).

The neuter *ta*(它)and *tamen* (它们) have gone against normal linguistic prescription in terms of their application and can be seen being used to refer to animate and inanimate objects, causing changes to Chinese Syntax (Chan, 2011:15). Multiple linguists have raised controversy with the properties of the neuter *ta*, with popular linguist Chao Yuen Ren classifying it as a conscious structural borrowing from Western languages (Chan, 2011: 90). Neuter *ta* is noted as having two vital characteristics: 1) a wide anaphoric range that includes abstract nouns, and 2) it appears most frequently in object positions and is rare in subject position (Chan, 2011:90).

1.3 Internet in China and Sina Weibo

The earliest developments of the Internet in China came when the first bulletin board system (BBS) was built in 1994(He & Pedraza-Jiménez, 2015:202). Since 1997 the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) has been authorized to conduct Internet development surveys. CNNIC has since published 37 statistical reports on Internet development in China. CNNIC's reports detail the history of the Internet in China and provide objective data to be used as references for government departments and businesses. The CNNIC issues the Statistical Report on Internet Development in China every January and July. With the growing popularity of the Internet and China's new "Internet+" action plan, the impacts that the Internet has on society as a whole have been recognized.

Chinese Internet boomed in 1999 with the release of Tencent's instant messenger program QQ (He & Pedraza-Jiménez, 2015:202). In 2002 another revolutionary tool BlogChina (blogchina.com) was released in 2002 by *Fangxingdong* (He & Pedraza-Jiménez, 2015:202). Sina Weibo is a microblogging channel and the platform of this study. It was released in 2009 and followed by the now popular mobile app Wechat (Weixin in China) in 2011(He & Pedraza-Jiménez, 2015:202). As of 2014, "the top two social media platforms are Weixin (355 million monthly active users) and Sina Weibo(129 million monthly active users)" (He & Pedraza-Jiménez, 2015:203).

The 37th Statistical Report on Internet Development in China released by CNNIC on January 22, 2016 reveals that as of December 2015, China had 688 million Internet users. This number accounts for half of the total population of the country and demonstrates an Internet penetration rate of 50.3%. This number reflects 39.51 million new Internet users. With technology and communication becoming evidently more prominent in China, so has international exchange. The report shows that "as of December 2015, China had 5,392,116 Mbps of international Internet gateway bandwidth, with an annual growth of 30.9%, indicating that China's capability of international communication network had been significantly enhanced."(CNNIC 37th Statistical Report on Internet Development in China, 2016).

The report further illustrates that “75.1% of Chinese Internet users aged between 10 to 39, 29.9% 20 to 29, 21.4% 10 to 19 and 23.8% 30 to 39. Compared with the end of 2014, the percentage of those under 10 and of those above 40 both rose, indicating that the Internet is continuing to penetrate into these two age groups”(CNNIC, 2016:51). However, a figure in the report titled the “Education Structure of Chinese Internet Users” shows a decline in Internet users who attend high school or junior college from the previous year (CNNIC, 2016:52). With relevance to the *ta* phenomenon and institutional accounts, another figure titled the “Occupational Structure of Chinese Internet Users” shows that compared to 2014, that the category of users who are General staff of Party, government organs and public institutions has seen an increase of 1.5% (CNNIC, 2016:52).

The 37th statistical report also indicates the current status of the social networking platform Sina Weibo. According to the report, Sina Weibo ranks at 24.7% in the figure of the report titled “The Usage Rate of Internet-Based Marketing Channels by Companies in 2015” (CNNIC, 2016:30). The percentage of Internet users in China using social networking platforms and applications such as Sina Weibo are noted at 77% (CNNIC, 2016:60).

CNNIC (2016:67) states that “Based on CNNIC’s analysis of the current social networking application market, China’s social networking applications can be divided into the following two types: comprehensive ones that gather information, such as QQ Zone, Weibo, etc.; and comparatively specialized, niche vertical ones, such as photo/video-based social networking applications, community-based ones, blind-date applications, anonymous social networking applications, and workplace social networking applications, etc.”

The aim of Sina Weibo is defined by CNNIC (2016:67) as “to satisfy users’ demands for information they are interested in, and serves as an important platform for users to obtain and share information such as “Hot News”, “Interest”, “Expert Knowledge” and “Public Opinion” [...] Weibo is playing a positive role in helping users expand their social network based on common interest.”In the past year efforts have been made to implement a decentralization strategy in order to foster the We Media force in vertical domains and stimulate the creation of

original contents (CNNIC, 2016:67). The goal of this process has been to attract and retain active users and as a result the user base is experiencing steady growth (CNNIC, 2016:67). Sina Weibo ranks second at a percentile of 33.5%, second only to QQ Zone (CNNIC, 2016:68).

Sullivan (2012:177) states that “[u]se of Sina Weibo reflects trends in the broader Chinese Internet, which is dominated by entertainment (Guo, 2005; Li, 2010). The most popular daily trends on Sina Weibo are generally entertainment news, gossip, commercial information and sports. The most popular Weibo users, judged by the number of their ‘fans’ (the equivalent terminology of Twitter ‘followers’), are actresses and TV personalities.” He and Pedraza-Jiménez (2015:203) state that “Sina Weibo attracts white-collar employees with higher incomes and educational backgrounds.”

Shi (2012:2) summarizes the properties of Sina Weibo as being “1) equipped with multiple media and functions, enabling branding activities to be more diverse; 2) Online brand communities enable a brand to effectively connect with consumers, and to increase brand loyalty; 3) In China, social media branding is emerging and innovating.”

1.4 Computer Mediated Communication (CMC)

Computer Mediated Communication (here in CMC), describes the environment where human beings interact with each other through technology, either auditory through sound or visually through images, videos, and text. As a result the areas that CMC studies covers are vast, from online advertisements to chat rooms to social networking platforms. Within CMC there are many approaches such as sociological, sociolinguistics, linguistics, functional linguistics, and descriptive linguistics, as well as discourse analysis and cross cultural perspectives.

Herring (1996) notes the vast range of CMC genres and the ethical issues that arise when data is not obtainable from a public domain. Androutsopoulos (2013) describes the concept of ‘CMC as text’, where the text portrayed on the Internet as the form of communication is the focus. ‘CMC as text’ is focused “on the vast archive of written language provided by the Internet” with an emphasis on researcher-oriented classifications and categories (Androutsopoulos, 2013:239). On

the other hand, ‘CMC as a place’ is defined as being approached from the ethnographic and blended data perspective, considering CMC as a constructed environment for interaction; thus a participant-oriented classification and categorical creation tendency(Androutsopoulos 2013, 239). This study of *ta* considers CMC as text, taking the categories of user types as social variables.

1.5 Overview of Chapters

The thesis will proceed in the following manner. In Chapter two the thesis presents a literature review focusing on the concept of non-standard spellings in CMC and relevant research related to the *ta* phenomenon. Chapter three introduces the methodology used in the analysis chapters of the data, as well as the data collection process and justification of methods. Chapter four addresses the functions of the *ta* phenomenon while Chapter five offers a textual analysis of the structure of the *ta*-texts and their functions. Chapter six, the conclusion, ties together the study and presents the succinct results and original contributions with regards to the *ta* phenomenon while acknowledging limitations and further research directions.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

This research explores an emergent non-standard spelling of the third person pronoun in Chinese social media and its uses. This chapter provides an overview of the previous literature in non-standard spellings and CMC. Research has been done on Internet homophones in Chinese (Tang, 2014; Fang, 2005; Fong, 2000; Li, 2007; Li, 2004; Liu, 2006; Wang, 2000). However, *ta*, a particular non-standard spelling in Chinese Internet language, is understudied with the exceptions of Zhan (2013) and Zhong (2015).

The main thread of research relevant to the *ta* phenomenon is on non-standard spellings in CMC. Multiple studies have explored non-standard spellings in CMC and computer mediated discourse (CMD) (Sebba 2012, 2011; Androutsopoulos 2013, 2012, 2008, 2006, 2000; Jaffe 2012, 2000; Spitzmüller 2012; Siebenhaar 2008; Lin 2016), yet their focus has mainly been on Indo-European languages. Although their studies are not directly related to the Chinese language, their methodologies can be applicable in a variety of ways to the *ta* phenomenon under discussion.

The literature review is organized into three sections. Section 2.1 provides an overview of the previous work done specifically with regards to the non-standard spelling *ta* in Chinese Internet language; Section 2.2 discusses related studies on non-standard spellings in Chinese CMC; and Section 2.3 presents related studies of non-standard spellings in CMC in other languages. Section 2.4 provides a summary of this chapter.

2.1 Non-standard Spelling *ta* in Chinese Social Media

There exist only two studies done on *ta*, those of Zhan (2013) and Zhong (2015). This section will first address the study conducted by Zhan (2013) and then compare and contrast Zhan's (2013) study with Zhong's (2015) study.

Zhan (2013) considers the *ta* phenomenon as a neologism created to fill a semantic gap in Chinese third person pronouns. This semantic gap refers to the inequality of gender representation which was created due to the historical formations of the third person pronoun,

specifically the 1915 introduction of the female referent “她” during the New Culture Movement². The introduction of “她” created the following problem: which third person singular pronoun should be used when gender distinction is unclear or unnecessary? (Zhan, 2013:37). This problem also occurs among the plural forms for they: 他们 (*tamen* “they males” OR “they co-ed”), 她们 (*tamen* “they females”), 它们 (*tamen* “they non-human”) where the general character preference 他们 (*tamen* “they males” OR “they co-ed”) is visually gender biased.

Zhan (2013:37) proposed two answers to this problem: (i) continue with the original ways (using default “他”) or (ii) create a new usage. The official standard was the first option, whereas the government workers and the public chose to exercise the second option and created the combined graphic display “他/她” (s/he) and the variant “他 (她)” (he (she)) to solve the problem (Zhan, 2013:37). This usage is much like the English combination of s/he and was used to express the idea of unknown gender before the appearance of *ta*. Zhan (2013) uses the following examples to illustrate this point:

1. (*Liaoning Shen Evening News*³ dated May 29th 2010 quoted in Zhan (2013:37))

他/她需要这样的生活

‘S/he wants this kind of life’

2. (*Children’s Literature*⁴ dated February 2nd 2012 quoted in Zhan (2013:37))

对兔子来说，再没有什么比摊上一个不懂我们不爱我们的主人更惨的了所以，我必须靠自己筛选一个完美的主人，让他（她）好好爱我

‘As far as rabbits are concerned, [...] let him (her) love me well’

Zhan (2013) acknowledges the three orthographical variations of *ta*: ta, TA, and Ta. Zhan (2013) observes that there are three situations where *ta* appears in written discourse. Firstly, it appears in situations where gender is specified or implied. This is because its main function of usage is to

² The New Culture Movement refers to the period during 1915-1921 where western educated Chinese scholars pushed for the simplification of characters, reformation of literature, usage of the vernacular, and rights for women amongst other issues.

³ Translation by me 辽沈晚报 2010年5月29日

⁴ Translation by me 儿童文学 2012年2月号

serve as a dual gender representative left open to interpretation. Zhan(2013:36)states that “it does not specifically point out male or female gender, yet is a representative of either a male or female party and means the equivalent of ‘he or she’”⁵.Zhan (2013) elaborates on this point with the following examples:

3. (*Gusu Evening News*⁶ dated March 1st 2013 quoted in Zhan (2013:36))
婚姻内外，TA 判若两人
‘TA is a totally different person before [they] marry and after.’
4. (*Xinhua News Agency*⁷dated February 14th 2013 quoted in Zhan (2013:36))
恐归族在线相亲怎么才能众里寻 ta 千百度？
‘How can you find your ta in a sea of a thousand online dating profiles?’

Secondly in situations where the gender of the referent is by no means determinable. The most common case noted by Zhan (2013:36) is where *ta* is used in texts referring to unborn children. For example:

5. (*Mother-Infant Magazine*⁸ dated January 4th 2013 quoted in Zhan (2013:36))
肚子里的 TA，男孩？女孩？
‘TA in the womb, [are they a] boy? [Are they a] girl?’
6. (*YaYaInternet*⁹ not dated quoted in Zhan (2013:36))
肚子里的 TA 对什么感兴趣？
‘What is TA in the womb interested in?’

Thirdly, *Ta* also occurs with the third person plural 们 (*men*) marker which Zhan (2013) discusses. He provides the following two examples:

⁵不特指男女而同时指代男方或女方，其意等同于“他或她”(Zhan, 2013:36)

⁶Translation by me 姑苏晚报 2013 年 3 月 1 日

⁷新华网 2013 年 2 月 14 日

⁸My Translation 《妈妈宝宝》杂志 2013 年 1 月 4 日

⁹My Translation 上海丫丫网

7. (*China News Service*¹⁰ dated October 18th2012 quoted in Zhan (2013:36))

2012 TA 们很忙

‘2012: They (gender ambiguous) are busy’

8. (*Southeast Bulletin Board*¹¹ dated August 19th 2012 quoted in Zhan (2013:36))

Ta 们坚守爱情

‘They (gender ambiguous) are holding on to romance’

Zhan(2013:36) further describes the utilization of *ta* in names for TV programs and cultural events such as the October 2012 Hunan Entertainment program “Sing a song for TA”¹² and the January 26 2013 entertainment program “Turn around and meet TA.”¹³

Zhan (2013) provides a comprehensive background of historical formation in terms of the third person pronouns as a foundation for justifying the emergence of *ta* as a non-standard spelling. Zhan (2013) also provides suitable empirical examples and dates to support most of his observations. However, a point not incorporated by Zhan (2013) is the third person pronoun “it” 它 used to refer to inanimate objects and the ability of *ta* to represent this character as well. The three situations where *ta* appears in written discourse as outlined and defined by Zhan (2013) are not very clear.

Zhong (2015: 77) considers the emergence of “Ta” as an Internet neologism, deeming it an addition and defect needed for the improvement of the Chinese language. Zhong (2015) focuses on the contributions of Liu Bannong (1920)¹⁴, and notes that the “it” 它 referent developed to be utilized with plants and animals. Zhong(2015: 77) quotes Liu Bannong as stating that in terms of male, female, and neuter gender expression “one must think of a lexical item that can actively

¹⁰中国新闻网 2012 年 10 月 18 日

¹¹My Translation 东南快报 2012 年 8 月 19 日

¹²My Translation 《为 TA 而唱》

¹³My Translation 《转身遇到 TA》

¹⁴ Liu Bannong (1920) is responsible for advocating the use of 她 as an exclusive third person pronoun in Chinese. More information on Liu Bannong can be found in Chapter 1 of this thesis or in works such as Chan (2011), Wang Yuan Yuan (2010), and Zhan (2015).

express in three different ways; at the same time it also should effectively avoid any kind of abnormal appearance which is, in fact, not an easy task.¹⁵”Zhong (2015: 77) adds to this stating that “The formation of *Ta* again begs the problem that is presented by the three characters and their unequal treatment of gender.¹⁶”

Zhong (2015) states that *Ta* is generally used to refer to an undefined-opposite gender-partner, citing the following example:

情人节来了，你怎样给 *Ta* 一个惊喜? (Zhong, 2015: 78)

‘It is Valentine’s Day, how will you give *Ta* a special surprise?’¹⁷

Zhong (2015) suggests that in modern Chinese the usage of gender pronouns is often met with awkwardness. The male-prominent character is used to refer to groups that also contain females which is problematic due to the heavy male connotation it carries. Zhong (2015: 78) uses made-up examples to illustrate this point:

1. 门外有人敲门，你去看看他是谁

‘There is someone at the door, go look to see who [HE] is’¹⁸.

2. 那边是我们班上的同学(有男有女)，他们正在一起做游戏

‘Over there are some students (both male and female) from our class, they (MALE) are playing a game together right now.’¹⁹

3. 当选手以精彩的表演结束比赛，他(她)会扑向谁? 会拥抱谁?

‘When the players finish a match in a splendid fashion, who will HE (she) fly towards in excitement? Who will [they] embrace?’²⁰

¹⁵My Translation :“要想发挥三分法的积极作用，同时又成功地避免种种不规范现象，实在是极其困难的” (Zhong, 2015:77).

¹⁶My Translation: “但第三人称代词三分法的问题却一直悬而未决，而 *Ta* 的出现可以说又把这个问题推到了前台”(Zhong, 2015:77).

¹⁷My Translation

¹⁸ My Translation, Emphasis mine

¹⁹ My Translation, Emphasis mine

²⁰ My Translation, Emphasis mine

From the above examples, Zhong (2015:78) comments that

"这些例句中的第三人代词使用存在一定的缺陷，“他”一般是被认为指代男性，让“他”兼指不明性别的对象容易引起误解，也包含了一定的男权主义思想"

Zhong (2015:78)

"[t]he usage of the third person pronoun presented in these sentences contains a huge flaw. The male prominent character “他” (*ta*) is generally assumed to indicate male gender. Using the male-prominent character to indicate undetermined gender easily leads to misconception and embodies a Machoist ideology"

(My translation)

Zhong (2015:78) notes that the usage of the male-prominent 他 alone could not stand for all the possibilities. As a result, it also could not fulfill the realistic life demands of the people (Zhong 2015:78). Zhong (2015:78) states that before the invention of female-prominent 她 *ta*, Lu Xun²¹ used the third person pronoun 伊 *yi* when translating foreign texts to refer to the third person female. Zhong (2015:78) further summarizes that the invention of the romanized form solves the aforementioned problems in its function as a three-way simultaneous character referent. Zhong (2015:78) views *ta* as similar to many other alphabet spellings and acronyms (WTO, NBA, GRE, HSK, RMB), but emphasizes that unlike acronyms it is entirely a pinyin spelling which makes it inherently different.

²¹ Lu Xun (1881 –1936) is a well renowned figure of modern Chinese literature and translator. Lu Xun spent some of his years abroad in Japan and was heavily influenced by Western theory and culture. Lu Xun played a large role in exposing the theories of the West to China through translation.

Zhong's (2015) article provides new information about this phenomenon with respect to its similarity with acronyms and creation to appease the masses. Although Zhong (2015) outlines the historical aspect of formation in third person gendered pronouns, Zhong's (2015) arguments specifically pertaining to *ta* lack empirical support throughout the article. There is also little-to-no mentioning of the data on which the arguments are drawn. Zhong (2015) also overlooks the three variants of *ta* (TA, ta, Ta) which are acknowledged by Zhan (2013).

Zhong (2015) suggests that the point in time of which the *ta* phenomenon appeared is not determinable or even able to be proved. Data collected from preliminary pilot studies conducted on Sina Weibo during this research shows the earliest token of *ta* being that of January 2011²². Zhong (2015) states that the usage of *ta* has been accepted by Internet users and used by many publishing houses such as magazines and newspapers. However, he unfortunately does not provide citations of examples.

These articles are not systematic in their approach to the phenomenon of *ta*. However, the significance of these two articles should not be overlooked. Zhan (2013) and Zhong (2015) provide some isolated case studies. While Zhan (2013) mentions some empirical data, Zhong (2015) does not mention his data and makes up examples. Zhan (2013) and Zhong (2015) bring to our attention the popularity of the use of *ta* and its possible semantic change. It is critical that both statistical evidence and a systematic study be carried out in order to create a more in depth evaluation on the rich topic of the *ta* phenomenon.

2.2 Non-standard Spellings in Chinese CMC

There are multiple systematic studies of the types of homophones in Chinese social media based on their phonetics, discourse, and morphological features (Tang, 2014; Zheng, 2007; Li, 2009; Wang, 2005; Zhang, 2007). A large portion of this body of work is on rhetorical functions of Chinese Internet language.

²²2011.1.31 如果你愛一個人，就和 **ta** 一起拼樂高吧！如果你恨一個人，就讓 **ta** 一個人拼樂高吧！！總之。。樂高害屎人！！ by poster Jossie 喬希希；
http://weibo.com/jossiejossie?is_search=1&key_word=ta#_0

Tang's (2014) work outlines a survey of the usage of Chinese Internet homophones, yet the *ta* phenomenon as a whole was left unaddressed in terms of existence, function, and occurrence. Adapting Chen's (2011, p.iii) definition of Internet homophone, Tang (2014:5) defines Chinese Internet homophones as "the language phenomenon resulting from intentional uses of words' which are 'identical or similar in sound for the purpose of achieving certain special effect' in Internet communication." Based on this definition, the *ta* phenomenon is a type of Internet homophone.

Tang's (2014) study was focused on the textual functions of Chinese Internet homophones. Specifically, Tang (2014) focused on the speech function component of Halliday's (1972) Systemic Functional Grammar with an emphasis on cohesion. The textual functions examined contributed to two types of cohesion in Tang (2014): lexical and grammatical. For grammatical cohesion Tang (2014) examined the textual functions of references, ellipsis, substitutions, and conjunctions. For lexical cohesion Tang (2014) examined the textual features of repetition, synonymy/antonymy, hyponymy/meronymy, and collocation. The social context behind why these Internet homophones manifested and why they occur where they do in texts was not touched upon.

Tang (2014) provides a survey of the classification of Chinese Internet homophones. One type of Chinese Internet homophone is that of alphabet homophones, the type which *ta* belongs to. According to Tang (2014:30), from the perspective of phonology, homophones with the same pronunciation as their base words are termed as narrow-homophones; as a result, *ta* can further be considered as a narrow-homophone type. Tang (2014:30) further elaborates that under the category of narrow-homophones there are two types: "homographic homophones (homophones with the same spelling as their base words) and heterographic homophones (homophones that have a different spelling than their base words)". *Ta* seems to belong to the heterographic homophone categorization as it shares the same pinyin sound system yet is transcribed in the roman alphabet writing system while the standard is transcribed in the Chinese character writing system.

Tang's (2014) work can potentially serve as an important stepping stone and point of access to existing research in the field of Chinese social media and the Sina Weibo platform.

Yuan (2012) approaches Chinese Internet homophones from a social-cultural perspective. Yuan (2012) explores the functions of Chinese Internet language as a specialized social practice. Yuan (2012:266) defines Internet language in Chinese as a process where “Internet users often create new words or appropriate the meanings of existing words in order to express themselves and to communicate with each other.” As opposed to other scholars who focus on the linguistic characteristics of Chinese Internet language (such as Gao (2006), Lin (2002) Wu (2003) Yao (2005) and Yang (2007)), Yuan (2012:266) focuses on the socio-political context that stimulates the wide spread usage of the Internet in China .Yuan (2012:267) proposes that the invention of Chinese Internet language is used to defy existing constraints of censorship and official discourse. Yuan’s (2012) study efficiently adopts a critical discourse analysis approach to examine the data collected from the two platforms tianya.cn and jjwxc.net where users express their opinions.

Accredited to Yang (2007), Yuan (2012:269) attributes five important factors of common varieties of Chinese Internet Language:

- Stylized Mandarin (e.g., “东东 (dōngdōng)” for “东西 (dōngxī)” meaning “things”)
- Stylized dialect-accented Mandarin (e.g., “偶 (ǒu)” for “我 (wǒ)” meaning “I, me”)
- Stylized English (e.g., “酷 (kù) for “cool”)
- Stylized initials (e.g., “HX” for “和谐” (héxié) meaning “harmony”)
- Stylized numbers (e.g., “88 (bābā)” for “bye-bye”)

Yuan (2012:269) further takes into account the discourse level where aspects such as Chinese-English code-switching, a combined written spoken style, humour, paralinguistic cues, local dialects and unconventional expressions are used in online communication. Yuan (2012) reveals that in her data, Chinese Internet Language is used for community identification. Community identification manifests on online community platforms as a result of users creating form-specific language to reflect their common interests and solidify a group identity. The concept of community identification can be beneficial for analyzing the *ta* phenomenon as a lucrative

gender pronoun. Despite this being the 21st century, topics regarding sexual relationships, especially homosexual relationships, are still very sensitive and even considered taboo topics in Chinese society. Under the pressure of public scrutiny and Internet censorship, Internet users who wish to discuss such topics in a public setting and voice private opinions are very aware of the caution they must exert when doing so. As a result, Yuan (2012:272) suggests that these users will often rely on code-switching strategies, alternating between the usages of English, coded words, and Mandarin. Through talking in code the users are able to isolate outsiders and effectively establish an in-group/out-group paradigm that protects the community. What this means is that unless an interlocutor is part of the community in which the discussion takes place, they will not be able to decode the message and may not even be able to recognize that it is coded.

Yuan (2012) also cites her data as being indicative of Internet language use for interactive practices. Interactive practices are the methods and language forms which Internet users employ to communicate and interact with each other in the online community. Users often create their own relevant terms to help facilitate communication in their specific online community, these terms then help the participants to locate their role in the discussion and determine how they should act to fulfill that role (Yuan, 2012:272). Ultimately Yuan (2012) attributes the creativity of Chinese Internet language to multi-cultural influences resulting in code-switching.

Yuan's (2012) review of literature for Chinese Internet language and usage is very detailed and comprehensive. However, the statistical data pertaining to Internet development in China that Yuan (2012) references is heavily reliant on the 2010 report published by CNNIC based on development statistics from 2009. With this being noted, the most recent statistics available at that time were not included in Yuan's (2012) study.

Yang (2007) takes a sociolinguistic approach when addressing Chinese Internet language in mainland China. Yang (2007) proposes that because the electronic input of languages like Chinese is relatively difficult, these languages are adapted to compensate.

There are several distinct characteristics of Internet language in Taiwanese: "stylized English stylized Taiwanese-accented Mandarin, stylized Taiwanese, and the recycling of a transliteration

alphabet used in elementary education” (Yang, 2007:1). Yang (2007:1-2) proposes the following five adaptations seen in Mainland Internet language: stylized Mandarin (e.g., 漂漂 piàopiào “beautiful” for 漂亮 piàoliang “beautiful”), stylized dialect-accented Mandarin (灰常 huīcháng for 非常 fēicháng “very”), stylized English (伊妹儿 yīmèier for ‘email’) stylized initials (bt for 变态 biàntài “pervert” and pk as a short form for ‘player kill’), stylized numbers (9494 for 就是就是 jiùshìjiùshì “that is/that’s right”).

Yang (2007) conducts thorough background research into the formation of Internet language in English and its properties, and then applies the findings and frameworks to studies in Chinese. The affect that English has on the Chinese language, especially on the Internet, is a large component of Yang’s (2007) research (Yang, 2007:3). Yang (2007:2) also provides evidence to support that texts of electronic communication have characteristics of both speech and writing, regardless of being a primary written form. Yang (2007) extensively looks at discourse adaptations of the traditional writing system in Mainland China’s Internet language. He reveals that most innovations occur at lexical levels and that these creative uses are “marked-choices”, not arbitrary. As a result, the lexical deviation and innovation of the writing system in to non-standard forms allows these forms to carry with them the social meanings and contexts of what triggered their formation.

In accordance with his framework, Yang (2007) summarizes the cause of each Internet language category and describes their features. Stylized Mandarin is achieved by borrowing, explanation, morpheme repetition, near homophonization, and a semantic shift. Of these characteristics in Stylized Mandarin, the *ta* phenomenon shows a semantic shift and homophonization. Stylized dialect-accented Mandarin was presented by Yang (2007) through extensive examples: -*ǒu* 偶 for *wǒ* 我 “I”, the form *de shuō* 的说 which is from the Japanese structure “.....と い い ま す” (...*to iimasu*) “... to be called”, *fěnsī* 粉丝 for “fans”, *bókè* 博客 for “blog”, anding to express progressive tense. Stylized initials were defined as either Pinyin initials or English letter initials. Yang (2007) attributes the creation and origin of stylized numbers to the function of pagers.

In his comparison to studies conducted on Taiwanese Internet language, Yang (2007) discovered that there is more Internet language variation and writing adaption in the mainland as opposed to

in Taiwan. Yang (2007) found more code mixings between Mandarin and English and that people in Taiwan tend to use Mandarin to transcribe English instead of just using English. Yang (2007) also revealed that English is viewed as a prestigious language in Taiwan and that mixing in the mainland is discouraged so there are more stylized Mandarin words in Mainland China. Yang (2007) also found that more people used the Internet in Mainland China than Taiwan, which allowed more opportunities for innovation and creativity.

Yang's (2007) work provides important information and guidelines for the classification of non-standard Chinese spellings. The study would have provided more insights, if it could look at other functional aspects such as the motivation behind the adaptations and the effects they achieve in addition to descriptive properties such as the morphological appearance of the non-standard spelling and the aspect of identity creation in terms of how Internet users in mainland China construct and portray an online identity.

CMC is largely dominated by descriptive approaches. Chinese Internet homophones, like those examined in Tang (2014) and *ta*, exist in the realms of CMD and CMC. From the literature review above we see that scholars such as Yuan (2012) are trying to change this descriptive dominance by focusing on the socio-cultural environment and social factors that have a profound influence on Internet language.

Some Internet homophones mentioned in Tang (2014) are non-standard Chinese character scripts; however, there are other Chinese Internet homophones which are romanized homophones, such as the *ta* phenomenon. Thus, the *ta* phenomenon is considered as a non-standard spelling in this study.

2.3 Non-standard Spellings in Other Languages

This section provides an overview of non-standard spellings in other language CMC and their social usage. It focuses on cases in German and English and comparative cases between Chinese and English. The section concludes with a sociolinguistic view on the creation of non-standard spellings based on script choices and the influence of one's social environment.

Androutsopoulos (2000) intended to create a framework for the analysis of non-standard spellings in media texts. Specifically, his study on German Fanzines aimed to explain how young writers modify language by using graphemic resources present in their language to create non-standard spellings in media texts. This was done by examining the various types of spellings and their usages.

Building on Fairclough's (1995) framework for the analysis of media discourse, Androutsopoulos' analysis appears to consider the sociocultural context of media despite having a focus on a linguistic analysis of spelling patterns. In order to carry out this linguistic analysis, Androutsopoulos (2000:3) makes a distinction between (i) spelling types and (ii) their usage patterns with a focus on graphemic resources. With regards to usage patterns, 'exceptional' non-standard spellings are most relevant and categorized as those which are "highly salient in their discourse environment, playing a key role for the point the writer wants to make"(Androutsopoulos, 2000:4). In order to analyze non-standard spellings, Androutsopoulos(2000:4) introduces the concept of 'graphemic contextualization cues' which he defines as "spelling choices which signal certain attitudes or evoke certain frames of interpretation by establishing a contrast to the text's spelling regularities or to the default spelling of a linguistic item."

Androutsopoulos (2000) found that in terms of the typology of non-standard spellings, the most relevant are homophone spellings. Homophone spellings are graphic/visual alterations which do not result in phonetic alterations. Further existing under the concept of homophone spellings are grapheme substitutions which are the replacement of "a graph (or graph sequence) by another graph (or graph sequence)" (Androutsopoulos, 2000:6). Both descriptions are directly relevant to the *ta* phenomenon as the Chinese character grapheme is replaced by the roman grapheme *ta* used for pinyin. As *ta* is the pronunciation of the standard characters there is also no phonetic alteration despite the graphic alteration of grapheme substitution.

Lin's (2016) study makes some valuable contributions to the formal properties of non-standard spellings in English CMC. Lin (2016) focuses specifically on non-standard capitalization and vocal spelling (spelling that reflects prosodic properties). Lin (2016) defines non-standard capitalization as cases where items are capitalized when they should not be and not capitalized

when they should be. Lin (2016:63) claims that non-standard capitalization is one of the most distinctive cues of CMC. This claim is extremely interesting with regards to the applications that can be made specifically to the TA variant, and further extended to the ta and Ta variants. Lin (2016:63) also focuses on the pragmatic aspects of these cues in his study and found that the non-standard capitalization and vocal spelling were used to “perform important interpersonal functions, and the analysis demonstrates different preferences by the participants for different purposes.”

Capitalization is a type of e-grammar²³ that usually reflects shouting. This type of e-grammar indicates certain emotion and the degree of that emotion that the user was attempting to convey. Capitalization is used to make up for gaps in texts in CMC: paralinguistic cues. Using capitalization as a paralinguistic cue in text, users are able to achieve a variety of effects such as yelling, disappointment, anger, and excitement.

Lin (2016:65) follows Riordan and Kreuz (2010) in analyzing capitalized words as one type of non-verbal cue commonly used in CMC. According to Lin (2016:65), Riordan and Kreuz (2010) found that 36% of CMC cue functions were to disambiguate the message, 24% to regulate interaction between the users, 15% to express affect, and 10% to strengthen message content. This last 10% is very interesting in terms of the *ta* phenomenon and the TA and Ta variants as both strengthen message content through capitalization. Capitalization is known for placing emphasis on the semantic meaning to which the capitalized orthography invokes. When interlocutors read TA, that *ta* is not just any *ta* of unspecified gender, but ‘the one and only’ *ta*, the most important *ta*. Overall Lin’s (2016) study provides a refreshing look into the descriptive properties of non-standard spellings and their functions.

Further on the topic of non-standard spellings with graphic deviation, Mukherjee (2000) also makes valuable contributions. Mukherjee (2000:161) notes that graphically deviant spellings, also known as non-standard spellings with graphic variation that does not influence pronunciation, “serve as attention-seeking devices, a well-known feature of the language of advertising.” Mukherjee (2000:161) has further observed that non-standard spellings of the

²³Herring (2013) labelled the grammar of electronic language as “e-grammar”.

grapheme type “may also convey some kind of semantic purport” which is also seen in the usage of the *ta* phenomenon.

Making reference to Lyons’ (1975) theory of medium-transferability, Mukherjee (2000:161) states that “[l]anguage is, in principle, independent of the medium in which it is realized.” The situation surrounding the third person pronoun *ta* in Mandarin Chinese and its new found usage in social media is an exemplary case of this. This independency is illustrated by the *ta* phenomenon as the association of *ta* being male, female, or neuter lies in the decision that an interlocutor makes. In other words, the referent is not pre-determined or constrained by the written medium.

There are multiple ways in which a language user, or encoder, is able to encode their message in the form of language. These encodings are a result of the stylistic choices that one has at their disposal, of which Mukherjee (2000) identifies two categories: choices that involve the medium-independent abstract form and choices that involve the medium-dependent substance. For the category of substance, one can find an array of features which are inherently bound to the medium and thus cannot be transferred between writing and speech.

Mukherjee (2000) focuses on deviant spellings of the graphemic type by operating on the presentation structure as proposed by Esser (1999& 2000). In other words, Mukherjee (2000) specifically focuses on how orthography is presented in the Roman alphabet, much like Androutsopoulos (2000, 2012,), Sebba (2011,2012), Jaffe (2000,2012), Hall (1960), and Davies (1987). Graphemic non-standard spellings are medium dependant, in other words the features encoded in the orthography are not transferred to speech when the word is presented in speech.

Mukherjee (2000:163) holds the following criteria for what constitutes a graphemic non-standard spelling in his study: (1) they are recognized as non-standard spellings, (2) they are not considered spelling variants and thus not included in dictionaries and (3) their presentation is bound to the written medium and their characteristics do not have the same effect when read aloud. The *ta* phenomenon clearly falls within these three criteria, further authenticating its categorization as a non-standard homophonic grapheme.

After clarifying the purpose of non-standard spelling, Mukherjee(2000: 163)proposes that there are three further functions which may be accomplished: (1) to mark idiosyncratic preferences of specific artists; (2) to bear a diffuse semantic purport; and (3) to establish a group identity. This establishment of group identity is also noted in Yuan’s (2012) study above on Chinese Internet language.

As opposed to the trending descriptive approach of the time, Mukherjee (2000:166) takes a functional approach and claims that deviant spellings of the homophonic grapheme type play the role of foregrounding devices. In other words, they serve the pragmatic purpose of attention seeking devices as proposed by Goddard (1988). This is one of the most valuable contributions made by Mukherjee (2000).

When a word is spelt with a deviant spelling of a grapheme type, it comes to the foreground not only as being unique to the eye, but also unique to search engines when interlocutors actively engage and attempt to search for that word on the Internet. In the case of the *ta* phenomenon, the grapheme <ta> exemplifies a graphical foreignism in written Mandarin which visually attracts the attention of the interlocutor. When considering the semantic purport in the usage of the *ta* phenomenon, it is evident that the ambiguity of gender referent is engrained in the presentation form *ta*. In other words, the *ta* phenomenon utilizes the pragmatic purpose of conveying less specific semantic content as an attention seeking device to pique the interlocutors interest and attention.

Concluding with the first and foremost issue of the *ta* phenomenon at hand, *ta* is essentially a deviation of orthography as are all Chinese Internet homophones; a point which has been readily overlooked. Sebba (2011:12) makes a bold claim that the cultural and social aspects of orthography “are not currently the main focus of any area of linguistics.” At the time of writing Sebba (2011:12) also expressed his discontent with the lack of interest in orthography in the most relevant field of sociolinguistics and the lack of effort in creating a theoretical framework to address such a prominent societal issue. Sebba’s (2011) innovative approach to orthography as a social action in conjunction with the notion of literacy may offer explanations as to why deviant orthographies (non-standard spellings) are left socially un-addressed; deviations can largely be understood. Sebba (2011: 26) defines orthographies as practices “because they

represent reasonably coherent and consistent choices made by writers and printers in respect of how to write words.” Conventions of orthography center on the relationship of alphabet and sound (Sebba 2011: 27). An interesting notion of convention addressed by Sebba (2011) is that of script; a popular example being the roman script used for the English writing system.

An idea very radical to grasp at first, the choice of scripts as a social action in a singular writing system can be more clearly seen in the representative language choice of Japanese made by Sebba(2011: 27). Japanese has access to the four different scripts of *kanji* (Chinese characters), *katakana* syllabary (used for foreign words, emphasis and other purposes), *hiragana* syllabary (used when there is no Chinese character available) and *romaji* (Roman alphabet like the Chinese writing system’s Pinyin). This deliberate choice of an alternative script in the case of *ta* seems also to be a clear act of social motivation where users desire to achieve a variety of interactional purposes.

2.4 Summary

Through surveying two very different realms of approaches, descriptive and sociological, and their corresponding literature, it is evident that the *ta* phenomenon is not only understudied, but also the approach of which to examine it is not so readily decidable. This study adapts the western theory of non-standard spelling from Androutsopoulos (2000) and the methodologies for the categorization of non-standard spelling from Androutsopoulos (2000) and Davies (1987) to define the *ta* phenomenon. This decision can be justified when taking into account Sebba’s (2011) theory on non-standard spellings as social action and script choice.

A change in script, regardless of the language, calls for an appropriate adaption of approaches and methodologies. The Chinese character and Roman alphabet should not be approached as the same. It is puzzling that up until now the two scripts, Roman alphabet and Chinese character, have been considered and approached as the same in relation to Chinese Internet homophones in CMC.

This study takes a sociolinguistic approach to address *ta* as a social phenomenon reflected as a non-standard spelling to achieve interactional purposes.

Chapter 3 Methodological and Theoretical Background

This chapter introduces the data and gives an outline of the research methodology used for data collection and analysis.

3.1 Data

3.1.1 Main Corpus

The data for this study are from a self-created corpus of Chinese social media, Sina Weibo. Although there is a large Weibo corpus, the Leiden Weibo Corpus (LWC) (<http://lwc.daanvanesch.nl/>), it is rather outdated as it only contains messages from January 2012. It also does not distinguish between an original post and the multiple re-posts that occur of the same original post; thus data aspects such as frequency of specific search queries, in this case *ta*, are skewed.

Weibo has a function in which you can search the entire site for key words in real time. As a result, the study used this function and entered the query “TA”. As Weibo does not distinguish case when compiling the search results, by using a single query the three variants of *ta* are all obtainable at once. Weibo has a capacity of holding up to 50 pages of searched content, however as the site operates in real time the results tend to move off their original page and on to the next fairly quickly. In order to combat this, pages 1-15 were looked through, each being opened at the same time in separate tabs so that the results would be frozen in their current state and left unaffected by new postings.

The data for the main corpus were collected at 5 different times with 3 hours in between to cover a 12 hour time span as follows: 10-13-2015 @ 10 am MST, 10-12-2015 @ 1pm MST ,10-11-2015 @ 4 pm MST , 10-08-2015 @ 7pm MST, and 10-09-2015 @10 pm MST. Searches for the token *ta* were carried out in this manner in order to obtain the largest possible data coverage. For example, the dataset collected at 10 am MST (12 am in China) reflects more personal thoughts of individuals while the dataset collected at 7 pm MST (9 am in China) contains more advertisements and promotions.

Important to note is that the methods of sampling by time and by phenomenon were utilized to collect the data on the *ta* phenomenon. It is noted by Androutsopoulos (2013:39) that the method of sampling by phenomenon targets specific features immediately, ruling out “systematic control of independent variables” when not combined with other selection criteria. As a result, the corpus is very specific to the phenomenon and the method of data collection is suitable.

Noteworthy is that the standard forms of 他 (male-prominent *ta*), 她 (female-prominent *ta*), and 它 (neuter *ta*) can also be seen occurring alongside the non-standards despite using the method of sampling by phenomenon.

There was a variety of data that was not counted into the sets as they would result in misleading analysis, these are data results which:

- Contained any form of “ta” in the username
- Were complete pinyin/romanized strings of input
- Contained “TA” as an abbreviation for the English term “Teaching Assistant”
- Contained “TA” in reference to the song “RHYTHM TA” produced by Korean Idol group iKON which debuted under YG Entertainment with the song released October 1st 2015
- Repeated data (reblogs/reposts)

The collected data was categorized under the following headings:

Personal:

- Commoner: Defined as accounts used for personal reasons. Users post their daily thoughts/self photos and are not celebrities/recognized public figures. They also are not assigned the orange verified symbol by Weibo which is used to indicate celebrity status. This category includes Weibo-daren status.
- Public Figure: Those accounts which are assigned an orange verification symbol by Weibo.

Institutional: Those accounts assigned a blue verification symbol by Weibo to indicate institutional status.

Related Essays: These are defined as essays which appeared in the search results under the headings.

Undefined: Accounts with postings of advertisements, health topics and daily encouragements instead of personal postings, and which are not assigned any verification symbols by Weibo.

Converted: Accounts determined as commoner (as defined above) after careful review of other posts made by the same account.

3.1.2 Data Segmentation and Categorization

The corpus was processed using the PanGu word segmentation software program and Antconc, a corpus search and text analysis program. This study of ta considers CMC as a text, taking the categories of user types as social variables and being focused “on the vast archive of written language provided by the Internet” with an emphasis on researcher-oriented classifications and categories (Androutsopoulos 2013: 239). There are two types of data in the study of CMC, screen-based (data produced without researcher intervention) and user-based (data produced by users in response to a stimulus from the researcher). In this study the data are screen-based. The chart below shows the breakdown of collected data for the corpus.

Table 1. An Overview of Theta Phenomenon in the Corpus

	Posts(n)	Characters(n)	Allta (n)	TA (n)	Ta (n)	ta (n)	他(n)	她(n)	它(n)
Undefined	63	5827	96	35	29	32	5	0	1
Converted	33	3047	51	12	20	19	1	2	0

Personal									
Public									
Figure	143	53181	221	91	45	85	8	7	3
Personal									
Commoner	918	92443	1458	483	293	682	79	44	18
Institution	110	10076	135	83	24	28	3	1	1
Related									
Essay	6	5256	16	2	13	1	0	2	12
TOTAL	1273	169830	1977	706	424	847	96	56	35

As can be seen in the table above, the corpus contains a collective total of 1,273 posts across all categories, 169,830 characters across all categories, and 1,977 occurrences of the *ta* phenomenon across all categories. The *ta* phenomenon contains 847 *ta* variants, 706 TA variants, and 424 Ta variants. Within the main corpus the study also looked at the standard variants which occurred along the non-standard variants. From the table it is clear that there were 96 standard 他 *ta* male tokens, 56 standard 她 *ta* female tokens, and 35 standard 它 *ta* neuter tokens. It is also clear from the table that third person standard pronouns are used the most by Personal Commoner accounts in this corpus.

3.1.3 Institutional Data Set

Due to the space limit of the thesis, the study focuses on a smaller data set of the corpus: the institutional accounts. The usage of *ta* in institutional accounts is less heterogeneous and

complex than personal accounts. Thus this study focuses on the simpler account type. The usage of *ta* in personal accounts may be explored in future studies.

The institutional data set contains 110 posts. Within the institutional data set there are a total of 140 tokens which includes both standard and non-standard forms of *ta*. The standard forms of *ta* occur at a ratio of 3.6 % for a total of 5 out of 140.

Within the institutional data set there is a significantly minimal amount of standard third person singular pronouns.

3.2 Methodology

The study adopted three main avenues to analyze the data: (i) quantitative analysis, (ii) qualitative analysis, and (iii) textual analysis. The general distribution and frequency of sentence types, the *ta* phenomenon, and its variations were measured and analyzed using general statistics.

The functional properties chapter contains a large amount of qualitative analysis and textual analysis, which are both complemented by quantitative analysis. Through the textual analysis the study came to deem the posts, i.e. texts, in which the *ta* phenomenon occurs as ‘*ta*-texts’.

3.2.1 Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative analysis for the *ta* phenomenon was carried out on a case by case basis. The analysis of the function of *ta* utilizes combined frameworks of persuasive writing and advertising to connect the content of the *ta*-texts with the interactional function of the *ta* phenomenon and sentence types (Janoschka, 2004; Fuertes-Olivera, Velasco-Sacristán, Arribas-Baño, & Samaniego-Fernández, 2001; and Shi, Chen, & Chow, 2016). The study has specifically utilized social media engagement theory (Smith & Gallicano, 2015; Fuertes-Olivera et al., 2001) that can be found embedded in theories of personalization and immediacy (Landert, 2014; Labrador, Ramon, Alaiz-Moreton, & Sanjuro-Gonzalez, 2014; Fairclough, 1989; Koch and Oesterreicher, 1999).

Theories of personalization and persuasive writing vary and can be traced to the notion of synthetic personalization proposed by Norman Fairclough in 1989. Synthetic personalization has its origins in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and is defined as the process of addressing a mass audience as if they were individuals through the use of inclusive language. Inclusive language plays a critical role in the personalization of mass media communication and is largely achieved through stylistic devices such as direct address of the audience, rhetorical questions, and imperatives (Landert, 2014:14). Specifically of interest for the study of the *ta* phenomenon are those stylistic choices of imperatives, rhetorical questions, and direct address through the pronoun ‘you’. All of these stylistic choices are linguistic strategies used to create personalization and result in a high level of emotional investment in the interlocutor.

The study further utilizes ideas from Koch and Oesterreicher’s (1999) model which focuses on the distance between a message sender and the interlocutor. It displays the role that content and language choice plays in either increasing or decreasing the distance (immediacy) between the sender and receiver, as well as the relationship this has to personalization. There is a distinction between public topics (public-sphere) and private topics (private sphere). The public-private sphere paradigm is an extension of the interpersonal metafunction and synthetic personalization. The public sphere is responsible for holding information that is relatable to a mass audience and the content of the public sphere shifts to the private sphere (a status of being directly immediate to an individual) when the content is personalized through immediacy as a result of inclusive language.

The study of the *ta* phenomenon combines the original characteristics of synthetic personalization proposed by Fairclough(1989,2001) with those added by latter scholars such as Janoschka (2004) and Landert (2014). Fairclough’s notion of synthetic personalization deals with the power constructs of language due to the influence of CDA, while the notion of personalization for scholars such as Janoschka (2004) and Landert (2014) deals with the characteristics of persuasive writing and advertisement in mass media. Through combining these two fields of CDA and persuasive writing in mass media, the study has created a comprehensive adapted model for personalization with the stylistics of inclusive language being analyzed from a more engagement-focused framework perspective.

3.2.2 Textual Analysis

The study extensively uses an adapted model of the rhetorical move analysis proposed by Swales (1990). Move Analysis was originally proposed to functionally describe the rhetorical organizational structure of research articles (Swales, 1981). It is used to identify the “communicative purposes of a text by categorizing diverse text units according to the particular communicative purpose of each unit” (Parodi, 2010:146). This framework is used to analyze the discourse and textual structure of the *ta* phenomenon in persuasive texts to further demonstrate the correlation of the gender factor of the *ta* phenomenon and the sentence type and linguistic environment in which it occurs. The frequency and distribution of the rhetorical move structures were measured and analyzed using general statistics in relation to the *ta* phenomenon. The study will return to a fuller account of rhetorical move theory in Chapter 5 where it is used.

3.3 Summary

The corpus contains 1,977 occurrences of the *ta* phenomenon across all categories with 847 *ta* variants, 706 TA variants, and 424 Ta variants. The institutional data set, and the focus of this study, contains 110 posts for a total of 140 tokens, of which 135 are non-standard spellings of the *ta* phenomenon. The study uses both quantitative and qualitative methods to complement each other, aiming to strengthen and further develop the argument from unbiased angles.

This chapter has briefly outlined the data collection processes of the corpus and comparative shield sample, the analysis and categorization steps of the data, and the methods /frameworks used for the main analyses. The following chapters will present the two large-scale analyses of the institutional data set in the order of functional properties and textual structure.

Chapter 4 The Function of the *ta* Phenomenon

This chapter discusses the function of the *ta* phenomenon as used by institutional accounts on Sina Weibo. The chapter begins with a brief discussion of the background for *ta*-texts in Section 4.1 before moving on to introduce the key functions of the *ta* phenomenon in Sections 4.2 and 4.3. A summary is presented in section 4.4.

4.1 Introduction

The texts in which the *ta* phenomenon occur in this study are obtained from institutional accounts on Sina Weibo. These *ta*-texts are parts of brand pages, also known as fan pages or brand communities (Shi et al, 2016:578). Institutions create these brand pages in order to increase marketing of their products and services in a personal, informal, and effective way. These institutions take advantage of the power social media platforms have when it comes to disseminating knowledge and advertisements/promotional texts. Not only are the promotional texts directly available to those who are ‘fans’ or ‘followers’ of the brand page, but when these fans or followers engage with the text by commenting, ‘like-ing’, and or sharing by re-posting, their friends are exposed to the content of the brand page as well.

This brings the following question into perspective: how do institutions persuade the online social media community to engage with their promotional texts? This study shows that the *ta* phenomenon is used to achieve this engagement through ‘personalization’. The following section defines and discusses the concept of personalization as a component of the *ta* phenomenon.

4.2 *Ta* As a Personalization Device

This section introduces how the *ta* phenomenon functions as a personalization device by illustrating its properties and providing multiple definitions.

While the Cambridge Dictionary defines ‘personalization’ as “the process of making something suitable for the needs of a particular person”, Janoschka(2004: 111) states that “[p]ersonalization takes place on the linguistic level with strategies such as personal addressing by means of personal pronouns or names, direct questions, imperatives, etc.”Landert (2014:9) defines

‘personalization’ as “the foregrounding of persons who are part of any of the three entities of mass media communication [i.e. the sender, the message, and the recipient].”

Personalization is a key component of persuasive writing/advertisements which essentially focuses on convincing interlocutors that they need to purchase a specific item or service, or that they should buy into an idea or concept. In other words, the first objective is the same regardless of the text’s content: interlocutor engagement. Advertisements are required to appeal to the masses while catering to the need of an individual to be specifically, and exclusively, addressed in order to encourage engagement, especially online. This balancing act of addressing mass audiences as though they were individuals is usually preformed through inclusive language usage, introduced previously as synthetic personalization (Labrador et al., 2014:40). As a result, most of the language is designed to be creative, attention-drawing, and exploitative of language resources to promote a colloquial style.

The *ta* phenomenon is such a discourse unit that embodies the characteristics of personalization used by the online institutional community. The *ta* phenomenon, as a non-standard homographeme spelling, is naturally devoid of any pre-determined gender notions due to the stripping of its standard character orthography that is responsible for indicating gender reference. This deprivation of gender certainty is a mirror of the effect that is achieved in oral face-face communication. In other words, the *ta* phenomenon is written language that mirrors the effect of spoken language as a personalization device to facilitate immediacy by decreasing the distance between the interlocutor and the institution. If one were to recall the introduction, spoken Chinese cannot specify gender, as the three third person singular pronouns are all pronounced the same.

There are two ways in which *ta* uses gender to achieve personalization. The first is when the gender of the *ta* referent is unspecified and interlocutors are left to make their own associations, essentially self-personalizing the content. The second way is when the gender of the referent of *ta* is specified by using *ta* as a filler for the third person pronoun ‘it’. This is achieved by implying the gender through co-text/image, or contextualizing the gender through socio-cultural context. These two types and their token amounts are demonstrated in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Gender of *ta* Referents and Tokens (%)

	Number of Tokens (n)	Number of Tokens (%)
Unspecified Gender	98	72.59
Specified Gender	37	27.41
Total	135	100

Table 2 clearly shows that most gender of the referents in the data is unspecified, accounting for 72.59% (98) of the total occurrences. These environments and their roles in enhancing engagement and achieving personalization will be addressed below.

4.2.1 Personalization Through Unspecified Gender of the Referent

This section will first present quantitative data illustrating the distribution of the *ta* tokens with unspecified gender based on their sentence types. The section then proceeds to introduce qualitative examples, and then presents more quantitative data for reference and comparison to specified gender token counts (see Table 2 above).

The following tables show a breakdown of the token composition of various sentence type categories found in the data.

Table 3. Distribution of *tas* with unspecified gender based on their sentence types

Types of Sentences	TA (n)	Ta (n)	ta (n)	Total (n)	Total (%)
Declarative	16	6	14	36	36.73
Imperative	30	7	3	40	40.82
Interrogative	9	4	9	22	22.45
Total (n)	55	17	26	98	100

Table3 illustrates the sentence types and the token variant count in each. As can be seen in the table, the most frequent sentence type that has a gender-unspecified occurrence of *ta* is that of the imperative, contributing to 40.82% of sentence occurrences. Declarative sentences fall slightly behind this number at 36.73%, whereas the interrogative structure only amounts to 22.45%.

It is clear from Table 3 that imperative sentences show a high correlation of gender ambiguity with regards to the *ta* phenomenon. Consequently, the objects of these referents are more likely to be animate people rather than inanimate objects.

Ta is a highly communicative discourse unit used to facilitate personalization and enhance engagement. The non-standard homographeme *ta* is a device designed to target interlocutors in the public sphere as a third person pronoun place holder. Interlocutors in the public sphere are those of the general public who can relate to the content on a surface level. A place holder is a symbol or component that fills a sequence in place of the original. The *ta* form then acts as a temporary simultaneous place holder for pronouns 他 (male *ta*) 她 (female *ta*) and 它 (neuter *ta*) because the real third person pronoun is unknown until interpreted due to the lack of graphic indication in *ta*. Once *ta* becomes interpreted by any interlocutor it then becomes a conceptualized referent which moves the interlocutor and their interaction with the text from the public sphere to the private sphere. The following three examples demonstrate this property of *ta* and its role in achieving personalization.

Ex 2) 港囧电影

【#每日一囧问#】我们来刺破人性的小秘密如果你结婚的时候，初恋来抢婚，你会跟 **TA** 走吗? 为啥? #一起看港囧#

Ex 2) Lost in Hong Kong – The Movie

【#One Embarrassing Question a day】Let us expose a small secret of human nature. If at the time you get married your first love crashes the wedding, would you go with **TA**? Why? #Watch “Lost in Hong Kong” together#

In this case it is clear that the referent of **TA** is gender unspecified, as the gender could change based on the interlocutor and their interpretation. In this text, if the interlocutor is heterosexual and of female gender, their first love would be a male, and thus **TA** would be associated as a male referent 他. However, if the interlocutor is heterosexual and of male gender, their first love would be a female, and thus **TA** would be associated as a female referent 她. Yet these are not the only options as one should take into consideration homosexual orientations, which further complicates the role of the interpretation of the interlocutor. In any case, **TA** covers the role of a

gender unspecified lover until the interlocutor interprets and contextualizes the gender of **TA**, facilitating immediacy and leading to personalization.

Additionally, the sentence here is an interrogative, demonstrated by the question mark and question particle 吗 *ma*. This example exemplifies the use of gender unspecified *ta* in interrogative sentences.

Ex 3) 小恩爱

“说说你和 **Ta** 初遇的地方吧_____” 没有早一步，没有晚一步，人海中与你相遇，恰在我最好的年纪。

Ex 3) Tiny Affection

“Why don't you tell us the place where you and **Ta** first met? _____” We did not meet too late and we did not meet too early, I met you in this sea of people at just the right age.

Example 3 also exhibits the characteristics presented in the analysis of example 2 above where the gender changes based on the interlocutor and their interpretation or experiences. In other words, an interlocutor will interpret the gender under the influence of their own personal circumstances and preferences. As a result, the gender can be either a heterosexual he/she or a homosexual he/she as seen in Example 2. However, instead of an interrogative sentence the one in Example 3 is an imperative sentence. This is indicated by the sentence final particle 吧 *ba* and the verb-initial syntactic structure. Sentence final particle 吧 *ba* is used to denote commands, suppositions, and suggestions (Ross & Ma, 2006:328,351,373; Cai&Lü, 2012:56) and is also used to solicit agreement (Sun, 2006:183; Li & Thompson, 1992:257). Sentence final particle 吧 *ba* encourages the interlocutor to engage with the topic by facilitating immediacy which results in personalization.

Ex 4) 微会 V

#黄晓明 baby1008 大婚# 陪伴是最长情的告白  被 ah 夫妇虐了一天的你，最想对你的那个 **Ta** 说点什么悄悄话呢？ 

Ex 4) Weihui V

#Huángxiǎomíng baby1008 Big Wedding# Accompaniment is the longest lasting confession 
Those who are oppressed by married couples, what sweet nothings do you want to say most to your **Ta**? 

The use of *ta* due to its gender ambiguity in Example 4 is similar to that of Example 2 and 3. The interlocutor can determine the gender of *ta* based on who their lover is in real life, regardless of sexual orientation or linguistic limitation. Like Example 2, Example 4 is also illustrative of an interrogative. The combination of unspecified gender and an interrogative sentence structure that requests information from the interlocutor makes the audience feel directly addressed. This concept of direct address is a characteristic of immediacy and helps to achieve personalization.

4.2.2 Personalization Through Specified Gender Reference

In addition to gender-unspecified *ta*, gender-specified *ta* also facilitates immediacy and achieves personalization. The gender of the referent of *ta* is specified in three ways: via attached images, via co-text, and via socio-cultural context. Below the study will discuss the link between a ‘specified referent’ and ‘specified gender’ where the male/female dynamic of gender itself is not a factor in personalization.

As noted previously in Table 2, gender-specified *ta* occurrences account for 37 tokens. The breakdown of these tokens as well as their sentence types can be seen in Table 4 below:

Table 4. Distribution of *tas* With Specified Gender Based on their Sentence Types

Types of Sentences	TA (n)	Ta (n)	ta (n)	Total (n)	Total (%)
Declarative	20	6	1	27	73.00
Imperative	5	0	0	5	13.50
Interrogative	3	1	1	5	13.50
Total (n)	28	7	2	37	100

Table 4 shows that declarative sentences are the most prominent in the case of the *ta* phenomenon having a clear referent, accounting for a total of 28 out of 37 tokens, which is equal to 73.00%.

To further illustrate the tendency of coloration between a specified referent and the type, whether it is male, female, or neuter, one can examine Table 5 below:

Table 5. Specified Gender Referents (%)

Gender Reference Tokens of <i>ta</i>	Total (n)	Total (%)
Male <i>ta</i> (他)Referent	4	11
Female <i>ta</i> (她) Referent	2	5
Co-ed Plural <i>tamen</i> (他们)Referent	1	3
Neuter <i>ta</i> (它)Referent	30	81
Total (n)	37	100

From the table it is easy to conclude that 81% of the instances where the ‘gender’ is specified is when the *ta* phenomenon corresponds to the inanimate third person pronoun neuter *ta*(它) , in other words neutral gender. Neuter *ta* (它) is clearly substituted 30 out of 37 times with the *ta* phenomenon, where as Male *ta*(他), Female *ta* (她), and Co-ed Plural *tamen*(他们) , are substituted four times, two times, and one time respectively. Thus the study has determined that gender does not play a role when the intended referent of the non-standard homographeme *ta* is the standard Neuter *ta* ‘it’ (它).

The following table shows the broader significance of gender-specified *ta* occurrences in comparison to gender-unspecified *ta* occurrences:

Table 6. Specified and Unspecified Gender Results Compared

Types of Sentences	Gender Specified (n)	Gender Unspecified (n)	Total (n)
Declarative	27 (42.86%)	36 (57.14%)	63 (100%)
Imperative	5 (11.11%)	40 (88.89%)	45 (100%)
Interrogative	5 (18.52%)	22 (81.48%)	27 (100%)
Total (n)	37 (27.41%)	98 (72.59%)	135 (100%)

Table 6 shows that almost half the number of declarative sentences, 42.86% of the entire data set declaratives, occur in gender-specified circumstances. Represented as a raw number, the amount of declarative sentences is 27 out of 63. Imperatives and interrogatives are both found in the raw numbers of 5. However, 5 out of 45 imperatives account for 11.11% of the entire data set imperatives while 5 out of 27 interrogatives account for 18.52% of the entire data set interrogatives.

Table 6 shows the significance of sentence types, especially in relation to gender-unspecified occurrences of *ta*. From Table 2 it is evident that 40.82% of the sentence types are imperative. Here Table 6 also clearly shows that imperatives in Unspecified Gender make up 88.89% of the

entire data set imperatives. Additionally the interrogatives with gender-unspecified occurrences of *ta* account for 81.48% of the entire data set interrogatives.

Two examples illustrating where the *ta* phenomenon exemplifies a specified gender are represented below.

Ex5)都芝旗舰店

『IPHONE 手机套，岂止于薄』 AH~爱明明就应该把 **TA**“套牢”。🥰初见时的倾心，拥有时的激动，不离不弃的相伴相随，如果有一天你不经意间的放手，TA 可能将永远离你而去。所以，给你的爱机来个套吧！

🥰>>>5S👉<http://t.cn/RL7IF6a> 6/6s👉<http://t.cn/RL7xpgI> 6/6s plus👉<http://t.cn/RL7IF6X>

Ex 5) Duzhi Flagship Store

[IPHONE Case, far from weak] AH~ If you love it then you should obviously just “bundle up” **TA**.🥰 The moment you first meet, the excitement when you possess it, an unbreakable companionship, if one day you inadvertently let go, TA may be out of your reach forever. So, why don't you give your beloved phone a case!

🥰>>>5S👉 <http://t.cn/RL7IF6a> 6/6s👉<http://t.cn/RL7xpgI> 6/6s plus👉<http://t.cn/RL7IF6X>

In Example 1 the referent is clearly the iPhone, a product indicated in the co-text and declarative sentence. The cotext 『IPHONE 手机套，岂止于薄』 (IPHONE Case, far from weak) specifically states the subject of the third personal referential pronoun **TA** as being an iPhone, and the further declarative sentence indicates that it is **TA** which should be bundled up in a case specifically manufactured for iPhone.

In Example 6 below the referent is gender contextualized as female.

Ex6) 半次元绘画频道

#画手推荐#半次元本期封面绘师: @吟耳汤 细腻的笔触搭配清新的颜色, 描绘出的人物安静而不失帅气, 美哭惹! 【围观 **TA** 更多美图戳】 <http://t.cn/RypTbiR>

Ex 6) Part-time Painting Channel

#Recommended Artist# The artist for the current cover of Half Dimension :@吟耳汤 (@Yin Er Tang) Meticulous brush strokes paired with vibrant colors, the characters portrayed are not only peaceful but also elegant, it is magnificent! 【Look at more of **TA**'s beautiful work】 <http://t.cn/RypTbiR>

This case of Example 6 illustrates the gender contextualized via co-text. In the co-text “@吟耳汤 细腻的笔触搭配清新的颜色, 描绘出的人物安静而不失帅气, 美哭惹! 【围观 **TA** 更多美图戳】 <http://t.cn/RypTbiR>” (@吟耳汤(Yin Er Tang) Meticulous brush strokes paired with vibrant colors, the characters portrayed are not only peaceful but also elegant, it is magnificent! 【Look at more of **TA**'s beautiful work】 <http://t.cn/RypTbiR>) a direct link to the artist's homepage is provided (@吟耳汤). When this link is clicked or hovered over, the profile indicates the artist as being of female gender through the pink female gendered icon. Furthermore, the *ta* phenomenon here is found again in a declarative sentence.

4.2.2.1 Gender of Referent is Specified via Attached Image

In addition to the examples above, the *ta* phenomenon is also used to refer back to the product mentioned in the attached image.

Our example for analysis here comes from Example 7 .

Ex 7) AFU阿芙

#阿芙新品直播#在泡芙们共同的创造之下，这款 cc 霜终于要诞生啦~**Ta** 轻薄并具有丰盈的光泽感，可以让你白里透红，**Ta** 可以让你无死角，零毛孔，成为素颜女神，**Ta** 是真正的精油底妆且含有护肤功效。**Ta** 将在 10 月 13 日开始预售，那你心中 **Ta** 的专柜价会是多少呢？猜中就可以带走 **Ta** 啦~

Ex 7) AFU(Afu)

#AFU New Product Broadcast# Produced under the collaboration with creampuffs, this cc skin cream has finally been born~ **Ta** is lightweight, has a well-rounded lustrous feel, and can make you pure and rosy. **Ta** can make you flawless, free your pores, and turn you into a goddess even in your bare face. **Ta** is real essential makeup oil and contains skin care efficacy. **Ta** will be put on the market for advanced sale October 13th, so how much will the counter price of **Ta** in your heart be? Those you guess it right can just have **Ta**~



AFU Essential Oil Brightening CC Cushion

猜猜TA的专柜价？

活动规则

- 1 本次活动所猜价格为产品专柜价
- 2 最终选出所猜价格差值最接近专柜价者获奖
- 3 所猜价格与他人同样时，奖品归首位猜中者

活动奖品

阿芙亮颜精油气垫修容霜一个

活动日期

截止到2015年10月12日 18:00



From this example it is clear that the **Ta** variant is used in place of the third person inanimate pronoun 它 to refer to the makeup. Also evident is that the picture acts as the visual stimulus for interlocutors as the **TA** variant is found directly in the image itself, facilitating immediacy and achieving personalization. The first four occurrences of the **Ta** variant, as well as the last, are all in declarative sentences. The fifth occurrence is in the sentence form of an interrogative, indicated by the question mark and the question particle 呢 *ne* combined with 多少 *duōshǎo* (how many).

Ex 8) 透真护肤品牌

周末出去嗨皮，除了带上手机、钱包、钥匙……别忘了带上 **TA** 噢~

Ex 8) Transparent Skincare Brand

Go out HAPPY this weekend, In addition to bringing your cell phone, wallet, and keys.... Don't forget to bring **TA**~



Example 8 shows a variety of Internet language including the *ta* phenomenon. It is clear that the **TA** variant is used in place of the third person inanimate pronoun 它 to refer to the makeup. Also evident is that the picture acts as the visual stimulus for interlocutors while they are confronted with an imperative sentence structure. Furthermore the non standard spelling 嗨皮 (*hāipi* in

pinyin) is used to phonetically mimic the English “Happy” and 憋 (*biē* in pinyin) is used to phonetically mimic that standard character 别 (*bié*) for the English “do not”.

4.2.2.2 Gender of Referent is Specified via Co-text

Below are four illustrative examples of the *ta* phenomenon where *ta* acts as a referential pronoun to an item portrayed in the text. The discussion of these examples will also focus on how the *ta* phenomenon itself facilitates immediacy as a non-standard homophonic grapheme without relying on gender and results in personalization.

As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, one of the main characteristics of promotional texts is that they are informal. As a non-standard spelling, *ta* is both informal and eye-catching. Non-standard spellings are used in advertisements or promotions to attract the interlocutor’s attention. The *ta* phenomenon stimulates the interlocutor to search for the object referent of *ta*, facilitating immediacy, closing distance, and achieving personalization. This function can also be linked back to the theme of personalization based on Fairclough’s (1989) synthetic personalization theories where preference for informality via a colloquial style and creative, attention drawing language is preferred. These aspects are demonstrated in the examples to follow in the remainder of this section.

Ex 9) 西门子家电

#出彩，就现在#不做谁的女白领，只做自己的杜拉拉。精致妆容已成为职场“白骨精”的标配，而一不小心将口红等化妆品蹭在衣服上，弄花妆容不说，烦人的是还要处理美衣上的妆渍。现在，有西门子 iQ500 洗衣机解除后“渍”之忧！特渍洗功能一键洗净妆渍，职场表现有 **TA** 倍显“净”彩！

Ex 9) Siemens Home Appliances

#The time to be noticed is now# Don't be just anyone's white collar woman, be your own LaLa. Exquisite make-up is now the hall-mark of the workplace for women. Not to mention that if you're not careful then cosmetic products such as lipstick always rub off on your clothes, ruining your make-up and resulting in those annoying tough stains that take ages to soak out. Now there is no need to fear, the Siemens iQ500 washing machine can take those stains right out for you! With new technology cosmetic stains are pre-soaked and then washed; have your performance stand out in the workplace with the cleanness **TA** brings!

In both Examples 9 above and 10 below, the *ta* phenomenon is being used as an eye catching non-standard spelling to refer back to the product mentioned in the text. In the case of Example 9 the product is the iQ500 washing machine and the *ta* phenomenon situated in a declarative sentence. Example 9 will be examined in greater detail in the next chapter.

In Example 10 below the entity referred to is the brand name Silk(植朴磨坊), who is responsible for producing the materials to make the Silk product. In both examples *ta* is neuter gender resulting in a 'specified gender and referent'. Let us take a closer look at what this means below where Example 10 is illustrative of inanimate object 它 reference replacement. The specified referent is exhibited first and foremost by the co-text, and accompanied by the attached images.

Ex 10) Silk 植朴磨坊

#植朴乐园#大自然有很多声音，人类却不懂得倾听。以大自然的主人核桃和巴旦木为原料的植朴磨坊，这次也有话说，**TA**的真情实感，愿你能有体会。

Ex 10) Silk (*zhípǔmòfāng*)

#Plant Paradise# Mother Nature has many voices, yet humans do not know how to listen to them attentively. Mother Nature's walnuts and almonds are used as raw material in Silk. This time there is something to keep in mind; we wish that you can come to know **TA**'s true feelings through experience.



Example 10 provides an interesting view of the *ta* phenomenon. Here one can see that there are three main ‘characters’ in the text: 1) Mother Nature; 2) Walnuts ; and 3) Almonds. Yet in this case here, **TA** refers to the brand name Silk(植朴磨坊 *zhípǔmòfāng*) in a declarative sentence. In this case the images compliment the text, providing a visual aid as well as additional co-text. Interesting to note is that **TA** also appears in the second image, which speaks to the audience from the perspective of the company SILK in second person. This is in contrast to the other images which are narrated in first person from the perspective of almonds and walnuts used to manufacture the product, and the product itself. In this example it is clear that a wide variety of creative language and eye-catching techniques are being used to shape the *ta* phenomenon and enhance its role as a facilitator of immediacy for personalization. Indeed Example 10 presents an intriguing pragmatic structure which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Ex 11)橘子娱乐

【今天 **TA** 生日】#刘恺威 1013 生日快乐# 今天是刘恺威 41 岁生日，生日快乐！从 1995 年踏进演艺圈，他面临过不少挫折，也有过人生低谷，一路走来，他日益成熟，用自己的能力给家人撑起了一片天。赶紧送上你的祝福吧~

Ex 11) Orange Entertainment

【Today is **TA's** Birthday】#Liu Kai Wei 1013 Happy Birthday# Today is Liu Kai Wei's 41st birthday, happy birthday!! In 1995 he set foot in show business and faced many setbacks and challenges. As he kept moving forward, he also kept improving, using his own strength to give him support. Why don't you quickly send your blessings~

Example 11 illustrates the case of the *ta* phenomenon being clearly referred to as male via co-text. Not only does it mention the name of the male referent, the male gender 他 also appears in the co-text. Although the referent of the *ta* phenomenon here is not an object, the process of facilitating immediacy is still achieved by a wide variety of creative language and eye-catching techniques of the non-standard spelling designed for personalization.

Ex 12) 新浪电视

【#剧能说#原来《琅琊榜》真正的女主是 **TA**！】首先恭喜#琅琊榜#收视逆袭啦~一直追剧的小编发现，这《琅琊榜》其实有位隐藏女主角，随着剧情进展渐渐上线！特别是最近几集，分分钟让小编想献出膝盖！揭秘分析详情戳这里→ <http://t.cn/RyQCWiD> 大家同意不同意呢？  关注浪浪官方 WX[剧能说]

Ex 12) Sina TV

[#about the program# originally the TV program Nirvana in Fire's real female lead is **TA!**] First of all let's congratulate # Nirvana in Fire # for its viewer ratings ~ The editor always following the drama has found that there is a hidden heroine, following the plot progress it has gradually been released on air! The recent episodes have especially given the editor things to think about! For details of the secret analysis click here → [http: t.cn/RyQCWiD](http://t.cn/RyQCWiD) What do you guys think, do you agree? Follow LiangLiang official WX [about the program]

In Example 12, the word 女主 *nǚzhǔ* 'female lead' immediately precedes the usage of the *ta* phenomenon. Thus the intended gender referent is specified through this co-text as being female. Reference to the female gender is constantly made throughout the co-text of the text as well through terms such as 女主角 *nǚzhǔjiǎo* (female lead character).

4.2.2.3 Gender of Referent is Implied Through Socio-cultural Context

The following three examples illustrate the *ta* phenomenon being used as a vague referent, or an implied gender referent, which is considered in this study as an extension of specified gender.

Ex 13) 百合网

如果对方没房没车父母身体不好还没有保险，你会选择跟 **TA** 在一起吗？

Ex 13) Baiduwang

If your partner does not have a car, a house, sickly parents and no health insurance, would you chose to be with **TA**?

This example puts forward a very interesting semantic analysis which hinges on the judgments and beliefs of Chinese society. In Chinese society, it is a very common thought that a man should own a car, house, and insurance before they are able to get married and care for a wife. As a result, these are often requested requirements when people sign with dating and match-making agencies in China. As a result of this stigmatism and societal pressure, the implied gender

referent of the *ta* phenomenon in this case is that of the male gender. In this case the *ta* phenomenon is situated in an interrogative sentence structure indicated by the question particle 吗 *ma*, a characteristic contributing to the facilitation of immediacy which results in personalization.

Ex 14) 杜蕾斯官方微博

【裸睡能提高性欲】专家指出：男性裸睡可以让睾丸温度下降，精子变得更活泼，性欲望自然就增强了。而建立裸睡习惯后，男性在性生活方面能变得更加自信，夫妻生活更放得开，这对促进两性间的相互信赖，促进夫妻关系都有很好的帮助。为了心爱的 **TA**，今晚一起裸睡吧！

Ex 14) Durex

[Sleeping nude can increase sexual desire] Experts indicate that: When males sleep nude the temperature in their testicles decreases, causing sperm to become livelier. Sexual desire naturally increases as well. Additionally, after getting accustomed to sleeping nude, men can have more confidence in their sex life and a more open marriage. This [idea of sleeping nude] is great in promoting trust for both parties and is very helpful for the progression of a husband-wife relationship. Tonight, for the sake of your beloved **TA**, why don't you sleep together nude!

Example 14 presents a complex semantic analysis, on first glance the *ta* phenomenon can be seen as referring to a gender unspecified lover. However, when the co-text is read carefully, it is constantly promoting the male's role in how they promote their relationship via 'expert opinions'. After introducing what 'experts' have discovered, the text then implies that women should assist men in sleeping nude to improve their relationship in the line '这对促进两性间的相互信赖，促进夫妻关系都有很好的帮助' (This [idea of sleeping nude] is great in promoting trust for both parties and is very helpful for the progression of a husband-wife relationship). As a result, the **TA** here is calling on females to sleep nude for the sake of males. Example 14 is also in the form of an imperative sentence, demonstrating one out of two instances in the data set.

As demonstrated above, both Example 13 and 14 are illustrative of the *ta* phenomenon implying a male referent based on the content. In Example 13 the content lists stereotypical criterion woman looks for when marrying a man. Example 14 is a post from the well known condom company Durex, which is also geared towards men.

Section 4.2.2 illustrated the three types of situations in which the gender of the *ta* phenomenon is specified. The gender is specified in the following three ways: via attached image, via co-text, and via socio-cultural context. This section illustrated that most inanimate objects are replaced with the *ta* phenomenon for the standard neuter *ta* 它.

4.3 *Ta* as a Personalization Device in Different Sentence Types

This section specifically focuses on the types of functions that specific *ta* phenomenon sentence types serve in *ta*-texts. There is a preference for certain sentence types (especially rhetorical questions and commands) and sentence structures in promotional writings (Fuertes-Olivera et al., 2001:1295;Janoschka, 2004). In the data, there is a distinct preference for certain sentence patterns depending on the semantics of the *ta* phenomenon. For example, Interrogatives and Imperatives occur most often in Unspecified Gender, while Declaratives appear often in Specified Gender, at a higher frequency than imperatives and interrogatives.

In the data set some promotional writings are specifically for a brand product, as seen in the Specified Gender which uses a large amount of declarative sentences. However, there are also ‘non-product’ promotional writings that can be found where gender-unspecified usage of *ta* occurs along with imperative and interrogative sentence structures to promote activities/the usage of their services with a loved one. These two types will be illustrated in the subsections below with a few examples.

4.3.1 *Ta* in Declarative Sentences used to Promote Tangibles

Example 9 was briefly introduced above and demonstrates the promotion of a specific brand product. Just how this is accomplished will be further examined in the next chapter.

Ex9) 西门子家电

#出彩，就现在#不做谁的女白领，只做自己的杜拉拉。精致妆容已成为职场“白骨精”的标配，而一不小心将口红等化妆品蹭在衣服上，弄花妆容不说，烦人的是还要处理美衣上的妆渍。现在，有西门子 iQ500 洗衣机解除后“渍”之忧！特渍洗功能一键洗净妆渍，职场表现有 **TA** 倍显“净”彩！

Ex 9) Siemens Home Appliances

#The time to stand out is now# Don't be just anyone's white collar woman, be your own LaLa. Exquisite make-up is now the hall-mark of the workplace for women. Not to mention that if you're not careful then cosmetic products such as lipstick always rub off on your clothes, ruining your make-up and resulting in those annoying tough stains that take ages to soak out. Now there is no need to fear, the Siemens iQ500 washing machine can take those stains right out for you! With new technology cosmetic stains are pre-soaked and then washed; have your performance stand out in the workplace with the cleanness **TA** brings!



As reflected by the example above, the specific product name 西门子 iQ500 洗衣机 (*xīménzǐ iQ500 xǐyījī*) (Siemens iQ500 washing machine) appears in association with the brand

name and in the form of a declarative sentence (现在，有西门子 iQ500 洗衣机解除后“渍”之忧！ - Now there is no need to fear, the Siemens iQ500 washing machine can take those stains right out for you!) Siemens is a well known quality product producing engineering company founded in Germany and the largest of its kind in Europe.

Ex 15) 广东思埠集团

因为 **TA**,我! 不! 干! 了! 😡😡😡

Ex 15) SIBU Group

Because of **TA**, I WON'T FEEL DRY ANYMORE! 😡😡😡



Example 15 is a newly shown example that is textually fairly simple with the hash tags and images which clearly point out that the text is promoting a brand name product. Specifically being promoted is SIBU GROUP's moisturizer in a declarative sentence. The textual structure of the advertisement will be explored in the following chapter.

The new Example 16 below showcases a rather straightforward semantic component combined with an intriguing textual structure. This structure will be discussed in detail in the following chapter while the discussion here will focus on the semantics of *ta*.

Ex 16) h2o 水芝澳官方微博

#h2o+芝识堂# 时间或许从来不会真正帮我们解决什么问题，但起码 **ta** 可以考验美丽。能经得住考验的终将成为经典，就像是水芝澳八杯水经典保湿。

Ex 16) h2o+ Oasis Official Weibo

#h2o+Zhī shítáng# Perhaps time will never really help us solve some problems, but at the very least **ta** can test beauty. Beauty can have the ability to stand the test of time and become a classic example, just like h2o+ Oasis classic moisturizer.



Example 16 showcases the brand name and the product name very prominently in the hash tags and the image, identifying it as “h2o+ Oasis”, a type of moisturizer. The occurrence of the *ta* phenomenon in the main text of Example 16 is that of a definite declarative sentence.

4.3.2 *Ta* in Interrogative and Imperative Sentences used to Promote Intangibles

The examples in this section all focus on either promoting a service or aiming to turn a brand name into a ‘household name’, meaning a name that is so common it is used daily in the home. The examples exhibit the characteristic structures of either imperatives or interrogatives.

Example 17 below showcases the *ta* phenomenon present in the gender unspecified semantic case. The text was made by the Chinese wedding photography company ‘Bojue Wedding Dress worldwide travel photographs’ which specializes in destination photography.

Ex 17) 铂爵婚纱全球旅拍

#铂爵夜话# 给在最好年纪陪伴你却最终没走到一起的 **Ta** 留下一句话吧

Ex 17) Bojue Wedding Dress worldwide travel photographs

#Bojue night talk # Why don't you leave behind a few words for **Ta** who accompanied you in the best years yet did not make it to the end together with you.

In this case the *ta* phenomenon is clearly in an interrogative structure indicated by the final particle 吧 *ba* indicating suggestion and is promoting the services of the company as opposed to a product. This concept will be further explored and built upon in the following chapter.

As mentioned in the beginning of this section, the texts which reflect non-brand product promotions often promote services or activities that can be done with a gender unspecified counterpart. Such a case of a recommended activity is seen below in Example 18.

Ex 18)中国日报

【今晚，一起去看流星雨!】曾经在 20 世纪有过数次精彩表演的天龙座流星雨，10 月 9 日 13 时达到极盛，感兴趣的公众可在 9 日晚至 10 日晨对其进行观测，届时，每小时会有数十颗左右的流星划过夜空。<http://t.cn/RyTdC11> 你找到陪你看流星雨的那个 **Ta** 了么？

Ex 18) China Daily

[Go watch the meteor shower together tonight!]

Previously in the 20th century there have been a number of wonderful Draco Meteor Shower displays. On October 9th at 13:00 we are almost at maximum capacity. Those of the public who are interested can view the meteor shower on October 9th between approximately 10 pm and the early morning hours. When the time comes, about 10 meteors will streak across the night sky every hour. <http://t.cn/RyTdC11> Have you found **Ta** who will accompany you to watch the meteor shower?

In this case the text is fairly straight forward and it is clear that the activity being promoted is the viewing of the meteor shower. The sentence in which the *ta* phenomenon occurs is a direct interrogative of the yes-no style. The pragmatics of this promotion will be further examined in the following chapter.

The last example in this section, Example 19, demonstrates the promotion of a service, more specifically an online quiz.

Ex 19)新浪星座

测! **TA** 的心里除了你还有别人吗? 一分钟做几道题测出你的 **TA** 心里只有你一个人 OR 还有别人? <http://t.cn/RyRcXsF>

Ex 19) Sina Horoscope

Survey! Besides you, does **TA**'s heart have others? Within just one minute complete a survey and see if your **TA**'s heart only has you OR if there are others? <http://t.cn/RyRcXsF>

The *ta* phenomenon in Example 19 is shown to occur twice, the first in an open ended interrogative and the second in a declarative.

There are various levels within the genre of advertising and the “public and institutional goal is selling a product and/or service” (Fuertes-Olivera et al. ,2001:1292). This observation is supported by the work of Cook (2001) who also identifies marketers as either promoting products or services as demonstrated in the *ta* phenomenon institutional data set.

4.4 Summary

In this chapter a multitude of frameworks were brought together to analyze the function of the *ta* phenomenon. There are two ways that gender is indicated (or not) through *ta*: 1) Unspecified Gender; and 2) Specified Gender. The most frequent gender case of the whole institutional data set is that of Unspecified Gender, accounting for 98 tokens, a converted percentage of 72.59%. Specified Gender accounts for 27.41 % of the whole data set.

Also displayed in this chapter is that interrogatives and Imperatives occur most often in Unspecified Gender and when gender referent is implied by co-text, while Declaratives appear often in Specified Gender. In Specified Gender, most referents are those of products and can be paired with the inanimate object 它(81%). As a result, the *ta* phenomenon in the form of declarative sentences has a high correlation tendency to be used as a replacement for specified referents. The next chapter focuses on an in depth textual analysis of the structure and phrases of *ta*-texts that contribute to the *ta* phenomenon by resulting in personalization.

Chapter 5 The Structure of *ta* Texts and Their Function

5.1 Introduction

This chapter is a continuation of the previous chapter in that it further illustrates the environment in which the *ta* phenomenon occurs. Specifically, this chapter analyzes the structure of *ta*-texts and their functions in enhancing engagement.

5.2 *Ta* As an Engagement Device in Different Textual Environments

This section presents a textual analysis of *ta*-texts and their functions. *Ta*-texts are designed to enhance interlocutor engagement through the positioning of certain phrases in the textual structure centered around the *ta* phenomenon. These sequences of textual structures are known as “moves” and are accomplished through a particular “three-move” structure. The “three-move” structure stems from Move Analysis proposed by Swales (1981).

A move is defined as ‘a section of a text that performs a specific communicative function. Each move not only has its own purpose but also contributes to the overall communicative purpose of the genre’ (Biber, Connor, & Upton, 2007, p. 23; Cited in Labrador et al., 2014:39). Online promotional texts tend to have two main rhetorical moves: the first move focuses on language use for identifying the product, and the second move is responsible for describing the product (Labrador et al., 2014: 38). The second move is realized through two steps (Labrador et al., 2014:38). The first step is responsible for portraying objective features (Labrador et al., 2014:38). The second step is responsible for focusing on persuading the interlocutor to either engage with the writing or with the product; thus ultimately leading them to become a consumer (Labrador et al., 2014:38). The study has coded the first move as M1, and the second as M2. Within the second move, M2^{DESCR} indicates step one of objective description and M2^{PERS} indicates step two of persuasion. The study also puts forward a third rhetorical move present in the ‘non-product’ persuasive writing in the current data (see section 5.2.2). This third move is responsible for identifying abstract notions such as services, or the brand image itself, and indicating them as a topic of the persuasive text instead of a concrete product. This rhetorical move will be referred to

as M3 with specific distinction made between texts with a non-profit purpose (e.g., promoting an ideology in Section 5.2.2.1) and texts with a for-profit purpose (Section 5.2.2.2).

Section 5.2.1 discusses how *ta*- texts are primarily used to generate profit and Section 5.2.2 discusses how *ta*-texts are primarily used to generate engagement.

5.2.1 *Ta*-Texts that aim to Generate Profit

There are two types of *ta*-texts that are used to generate profit: 1) M1 and M2 are both explicit (section 5.2.1.1), and 2) M2 is explicit and M1 is implied (section 5.2.1.2). Each section will discuss three illustrative examples. In the discussion portions of analysis the study draws upon a variety of work completed in the field of online advertisement and engagement characteristics. For the sake of clarity, these studies and their terminologies will be shortly addressed below.

The first relevant notion is engagement. The structure of the *ta*-texts is used to achieve engagement. “[E]ngagement involves cognitive and emotional immersion [...] engagement is driven by information consumption, interest immersion, sense of presence, and social interaction” (Smith et al., 2015:82).

In order to effectively engage consumers, companies need to make their advertisement and social media content personal with a focus on improving customer value. (Smith et al., 2015:86,578). This is critical in today’s society as customers are extremely value conscious and avid social media users (Smith et al., 2016: 578). Companies effectively engage consumers with social media by providing them with values that satisfy their various needs (Shi et al., 2016:578). The usage of the *ta* phenomenon satisfies needs by allowing the interlocutor to associate *ta* freely to the first person that comes to their mind regardless of gender.

One major factor in encouraging the continued engagement of followers with the brand page is to ensure that their needs are met within the text (this notion is referred to as customer value theory, Shi et al., 2016). Under customer value theory there are three main values of operation identified among interlocutors: functional, social, and emotional values (Shi et al., 2016:589). The functional value evaluates the product or service’s quality, performance, and monetary value; the social value aims at enhancing a consumer’s social relations and social standing; and

the emotional value is exercised when the company benefits from stirring the inner feelings of the consumer and motivating them into action (Shi et al. 2016:579). The last value of emotion is a factor in the engagement and reception level of promotional texts in interlocutors (Labrador et al., 2014; Janoschka, 2004; Cook, 2001; Fairclough, 1989). Rather than focusing on functional issues, the nature of social media is to focus more on socializing and entertainment (Shi et al., 2016:586). As a result, the social and emotional functions will be utilized in the analyses.

There are three key factors for social value among Sina Weibo users: interactivity, collaboration, and social presence; and two for emotional value: entertainment and arousal (similar to Janoschka's (2004) sex and emotion factors) (Shi et al., 2016:579). In addition to the two factors for emotional value found by Shi et al. (2016), this study also considers the following additional factors proposed by Janoschka (2004) when analyzing the functions of the *ta*-texts: curiosity, giving support, receiving support, and gain

In the following sections the notions of emotional and social value will be applied in the analysis of the structures of the *ta*-texts.

5.2.1.1 M1 and M2 are Both Explicit

There are 13 out of 110 texts where M1 and M2 are both explicit, which equals a percentile of 11.8. The text in Example 7 can be seen explicitly embodying both rhetorical moves mentioned by Labrador et al. (2014) above. For the sake of clarity in analysis, language indicative of M1 is underlined in black once, while language indicative of M2 is underlined twice. The text has been repeated below for convenience:

Ex 7) AFU 阿芙

#阿芙新品直播#在泡芙们共同的创造之下，这款 cc 霜终于要诞生啦~ **Ta** 轻薄并具有丰盈的光泽感，可以让你白里透红， **Ta** 可以让你无死角，零毛孔，成为素颜女神， **Ta** 是真正的精油底妆且含有护肤功效。 **Ta** 将在 10 月 13 日开始预售， 那你心中 **Ta** 的专柜价会是多少呢？猜中就可以带走 **Ta** 啦~

Ex 7) AFU(Afu)

#AFU New Product Broadcast# Produced under the collaboration with creampuffs, this cc skin cream has finally been born~ Ta is lightweight, has a well-rounded lustrous feel, and can make you pure and rosy. Ta can make you flawless, free your pores, and turn you into a goddess even in your bare face. Ta is a real essential makeup oil and contains skin care efficacy. Ta will be put on the market for advanced sale October 13th, so how much will the counter price of Ta in your heart be? Those you guess it right can just have Ta~

The language used to identify the product and serve as M1 is demonstrated in the hash tags, which explicitly state that the main content is about AFU’s new product (阿芙新品 -ā fúxīnpǐn). This new product is further indentified in detail with the information of what it actually is: cc skin cream (这款 cc 霜 - zhèkuǎn cc shuāng).As can be seen above, there is evidently more M2language. There are two sentences dedicated to the portraying of objective features (M2^{DESCR}), and roughly two dedicated to persuading the readers to engage (M2^{PERS}). The structure of the two steps of the second rhetorical move is represented in the chart below:

Second Rhetorical Move (M2) Ex 7		
Move Number	M2 ^{DESCR}	M2 ^{PERS}
1	<u>Ta 轻薄并具有丰盈的光泽感，可以让你白里透红</u>	<u>Ta 可以让你无死角，零毛孔，成为素颜女神</u>

	<u>Ta is lightweight, has a well-rounded lustrous feel, and can make you pure and rosy</u>	<u>Ta can make you flawless, free your pores, and turn you into a goddess even in your bare face.</u>
2	<u>Ta 是真正的精油底妆且含有护肤功效</u> <u>Ta is a real essential makeup oil and contains skin care efficacy.</u>	那你心中 <u>Ta</u> 的专柜价会是多少呢? <u>猜中就可以带走 Ta 啦~</u> , <u>so how much will the counter price of Ta in your heart be? Those you guess it right can just have Ta~</u>

This text exhibits the emotional engagement factors of entertainment, gain, and curiosity. The first sentence under M2^{PERS} contains the second occurrence of *ta* in a declarative sentence while the remaining sentence includes the fifth and sixth occurrences of *ta*. What is critical to note here is that the fifth instance of *ta* is enclosed in an interrogative, a style designed to engage interlocutors (Janoschka, 2004). Here the non-standard form of the homophonic grapheme *ta* contributes to the curiosity factor as it is eye-catching and informal. In terms of gain, the language of persuasion in the text of M2^{PERS} presents the interlocutor with all the things they can gain from using the product (flawless skin, free pores, goddess like appearance). The entertainment factor is exhibited in the open ended question which invites interlocutors to partake in a guessing game (i.e., the price of the product) with the chance to win it for free.

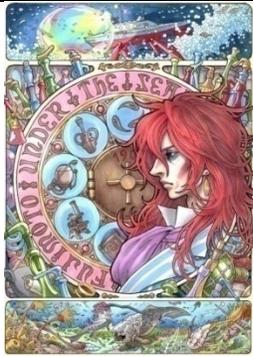
Ex 20) 三叠色官方微博

穆夏风格的宫崎骏动画人物，TA们分别出自哪部作品呢？

Ex 20) Tri-color Official Weibo

MuXia style of Japanese Director Miyazaki Hayao's animated characters, which work are **They** (Co-ed) from?

			
<p>Ex 20) Image 1</p>	<p>Ex 20) Image 2</p>	<p>Ex 20) Image 3</p>	<p>Ex 20) Image 4</p>
			
<p>Ex 20) Image 5</p>	<p>Ex 20) Image 6</p>	<p>Ex 20) Image 7</p>	<p>Ex 20) Image 8</p>

 <p data-bbox="191 604 375 638">Ex 20) Image 8</p>			
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	--	--	--

From the images it is clear that the TA variant here is being used to refer to a co-ed collective (i.e., a group of males and females) and that the referents are indicated by each picture. The images contain 6 female characters, 2 male characters, and 1 animal character as the main representatives of the various works of Miyazaki Hayao. Of these the most well known are Spirited Away (Image 3), Totoro (Image 5), Howl's Moving Castel (Image 6) and Kiki's Delivery Service (Image 8). The sentence structure here is that of an interrogative, which consistently correlates at a high level when gender plays a role in the referent. Thus in this case of Example 20, the user shows that their usage of the *ta* phenomenon is to refer to all three third person pronoun options: 他 *ta* male, 她 *ta* female and 它 *ta* neuter.

The language used to identify the product, in this case the physical object of focus, and serve as M1 is demonstrated in the phrase 动画人物 (*dònghuà rén wù* - animated characters). These characters are further identified in detail in the phrase 宫崎骏 (*gōngqí jùn* - Japanese Director Miyazaki Hayao) as indicating their creator. In this example the language pertaining to M1 and M2 is relatively equal.

The first portion of the first clause is dedicated to the portrayal of objective features (M2^{DESCR}), and the entire second clause is roughly dedicated to persuading the interlocutor to engage with the text content (M2^{PERS}). This structure is schematically represented in the chart below:

Second Rhetorical Move (M2) Ex 20		
Move Number	M2 ^{DESCR}	M2 ^{PERS}
1	<p><u>穆夏风格</u></p> <p>MuXia style</p>	<p><u>TA 们分别出自哪部作品呢?</u></p> <p>which work are They (Co-ed) from?</p>

The text here largely plays on the curiosity factor of emotional appeal leading to engagement. 穆夏风格 mùxiàfēnggé (MuXia style) is an additive descriptor describing the visual appearance of the art work in an objective manner, thus falling under M2^{DESCR}. On the other hand, the language involved in M2^{PERS} contains two main components: the *ta* phenomenon and an interrogative. It has already been concluded that the *ta* phenomenon is able to be all three *ta* forms in Chapter 4. Thus, the analysis in this chapter will be focused on the pragmatic function of a rhetorical move in which *ta* occurs.

The use of interrogatives is a basic component of persuasive language and a device used to achieve engagement. Interrogatives solicit an interlocutor to answer the question of which character is from which work. With the use of the *ta* phenomenon, an interlocutor is lead to realize that the possibilities of which character belongs to which work are infinite, as the works of Miyazaki Hayao are many and *ta* does not specify, or give a hint, as to which work it may be based on the gender of the main character. This play on the unknown further sparks an interlocutor's interest, and as a result, increases their likelihood to engage with the text. The emotional factor of entertainment is also played upon here much like that demonstrated in Example 7. Through the interrogative structure, the entertainment factor lies in the matching activity of association and that the characters come from popular animation films. The subject matter and activity are both entertaining and can put an interlocutor's, especially a Miyazaki Hayao fan's, knowledge to the test and entice them to prove said knowledge as knowledge is capital in terms of social function; the more social capital one has the higher their standing in society is.

Example 9 demonstrates a large amount of M2 before explicit indication of M1. Once the interlocutor is introduced to the language in M1, they then realize that all prior language in M2 is actually setting the stage for M1 and enhancing its identification.

Ex9) 西门子家电

#出彩，就现在#不做谁的女白领，只做自己的杜拉拉。精致妆容已成为职场“白骨精”的标配，而一不小心将口红等化妆品蹭在衣服上，弄花妆容不说，烦人的是还要处理美衣上的妆渍。现在，有西门子 iQ500 洗衣机解除后“渍”之忧！特渍洗功能一键洗净妆渍，职场表
现有 **TA** 倍显“净”彩！

Ex 9) Siemens Home Appliances

#The time to stand out is now# Don't be just anyone's white collar woman, be your own LaLa. Exquisite make-up is now the hall-mark of the workplace for women. Not to mention that if you're not careful then cosmetic products such as lipstick always rub off on your clothes, ruining your make-up and resulting in those annoying tough stains that take ages to soak out. Now there

is no need to fear, the Siemens iQ500 washing machine can take those stains right out for you!
With new technology cosmetic stains are pre-soaked and then washed; have your performance
stand out in the workplace with the cleanness TA brings!



The discussion of this example will mainly focus on the aspect of M2, as that of M1(Siemens iQ500 washing machine) is very straightforward.

Second Rhetorical Move (M2) Ex 9		
Move Number	M2 ^{DESCR}	M2 ^{PERS}
1	<p><u>特渍洗功能一键洗净妆渍</u></p> <p><u>With new technology cosmetic stains are pre-soaked and then washed</u></p>	<p><u>#出彩, 就现在#</u></p> <p><u>#The time to stand out is now#</u></p>

2		<p><u>不做谁的女白领，只做自己的杜拉拉。</u></p> <p><u>Don't be just anyone's white collar woman, be your own LaLa</u></p>
3		<p><u>精致妆容已成为职场“白骨精”的标配，</u></p> <p><u>Exquisite make-up is now the hall-mark of the workplace for women.</u></p>
4		<p><u>而一不小心将口红等化妆品蹭在衣服上，</u></p> <p><u>Not to mention that if you're not careful then cosmetic products such as lipstick always rub off on your clothes</u></p>
5		<p><u>弄花妆容不说，</u></p> <p><u>ruining your make-up</u></p>
6		<p><u>烦人的是还要处理美衣上的妆渍。</u></p> <p><u>and resulting in those annoying tough stains that take ages to soak out</u></p>
7		<p><u>解除后“渍”之忧！</u></p> <p><u>there is no need to fear, [...] can take those stains right out for you!</u></p>
8		<p><u>职场表现有 TA 倍显“净”彩！</u></p> <p><u>have your performance stand out in the workplace with the cleanness TA brings!</u></p>

Example 9 operates on the emotional factors of gain, arousal, order, and giving support. It starts off very strongly worded in hash tags with the motivational phrase “#出彩，就现在#” (*#chūcǎi, jiùxiànzài#*- #The time to stand out is now#) to entice engagement. At first the message seems very general and targeted at all interlocutors, yet with the following context we can see that the content of the text is once again a portrayal of stereo typical gender roles in society with a clear target audience.

The second M2^{PERS} solidifies the gender of the target audience as female. Laced with empowering feminine speech that is achieved by the negative imperative construction of “不做谁的女白领” (*bùzuòshuí de nǚbáilǐng*- Don't be just anyone's white collar woman) coupled with the commercialized image of “杜拉拉” (*dùlālā*)- Lala, the main character and heroine of the 2010 mainland Chinese popular television series 《杜拉拉升职记》 (*dùlālāshēngzhìjì*), or “Go La La Go!” in English. Lala is portrayed in the media as a woman in the workplace who has lost her love, been betrayed by her best friend, and is trying her best to stick it out in the office place of a marketing firm. Simple and plain information about a product or service is not enough to engage the interlocutor. As a result, “an additional emotional appeal to their needs is, therefore, integrated in the advertising communication (Krober-Riel & Esch 2000: 38f)” (Janoschka, 2004: 88). With this iconic reference to Lala, the second M2^{PERS} already contextualizes and personalizes the content for many women, emotionally appealing to them and leading them to identify with the text, establishing a personal connection and facilitating engagement.

The third to sixth M2^{PERS} describe the inconveniences faced daily by many women in the office-setting workplace. The seventh M2^{PERS} introduces the idea that there is a way to immediately eliminate these inconveniences, which directly connects and leads in to the Siemens iQ500 washing machine in M1. The eighth and final M2^{PERS} embodies the *ta* phenomenon as a reflexive third person pronoun to the specified referent identified in M1 as the washing machine, the product for sale, attracting attention due to the non-standard spelling format.

5.2.1.2 M2 is Explicit and M1 Implied

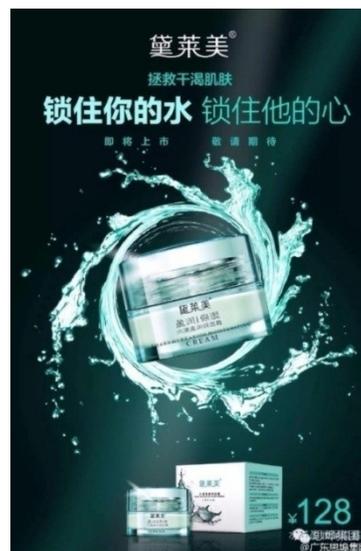
M2 is explicit and M1 implied accounts for 7 out of 110 texts. This section presents three examples of cases where only M2 is explicit. The discussions will first focus on M2 and then proceeds to address M1 and how it is implied either through co-text or image.

Ex 15) 广东思埠集团

因为TA,我!不!干!了! 😡😡😡

Ex 15) Sibu Group

Because of TA, I WON'T FEEL DRY ANYMORE! 😡😡😡



In Example 15, the sentence is a declarative with one occurrence of the *ta* phenomenon in an 因为 (Yinwei, or ‘because’) clause. Here we can see that the second rhetorical move only contains the persuasive language as is reflected in the lexical choices and syntactic structure. The chart below shows a breakdown of this

Second Rhetorical Move (M2) Ex 15		
Move Number	M2 ^{DESCR}	M2 ^{PERS}
1		因为 TA , <u>Because of TA</u>
2		我! 不! 干! 了! <u>I WON'T FEEL DRY ANYMORE!</u>

With **TA** being unknown from the beginning, the interlocutor's curiosity is piqued and they are inclined to find out more about the message by engaging with the images. Specifically, they want to associate **TA** with a concrete product so that they can establish a cause and effect relationship as indicated by the first clause in the text. This leads us to the role of M1 where the type of product and brand name is implied as being a moisturizer manufactured by 思埠集团 *sībùjítuán* "Sibu Group". Interlocutors are then able to understand that if they buy the product (the moisturizer), then they will no longer experience dry skin. This realization that they will no longer experience dry skin is a gain factor. This is a typical example of an advertisement aiming at affecting the interlocutor on the emotional level by closely connecting "with the experiences that should be realized by the product" (Janoschka, 2004: 88).

Ex 10) Silk 植朴磨坊

#植朴乐园#大自然有很多声音，人类却不懂得倾听。以大自然的主人核桃和巴旦木为原料的植朴磨坊，这次也有话说，TA的真情实感，愿你能有体会。

Ex 10) Silkzhípǔmòfāng

#Plant Paradise# Mother Nature has many voices, yet humans do not know how to listen to them attentively. Mother Nature's walnuts and almonds are used as raw material in Silk. This time there is something to keep in mind; we wish that you can come to know TA's true feelings through experience.

TA refers to the brand name Silk in a declarative sentence in Example 10. The images complement the text, providing a visual aid as well as additional co-text. In order to gain an in-depth understanding of the pragmatics of this text, both the primary text (i.e., the text in the post) and the text of the three attached images will be analyzed via rhetorical move analysis below. The characteristics of vague TA identification implied by the image seen in Example 15 are also seen occurring here in Example 10.

Second Rhetorical Move (M2) Ex 10		
Move Number	M2 ^{DESCR}	M2 ^{PERS}
1	<u>大自然有很多声音</u> <u>Mother Nature has many voices</u>	<u>人类却不懂得倾听</u> <u>yet humans do not know how to listen to them attentively</u>

2	<u>以大自然的主人核桃和巴旦木 为原料的植朴磨坊</u> <u>Mother Nature's walnuts and almonds are used as raw material in Silk.</u>	<u>这次也有话说</u> <u>This time there is something to keep in mind</u>
3		<u>TA 的真情实感，愿你能有体会。</u> <u>we wish that you can come to know TA's true feelings through experience.</u>

From the primary text one can see that it is setting the stage to direct interlocutors to the accompanying pictures and plays on the factors of curiosity, emotional arousal, and receiving support. The two portions of the text in M2^{DESCR} are fairly straight forward and factually descriptive while personifying Mother Nature. Those in the M2^{PERS} column contain debatable claims, personalization via pronouns and direct address, and the *ta* phenomenon. The very last sentence largely plays on the emotional factor. Interesting to note here is the invocation of curiosity with “we wish” and “**TA**’s true feelings”. These phrases combined with the *ta* phenomenon lure interlocutors to further explore the message by engaging with the attached images where the M1 is implied as being a milk product manufactured by Silk that is based on almonds and walnuts. The factor of receiving support is demonstrated in the final sentence of the main text where the text directly calls for support of the interlocutor with lexical devices such as “wish”, “come to know”, and “experience”.

Ex 10 a) Image 1:



我是植朴磨坊

对你们来讲, 我平平无奇

我的存在, 就是一盒饮料

但你可知道, 每一滴植朴磨坊

都能追溯到中国高山地区核桃的精魂

以及美国巴旦木庄园的纯净阳光

Ex 10 a) Image 1 Translation:

I am Silk

As far as you are concerned, I am
nothing special

My existence is just that of a carton
drink

Maybe you know that every plant by-
product

Can be traced back to the soul of
walnuts from China's high
mountainous regions and the pure
sunshine of almonds from the United
States.

Second Rhetorical Move (M2)– Ex 10 a)		
Move Number	M2 ^{DESCR}	M2 ^{PERS}
1	<u>我是植朴磨坊</u> <u>I am Silk</u>	<u>但你可知道</u> <u>Maybe you know</u>
2	<u>对你们来讲，我平平无奇</u> <u>As far as you are concerned, I am nothing special</u>	
3	<u>我的存在，就是一盒饮料</u> <u>My existence is just that of a carton drink</u>	
4	<u>每一滴植朴磨坊</u> <u>that every plant by-product</u>	
5	<u>都能追溯到中国高山地区核桃的精魂</u> <u>Can be traced back to the soul of walnuts from China's high mountainous regions</u>	
6	<u>以及美国巴旦木庄园的纯净阳光</u> <u>and the pure sunshine of almonds</u>	

	<u>from the United States.</u>	
--	--------------------------------	--

The text of image 1 is used to personify the product and brand name Silk, taking the narrative role of first person. As demonstrated in the table above, the majority of the language is a simple flowery description hinting at what Silk products actually are.

<p>Ex 10b) Image 2:</p>  <p><u>经年累月，周而复始</u></p> <p><u>大自然把 TA 最美好的果实馈赠给你</u></p> <p><u>你能否品尝出 TA 的甘甜-----</u></p>	<p>Ex 10b) Image 2 Translation:</p> <p><u>For years and years the cycle has repeated itself</u></p> <p><u>Mother Nature takes TA's most beautiful products and gives them to you.</u></p> <p><u>Can you taste TA's sweet....</u></p>
--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Second Rhetorical Move (M2)– Ex 10 b)		
Move Number	M2 ^{DESCR}	M2 ^{PERS}
1	<u>经年累月，周而复始</u> <u>For years and years the cycle has repeated itself</u>	<u>大自然把 TA 最美好的果实馈赠给你</u> <u>Mother Nature takes TA’s most beautiful products and gives them to you.</u>
2		<u>你能否品尝出 TA 的甘甜-----</u> <u>Can you taste TA’s sweet....</u>

Image 2 displays language that begins to target the emotional appeal factors of curiosity through the yes/no question (你能否品尝出 TA 的甘甜----- “Can you taste TA’s sweet....”) where the second occurrence of the *ta* phenomenon is seen, and the arousal aspect in the first sentence where *ta* is seen. The perspective has flipped back to that of the company, objectively describing and personifying Mother Nature, attempting to imply a guilt factor that Mother Nature ‘works hard’ to supply us with sustainable food. More specifically the implied items are the walnuts and almonds used in the Silk product.

Ex 10c) Image 3:



下次，在品尝我时

请注意倾听

由我缓缓而出的来自大自然的歌.....

Ex 10c) Image 3 Translation:

Next time when you taste me

Please keep in mind that

I come from the warmth of Mother Nature

Second Rhetorical Move (M2)– Ex 10 c)		
Move Number	M2 ^{DESCR}	M2 ^{PERS}
1		<p><u>请注意倾听</u></p> <p><u>Please keep in mind that</u></p>
2		<p><u>由我缓缓而出的来自大自然的歌.....</u></p>

		<u>I come from the warmth of Mother Nature</u>
--	--	------------------------------------------------

In the text of the third image the emotional arousal factor is being achieved by switching to the narration from the almonds/walnuts' perspective. It also implies that all of the raw materials used in the manufacturing of Silk products are organic and sustainable resources making them more consumer-friendly and environmentally conscious. Fuertes-Olivera et al.(2001:1295) explain the workings of advertisements and their relation to mass consumption in the following statement:

“mass-consumption is only possible if the addresser conveys a persuasive message under an informative mask so that the receiver gets a delusive impression of a referential message. It is obvious, however, that this is difficult not only because there is always more than one plausible interpretation, but also because of the fuzzy borders between ‘denomination’ (brand identity), ‘predication’ (product/object promotion to create needs) and ‘information’ (product features).”

(Fuertes-Olivera et al. 2001:1295).

This cycle outlined by Fuertes-Olivera et al. (2001) is perfectly portrayed in Example 10 as illustrated above.

Ex 21)东风悦达起亚

#谁是你眼中的美学之作？#你眼中的完美是什么？是荣膺设计大奖的 A9 音响？是获至尊大奖的徕卡 T 相机？是包揽双料大奖的 Circolo 胶囊咖啡机？还是系出世界顶尖设计大师之手的 **TA**?

Ex 21) DongfengYuedaKia

#Who is your ideal aesthetic work?# What is considered perfect in your eyes? Is it the prized A9 stereo sound system which won the IF international forum design award? Is it the Red Dot award winning Leica T Camera? Is it the Circolo Coffee Maker which has won both the IF and Red Dot award? Or is it **TA** that has been crafted and born from the hands of a great designer?



DongfengYuedaKia Motor is an automotive manufacturing company based in Yancheng, China. It is a joint venture between Dongfeng Motor Corporation, Kia Motors and Yueda. The text here only consists of M2^{PERS} which all builds up to the implied M1 embodied by the *ta* phenomenon²⁴.

²⁴ In Ex 21 the texts on the images are the same as the primary text. Thus, they are not analyzed separately as in Ex. 10.

Second Rhetorical Move (M2) Ex 21		
Move Number	M2 ^{DESCR}	M2 ^{PERS}
1		<p><u>#谁是你眼中的美学之作? #</u></p> <p><u>#Who is your ideal aesthetic work?#</u></p>
2		<p><u>你眼中的完美是什么?</u></p> <p><u>What is considered perfect in your eyes?</u></p>
3		<p><u>是荣膺设计大奖的 A9 音响?</u></p> <p><u>Is it the prized A9 stereo sound system which won the IF international forum design award?</u></p>
4		<p><u>是获至尊大奖的徕卡 T 相机?</u></p> <p><u>Is it the Red Dot award winning Leica T Camera?</u></p>
5		<p><u>是包揽双料大奖的 Circolo 胶囊咖啡机?</u></p> <p><u>Is it the Circolo Coffee Maker which has won both the IF and Red Dot award?</u></p>
6		<p><u>还是系出世界顶尖设计大师之手的 TA?</u></p> <p><u>Or is it TA that has been crafted and born from the hands of a great designer?</u></p>

In this case the identification of **TA** is still vague, however due to the previous sentences in moves one through five listing the products that have won designer awards, interlocutors are lead to believe that **TA** refers to a similar product that has won the same award(s) for this year. Through the use of multiple interrogatives, two being open ended and four being yes-no, the text targets the emotional appeal of curiosity and arousal. The text clearly solicits the interlocutor's personal opinion through the interrogatives and the *ta* phenomenon which refers to an inanimate 'it' object. These linguistic devices enhance the anticipation and curiosity an interlocutor may feel with the final image which foreshadows the award winner of the year.

5.2.2 Ta-Texts that aim to Generate Engagement

Ta texts used to generate engagement fall in to two categories: 1) M2 and M3 Non-Profit Oriented; and 2) M2 and M3 Profit Oriented. Each section will be discussed by analyzing three illustrative examples. Non-profit oriented posts primarily focus on promoting an ideology (5.2.2.1) and profit oriented posts primarily promoting services(5.2.2.2).

5.2.2.1 M2 and M3 Generating Engagement to Promote an Ideology

The token count of this case consists of 84 out of 110 texts. In this section, examples which demonstrate the promotion of a concept, an idea, a public service message, or a brand image will be examined. What these texts have in common is that they do not have an M1 function as there is no concrete product/object of sale associated with them. Consequently, these texts also do not aim to generate profit but rather aim to generate engagement to promote a concept. M3 is indicated by being enclosed in double square brackets.

Ex22)PETA 亚洲善待动物组织

绑住这只安哥拉兔的前后腿，一撮一撮拔下**Ta**的毛，做成毛衣，[[这样对待动物是→→错的！]]

Ex 22) PETA Asia Headquarters

After binding both the front and hind legs of Angora Rabbits, they pluck Ta's fur out one by one to make sweaters.[[This treatment of animals is →→ WRONG!]]



Example 22 showcasing a text made by PETA(People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) is an example of an institution writing promotional texts without profit in mind. PETA itself is a well known NGO animal rights advocate agency, meaning that its very nature is non-profit and engagement oriented. PETA aims to improve the lives of animals all over the world that fall victim to trafficking, death, and abuse at the hands of merchants and illegal manufacturing procedures. PETA aims to create awareness and entice people to take a stand for animals, i.e. engage with and conform to their ideologies. This is evident in the text.

Second Rhetorical Move (M2) Ex 22		
Move Number	M2 ^{DESCR}	M2 ^{PERS}
1	<u>绑住这只安哥拉兔的前后腿，</u> <u>After binding both the front and hind</u>	

	<u>legs of Angora Rabbits,</u>	
2	<u>一撮一撮拔下 Ta 的毛,</u> <u>they pluck Ta's fur out one by one</u>	
3	<u>做成毛衣,</u> <u>to make sweaters.</u>	

As seen in the chart above, the second rhetorical move consists solely of objectively descriptive language in M2^{DESCR}. The text outlines how Angora rabbits are stripped of their fur and what this fur is used for. It outlines a story and sets the stage for interlocutors to realize that the topic of this persuasive text is not an object of sale, but a call for action. This text operates on the appeal to emotion and arousal. The arousal is aimed at creating a sense of justice-seeking duty in the interlocutor through the *ta* phenomenon and the third rhetorical move[[这样对待动物是→→错的!]] “[This treatment of animals is →→ WRONG!]” Traditionally animals are referred to with the inanimate third person ‘it’ pronoun ‘它’, yet the non-standard usage of the *ta* phenomenon makes a striking statement that is in line with the ideologies of PETA: Animals are living, breeding, gendered organisms that deserve the same humane treatment as human beings do. By using the non-standard spelling *ta* PETA is able to build their case that leads to the third move, i.e., their ideology presented in the last line of a declarative sentence, forcefully stripping fur off of animals is WRONG.

Ex23)岡本的官方微博

对于世界而言，你是一个人；[[但是对于某个人，你是 **TA** 的整个世界]]。

Ex23)Gangben Offical Weibo

As far as the world is concerned, you are just one person; [[however, to some person, you are **TA**'s entire world]].



In this example it is clear that **TA** refers to 某个人 *mǒugèrén*“some person”. The gender of this referent will change based on the interpretation of the interlocutor, which is much the same argument as found in Unspecified Gender(Chapter 4section 4.2.1). However, the difference here is that there is a concrete co-textual referent (某个人 *mǒugèrén*)to let readers know what **TA** actually is. As a result, the use of the *ta* phenomenon here is not confined to stimulating a gender specified lover interpretation, but can also be extended to friends and family who care about the interlocutor.

Similar to Example 22, Example 23 demonstrates the promotion of an idea.

Second Rhetorical Move (M2) Ex 23		
Move Number	M2 ^{DESCR}	M2 ^{PERS}
1	<u>对于世界而言，你是一个人；</u> <u>As far as the world is concerned,</u> <u>you are just one person;</u>	
2	<u>[[但是对于某个人，你是 TA 的</u> <u>整个世界。]]</u> <u>[[However, to some person, you are</u> <u>TA's entire world.]]</u>	

As demonstrated in the chart above, M2^{DESCR} is present throughout the text providing a description. This text is a complex sentence, and the second clause contains the *ta* phenomenon. The text starts by explicitly telling the interlocutor their ‘assigned’ place in the grand scheme of things. This plays on both the social and emotional factors by instilling in interlocutors the idea that they are insignificant in the eyes of many. However, the second clause shows the conjunction 但是 *dànshì* “however” indicating contrast. This contrast introduces an opposite claim that despite the possibility of being just one in the world of many, the interlocutor is the most significant in the eyes of a specific person, **TA**. This is the support factor. The *ta* phenomenon here invites interlocutors to reflect on themselves and recall that specific **TA** who may view them in this way. This is the stage of M3, where the interlocutor becomes cognitively and emotionally immersed in the content by thinking of **TA** and their relationship. They are being ‘set-up’ to buy into the ideology. That is, even though one may feel socially and emotionally insignificant, there is always one person who thinks otherwise and this person is 某个人 *mǒugèrén* “some person”. 某个人 *mǒugèrén* “some person” is displayed as giving support to the interlocutor, and the interlocutor receives this support. This is achieved through the usage

of the general ‘you’ transitioning to the specific ‘you’ as the public sphere shifts to the private sphere. This is a typical example of the characteristics of engagement put forth by Smith et al. (2015).

Example 18, shown below, is a fine example of a public announcement from an institution that encourages people to go out and do a specific activity together with *ta*. Here there is a lot of overlap between M2 and M3 due to the fact that the descriptive function itself largely contributes to the public service announcement which must be detailed if interlocutors are to engage. The analysis below will illustrate the overlap of the two categories as well as break down the M2functions.

Ex18) 中国日报

【今晚，一起去看流星雨!】 [[曾经在 20 世纪有过数次精彩表演的天龙座流星雨，10 月 9 日 13 时达到极盛，感兴趣的公众可在 9 日晚至 10 日晨对其进行观测，届时，每小时会有数十颗左右的流星划过夜空。]]<http://t.cn/RyTdC11> 你找到陪你看流星雨的那个 **Ta** 了么?

Ex 18) China Daily

[Go watch the meteor shower together tonight!] [[Previously in the 20th century there have been a number of wonderful Draco Meteor Shower displays. On October 9th at 13:00 we are almost at maximum capacity. Those of the public who are interested can view the meteor shower on October 9th between approximately 10 pm and the early morning hours. When the time comes, about 10 meteors will streak across the night sky every hour.]]<http://t.cn/RyTdC11>Have you found **Ta** who will accompany you to watch the meteor shower?

Second Rhetorical Move (M2) Ex 18		
Move Number	M2 ^{DESCR}	M2 ^{PERS}
1	<p><u>[[曾经在 20 世纪有过数次精彩表演的天龙座流星雨,]]</u></p> <p><u>[[Previously in the 20th century there have been a number of wonderful Draco Meteor Shower displays]]</u></p>	<p><u>【今晚，一起去看流星雨!】</u></p> <p><u>[Go watch the meteor shower together tonight!]</u></p>
2	<p><u>[[10 月 9 日 13 时达到极盛,]]</u></p> <p><u>[[On October 9th at 13:00 we are almost at maximum capacity.]]</u></p>	<p><u>http://t.cn/RyTdC1l</u></p>
3	<p><u>[[感兴趣的公众可在 9 日晚至 10 日晨对其进行观测，届时，每小时会有数十颗左右的流星划过夜空。]]</u></p> <p><u>[[Those of the public who are interested can view the meteor shower on October 9th between approximately 10 pm and the early morning hours. When the time comes, about 10 meteors will streak across the night sky every hour]]</u></p>	<p><u>你找到陪你看流星雨的那个 Ta 了么？</u></p> <p><u>Have you found Ta who will accompany you to watch the meteor shower?</u></p>

Here we see an overlap of the M2^{DESCR} and the M3, as well as the M2^{PERS} containing an interrogative structure with the *ta* phenomenon. This example also shows an engaging URL and an imperative header. The M3 language gives a very objective, factual description which is both

informational and suggestive of advice. These are two key characteristics of public service announcements which are intended to benefit the interlocutor upon reception and help them gain knowledge. The first, second, and third move of M2^{DESCR} are all presenting informative knowledge and providing the interlocutor with satisfaction for the gain factor. The text goes further to ensure that the interlocutor has received their message and intends to engage in the activity of watch the meteor shower by utilizing personalization of the general to specific ‘you’ combined with the *ta* phenomenon in a yes-no interrogative. This is demonstrated in the third move of M2^{PERS}. By asking if the interlocutor has found a partner to watch the meteor shower with, the text is already arousing the interlocutor’s sense of obligation to attend, targeting the emotional arousal factor. As a result, the interlocutor becomes motivated to find Ta to attend the event with.

5.2.2.2 M2 and M3 Generating Engagement to Promote a Service

The number of M2 and M3 texts used to generate engagement and promote a service is 6 out of 110 texts. This section will discuss the *ta*-texts which do not explicitly promote a specific concrete product but rather a service. They aim at engaging interlocutors and persuading them that they need to utilize the service promoted. Many texts in this category are relatively short.

Example 16 demonstrates a text that attempts to persuade interlocutors’ to conform to the ideology that in order to stay eternally beautiful the only way to do so is with the company’s services, i.e. their product. The text attempts to accomplish this by appealing to their emotional and social factors.

Ex16) h2o 水芝澳官方微博

#h2o+芝识堂# 时间或许从来不会真正帮我们解决什么问题，但起码 **ta** 可以考验美丽。

[[能经得住考验的终将成为经典，就像是水芝澳八杯水经典保湿。]]

Ex 16) h2o+ Oasis Official Weibo

#h2o+Zhishitang# Perhaps time will never really help us solve some problems, but at the very least **ta** can test beauty. [[Beauty can have the ability to stand the test of time and become a classic example, just like h2o+ Oasis classic moisturizer.]]



Second Rhetorical Move (M2) Ex 16		
Move Number	M2 ^{DESCR}	M2 ^{PERS}
1	#h2o+芝识堂# #h2o+Zhishitang#	
2		<u>时间或许从来不会真正帮我们解决什么问题，</u> <u>Perhaps time will never really help us solve some problems.</u>
3		<u>但起码 ta 可以考验美丽。</u> <u>but at the very least ta can test beauty.</u>
4		<u>[[能经得住考验的终将成为经典，就像是水芝澳八杯水经典保湿。]]</u> <u>[[Beauty can have the ability to stand the test of time and become a classic example, just like h2o+ Oasis classic moisturizer.]]</u>

This text comes from the company h2o+ Oasis and differs from that of the non-profit oriented texts presented in section 5.2.2.1 in that the M2^{PERS}, which is responsible for persuasion, is more prominent than description. There are many modal verbs in M2^{PERS} such as 会 *huì* “will” and 或许 *huòxǔ* “perhaps”. The second M2^{PERS} indicates uncertainty and when combined with the *ta* phenomenon in the third M2^{PERS} it demonstrates a play on the curiosity factor. The interlocutor’s curiosity is piqued as they wonder what can test beauty due to the non-standard spelling factor. The referent of the *ta* phenomenon here is ‘time’. The third M2^{PERS} plays on this reference using the concept of implied cause and effect: if you use our product, then you can preserve your beauty. The image of beauty, especially for women, is very important in society and thus appeals to the social function of an interlocutor’s engagement. This is further accomplished by the *ta* phenomenon occurring in the declarative sentence that affirms the argument. Additionally the modal verb 能 *néng* “can” in the fourth M2^{PERS} adds to the pragmatic meaning that without the h2o+ Oasis moisturizer, beauty cannot stand the test of time, further convincing interlocutors that this moisturizer is a must have item. The feature is illustrative of the gain appeal.

Ex24)三亚克力婚纱摄影

#克洛伊晨语# 美好的一天开始 ☀️ [[有心爱的 **ta** 在梦想在年纪在就不算辜负了自己]] 😊 #
早安#

Ex 24)Sanya Chloe Wedding Photography

#Early Morning Advice# A beautiful day has begun ☀️ [[Having your beloved **ta**, your dreams, your youth, this cannot be considered a letdown]] 😊 #good morning#



Example 24 is a promotional text for the service of wedding photos, thus a text that is profit oriented. The main interlocutor engagement is dependent on the accompanying images. However, the text will still be briefly discussed in relation to the *ta* phenomenon below.

Second Rhetorical Move (M2) Ex 24		
Move Number	M2 ^{DESCR}	M2 ^{PERS}
1	<p><u>#克洛伊晨语#</u></p> <p><u>#Early morning advice#</u></p>	
2	<p><u>美好的一天开始</u> ☀️</p> <p><u>A beautiful day has begun</u> ☀️</p>	

As can be seen above, the table above shows two instances of M2^{DESCR} –the rhetorical move responsible for objective description. Both M2^{DESCR} are both straightforward statements. However, the language identified as M3, [[有心爱的 **ta** 在梦想在年纪在就不算辜负了自己]]([[Having your beloved **ta**, your dreams, your youth, this cannot be considered a letdown]]), that contains the *ta* phenomenon scaffolds onto the statement 美好的一天开始 (A beautiful day has begun). These two sentences form a Topic-Comment structure which is a unique Chinese sentence structure (Li & Thompson, 1981). “美好的一天开始” (A beautiful day has begun) is the topic while“[[有心爱的 **ta** 在梦想在年纪在就不算辜负了自己]]”([[Having your beloved **ta**, your dreams, your youth, this cannot be considered a letdown]]) is the comment. The function of the comment is to indicate further information about the topic “美好的一天开始” (A beautiful day has begun). The function of the topic, “美好的一天开始” (A beautiful day has begun), is to establish a framework (e.g., the time) for the second clause which is the comment. Following the topic-comment structure are the accompanying images of the photo shoot, which interlocutor’s utilize to satisfy their curiosity. *ta* here refers to a person, in this case contextualized in the pictures as either some one’s wife or husband. The text then proceeds to promote the idea that when *ta* is by your side and you have achieved your dreams in your youth then you should have a fulfilling life. The images indicate that having *ta* by your side as a fulfillment of a dream is through marriage. The photos visually show how the couple in them is very young, happy, and having a good time. The text suggests that if one wishes to fulfill their dreams of marriage with *ta*, then their photo shoot service is an excellent option. By showcasing the product as a result of the service, the company is not only advertising a general ideological message, but also the quality and satisfaction of their service.

Example 25 showcases travel services provided by a travel company. The text here is fairly simple and almost entirely reliant on M3.

Ex 25) 同程旅游

愿在有生之年能够和心爱的人走遍这 62 座城!  [[你最想和心爱的 **ta** 去哪座城?]] 

Ex 25) One Travel

Hope that in your life you can travel to these 62 cities with your beloved person! ❤️ [[Which city do you want to go to most with your beloved *ta*?]] 🤔

In this case the company name, “One Travel”, gives a hint of M2^{DESCR} in that the aim is travel and is combined with images from various cities (not shown here due to space limitation) and the phrase “62 cities”. The M3 function is seen as once again containing the *ta* phenomenon and in the form of an open-ended wh-word question. This text plays, again, on an interlocutor’s emotional value factor and causes curiosity and reflection as well as targets the appeal factor of engaging entertainment. Specifically, the entertainment factor is played upon in the wh-word question [[去哪座城]] “Which city”. This wh-word question motivates interlocutor to view the photographs to see if they can determine which cities are of those promoted 62, and which ones would be suitable to going vacationing to with the *ta* of their personalized association. This interest in selecting the perfect city to take *ta* is a result of their curiosity factor being aroused. If the interlocutor was not curious about the 62 cities, they would not click the images and interact with the post. The effect here is similar to that seen in Example 18 addressed above.

The following table illustrates the distribution of posts in terms of their rhetorical move structures.

Table 7. Structure of *ta*-texts in terms of Rhetorical Moves

	Number of Posts (n)	Number of Posts (%)
M1 and M2	13	11.8
M2 implied M1	7	6.4
M2 and M3 Non-Profit	84	76.4
M2 and M3 Profit	6	5.4
Total	110	100

It can be seen from Table 7 above that the majority of the posts from the institutions (76.4%) which have Rhetorical Move Two and Rhetorical Move Three are non-profit. In other words, 76.4% of the *ta*-texts are a result of institutions attempting to ‘sell themselves’ and their brand image, or to promote an ideology; there is no physically concrete manifestation of what is being marketed.

5.3 Summary

This chapter mainly utilized an adapted version of the rhetorical move analysis proposed by Labrador et al. (2014), originally developed by Swales (1981), to illustrate the structure of the *ta*-texts and how this structure achieves engagement with the readers. The study revealed that the *ta*-texts in the data set are used to achieve two main goals: 1) to promote a concrete product (Section 5.2.1), and 2) to promote a brand product either for profit (Section 5.2.2.2) or non-profit purposes (Section 5.2.2.1).

Qualitatively the study revealed that the *ta* phenomenon is a pragmatic device constructed and utilized by posters to create personalization and enhance engagement. Quantitatively the study showed that the *ta* phenomenon of Unspecified Gender Referents are concentrated in texts where the objective is non-profit oriented promotion of a service or ideology. The study also illustrates that the structure of the *ta* phenomenon when it is a Specified Referent is predominantly those containing Move One.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

This chapter summarizes the findings of this study on the *ta* phenomenon as used by institutions (Section 6.1) and discusses the significance of these findings in terms of engagement and marketing (Section 6.2). This chapter also outlines the implications and short comings of the study as well as future avenues of research (Section 6.2).

6.1 Findings

Non-standard third person pronoun *ta* in Chinese social media is an understudied phenomenon. This study combines the frameworks of discourse analysis, persuasive writing, and advertising to analyze the socio-interactional functions of the non-standard third person pronoun *ta* in Chinese Sina Weibo. The findings of this study are corpus specific.

This study defines the *ta* phenomenon as a non-standard spelling for third person pronouns. As a non-standard spelling, *ta* is a homophonic grapheme due to the fact that it is written in the Roman alphabet, which is used to replace the standard Chinese character script. The foreignness and refreshing properties of the romanized non-standard form draw a reader's attention. The *ta* phenomenon exhibits a semantic shift, which further contributes to its attractive trendiness amongst Internet users and consumers. Due to its plain graphic form *ta* can simultaneously serve as a referent for all three standard forms of the third person singular pronoun *ta*: feminine 她, masculine 他, and neuter 它. This flexible semantic property is a large factor contributing to the status of *ta* as a personalization device used to enhance engagement.

This study has shown that in the corpus, *ta* is used by institutions in advertisements and promotional writings, what the study termed *ta*-texts, to enhance engagement by allowing interlocutors to self-personalize the message content. Due to the absence of gender reference, the *ta* phenomenon is used as an attention seeking device to pique the interlocutors' interest and attention. This pique of interest is a target of the emotional values that the *ta*-texts attempt to

create for the interlocutors, so that they are more inclined to engage with the promotional text and make a purchase.

The study saw that amongst the *ta* phenomenon tokens in the data set of the corpus, 72.59% of token occurrences displayed unspecified gender. In other words, 72.59% of the time institutions utilized the *ta* phenomenon to exploit its gender ambiguous property and engage interlocutors by having them self-personalize the content of the *ta*-text in the data set of the corpus. In the cases where gender is unspecified, *ta* is used in imperative sentences 40.82% of the time and in interrogative sentences 22.45% of the time in the data set of the corpus. When *ta* refers to a specified gender, it is rarely used in interrogatives and imperatives, which are noted as sentence types responsible for evoking high engagement, but often used in declarative sentences within the data set of the corpus.

In terms of the structure of the *ta*-texts, the study found that there are four clear cut environments in which the *ta* phenomenon occurs from the data set: 1) M1 and M2 are explicit, 2) M2 is explicit and M1 is implied, 3) M2 and M3 to promote non-profit content (ideologies, public service announcements etc.), and 4) M2 and M3 to promote profit content (i.e. services).

The study found that in institutional accounts of the data set, 84 out of 110 texts (76.4 %) are designed to promote either an ideology or make a public service announcement. In other words, 76.4 % of *ta*-texts used by institutions in the data set are for the promotion of non-tangible items that do not generate a profit. The percentage of non-tangible item promotion increases when considering the promotion of services, which account for 6 out of 110 texts. As a total of 90 out of 110 texts(81.81%), the *ta* phenomenon can be concluded as primarily used by institutional accounts to enhance engagement by exploiting its semantic ambiguity and role as a pragmatic personalization device in the context of the data set. This being said, the study also uncovered the trend that the *ta* phenomenon in these 90 *ta*-texts is used to personalize either male or female gender more than 85% of the time, in other words more than 77 of these 90 texts are of unspecified gender within the data set.

In addition, this study found that in the data set institutions secondarily use the *ta* phenomenon to advertise for concrete products to generate profit. This is seen in the remaining 20 out of 110

texts in the institutional data set. When promoting a concrete object, the gender referent of *ta*, in most cases the standard neuter *ta* 它, *ta* is specified in three ways: via co-text, via-attached image, and via socio-cultural context. In the first two cases *ta*'s intended referent is a product and is used as a third person pronoun place holder for the neuter 它. In the last case of socio-cultural context, *ta* is often a placeholder for a defined male or female gender that is deduced from the context.

6.2 Significance and Implications of the Study

To my knowledge, this research is the first systematic and empirically based study on the *ta* phenomenon in Chinese social media. It has several contributions. First, this study defines and categorizes *ta* as a non-standard homographeme. Second, this study establishes a corpus of the *ta* phenomenon based on Sina Weibo which can benefit other studies of Chinese Internet language. The study systematically examined the interactional functions of *ta* in Chinese social media, and discovered a new rhetorical move structure that is distinct from previously established models.

The *ta* phenomenon in itself is a complex language structure that requires more in depth investigation into other aspects of its structure and usage. Due to limitations of space and the research scope, the current study was unable to investigate the syntactic environment in which *ta* occurs, as well as other types of accounts in the corpus. This study hopes to lay a solid foundation for future research into the *ta* phenomenon. My research findings would not only benefit research in the *ta* phenomenon, non-standard spelling, and Chinese Internet language, but also be of interest to scholars in sociology, psychology, and communication studies.

References

Androutsopoulos, J. K. (2013). Online Data Collection. In Mallinson, C., Childs, B., & Van Herk, G. *Data collection in sociolinguistics : Methods and applications* (236-249) New York : Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group

Androutsopoulos, J. K. (2012). 'Greeklish': Transliteration practice and discourse in the context of computer-mediated digraphia. In A. Jaffe, J. Androutsopoulos, M. Sebba& S. Johnson (Eds.), (pp. 359-392). Berlin, Germany: de Gruyter Mouton.

Androutsopoulos, J.K. ,&Beisswenger, M. (2008).Data and methods in computer-mediated discourse analysis [special section]. *LanguageInternet*, 5

Androutsopoulos, J. K. (2006). Introduction: Sociolinguistics and computer-mediated communication. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, (4), 419. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9841.2006.00286.x

Androutsopoulos, J. K. (2000). Non-standard spellings in media texts: The case of german fanzines. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 4(4), 514-533.

Aguirre, E., Mahr, D., Grewal, D., de Ruyter, K., &Wetzels, M. (2015).Unraveling the Personalization Paradox: The Effect of Information Collection and Trust-Building Strategies on Online Advertisement Effectiveness. *Journal Of Retailing*, 91(1), 34-49. doi:10.1016/j.jretai.2014.09.005

Bernritter, S. F., Verlegh, P. W., & Smit, E. G. (2016). Why Nonprofits Are Easier to Endorse on Social Media: The Roles of Warmth and Brand Symbolism. *Journal Of Interactive Marketing (Mergent, Inc.)*, 33 27-42. doi:10.1016/j.intmar.2015.10.002

Biber, D., Connor, U., & Upton, T. A. (2007). *Discourse on the move: using corpus analysis to describe discourse structure*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Pub. Co.

Cai, W. 蔡文兰.,&Lü, S 吕叔湘.,(2012). *现代汉语八百词增订本*”xiandai hanyu babaicizengdingben”[800 Modern Chinese Words].北京“Beijing” [Beijing]: 商务印书馆“shangwuyinshuguan” [Commercial Press].

Chan, C. Ho-yan. (2011). *The Europeanization of modern written Chinese : a case study of the changing third person pronouns in the twentieth century and beyond*. Bern: Peter Lang.

Chen, P. (2011). *A Comparative Study of Xieyin Chinese and English from the Perspective of Cognition* (Master thesis), Central China Normal University.

CNNIC. (2016).第 37 次《中国互联网络发展状况统计报告》 “di 37ci 《zhongguohulianwanglufazhanqingkuangtongjibaogao》 ” [The 37th 30 Statistical Report on Internet Development in China] (<https://cnnic.com.cn/IDR/ReportDownloads/201604/P020160419390562421055.pdf>)

CNNIC Released its 37th Statistical Report on Internet Development in China. (2016, January 27). Retrieved December 12, 2016, from http://cnnic.com.cn/AU/MediaC/rdxw/2016/201601/t20160127_53309.htm

Cook, G. (2001). *The discourse of advertising*. London: Routledge

Davies, E. E. (1987). Eyeplay: On some uses of nonstandard spelling. *Language & Communication*, 7(1), 47-58.

Esser, J. (1999). Medium-Dependent and Medium-Independent Presentation Structures. In U. Carls, P. Lucko (Eds.), *Form, Function and Variation in English* (pp. 247-260). Frankfurt, Germany: Peter Lang.

Esser, J. (2000). Medium-transferability and presentation structure in speech and writing (English). *Journal Of Pragmatics*, 32(10), 1523-1538.

Fang, Z.P. 方珍平. (2005). 网络语汇的构成方式谈略 "Wangluoyuhui de gouchengfangshi tan lue" [The Formation of Internet Vocabulary]. 当代修辞学//修辞学习 "dangdaixiucixue//xiucixuexi" [Contemporary Rhetoric//Rhetoric Studies], 6, 39-40. doi:10.16027/j.cnki.cn31-2043/h.2005.06.012

Fairclough, N. (1989). *Language and power*. London: Longman.

Fong, M. (2000). 'Luck Talk' in celebrating the Chinese New Year. *Journal Of Pragmatics*, 32(2), 219-237.

Fuertes-Olivera, P. A., Velasco-Sacristán, M., Arribas-Baño, A., & Samaniego-Fernández, E. (2001). Persuasion and advertising English: Metadiscourse in slogans and headlines. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 33(8), 1291-1307.

Gao, L. (2006). Language contact and convergence in computer-mediated communication. *World Englishes*, 25(2), 299-308. doi:10.1111/j.0083-2919.2006.00466.x

Goddard, A. (1998) *The Language of Advertising: Written Texts*. London: Routledge.

Habibi, M. R., Laroche, M., & Richard, M. (2016). Testing an extended model of consumer behavior in the context of social media-based brand communities. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 62, 292-302.

Hall, R. A. (1960). A theory of graphemics. *ActaLinguistica*, 8(1), 13-20.

He, X., & Pedraza-Jiménez, R. (2015). Chinese social media strategies: Communication key features from a business perspective. *EPI El Profesional De La Información*, 24(2), 200.

Herring, S. C. (1996). *Computer-mediated Communication : Linguistic, Social, and Cross-cultural Perspectives*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Co

Herring, S.C. (2013). 'Grammar and electronic communication' in C.A.

Chapelle (ed.) *The Encyclopedia of Applied Linguistics*, pp. 2338–46. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Jaffe, A.M. (2000). Introduction : Non-standard orthography and non-standard speech (english). *J.Socioling.(Print)*, 4(4), 497-513.

Jaffe, A.M.(2000). The voices people read : Orthography and the representation of non-standard speech (english). *J.Socioling.(Print)*, 4(4), 561-587.

Jaffe, A. M. (2012). *Orthography as social action : Scripts, spelling, identity and power*. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.

Janoschka, A. (2004). *Web advertising : new forms of communication on the Internet*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Pub.

Koch, P.(1999). “Court Records and Cartoons.Reflections of Spontaneous Dialogue in Early Romance Texts”. In *Historical Dialogue Analysis*, ed. by Andreas H. Jucker, Gerd Fritz, and Franz Lebsanft, 399–429. *Pragmatics & Beyond New Series 66*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Labrador, B., Ramón, N., Alaiz-Moretón, H., &Sanjurjo-González, H. (2014).Rhetorical structure and persuasive language in the subgenre of online advertisements. *English for Specific Purposes*, 34, 38-47.

Landert, D. (2014). *Personalisation in mass media communication: British online news between public and private*. Amsterdam: Benjamins.

Li, C. L. 李春玲 (2009). *谐音手机短信的语篇机制研究 “Xieyinshoujiduanxin de yupianjizhiyanjiu”* [A Study on the Textual Functions of Homophones in SMS] (master's thesis). 湖南师范大学 "hunanshifandaxue" [Hunan Normal University].

Li, C. N., & Thompson, S. A. (1981). *Mandarin Chinese: A Functional Reference Grammar*. Berkeley: U of California P.

- Li, C. N., & Thompson, S. A. (1992). 汉语语法: *Mandarin Chinese-A Functional Reference Grammar*. "Han yuyu fa" [*Mandarin Chinese :A Functional Reference Grammar*]. (黄宣范 Huang Xuan Fan, Trans.) 3 版. 台北市:文鹤出版有限公司 3 ban. *Taipei Shi: Wen he chu ban you xian gong si*. [3rd Edition. Taipei City: Crane Publishing Co., Ltd.].(1981)
- Li, M. 李梅. (2004). 谈网络语言的语词类型、特点及规范 "tan wangluoyuyan de yucileixing, tedianjigui fan" [The Type, Character and Criterion of Words in the Network Language]. *Women's Academy at Shandong*, (3), 48-50. doi:10.3969/j.issn.1008-6838.2004.03.014
- Lin, G. (2002). 网络用语的类型及其特征 "wangluyongyu de leixingjiqitezhen g" [Categorization and Characteristics of Internet language]. *修辞学习 "Xiucixuexi" [Learning Rhetorics]*, 1, 26-27.
- Lin, Y.(2016). Non-standard capitalisation and vocal spelling in intercultural computer-mediated communication. *Corpora*, 11(1), 63-82.
- Liu, B. N. 刘半农 (1920). 她字问题 "taziwenti" [The Issue of the Female Character *ta*]. In F. Liu 刘复著 (Ed.) (1983), *半农杂文第一册 "bannongZawen Di Yi Ce" [Bannong Essay Collection Part I]* (pp. 130–138). Beijing: 北平星云堂书店出版 "beipingXingyuntangShudian" [BeipingXingyuntang Book Store].
- Liu, X. M. 刘晓梅 (2006). 网络语言中的谐音双关 "Wangluoyuyan zhong de xieyinshuangguan" [Homophone Puns in Internet Language]. *语文学刊 (外语教育教学) "yuwenxuekan (waiyujiaoyujiaoxue)" [Journal of Language and Literature Studies]*, (9), 129-131.
- Lyons, J. (1977). *Semantics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mukherjee, J. (2000). Krisis at Kamp Krusty - deviant spellings in popular culture as examples of medium-dependent graphic presentation structures. *AAA: Arbeiten aus Anglistik und Amerikanistik*, (2). 161.

Parodi, G. (2010). *Academic and Professional Discourse Genres in Spanish*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Co.

Ross, C., & Ma, J. Sheng. (2006). *Modern Mandarin Chinese grammar : a practical guide*. London: Routledge.

Rush, S. (1998). The noun phrase in advertising English (English). *Journal Of Pragmatics*, 29(2), 155-171.

Sebba, M. (2012) Introduction. In Jaffe, A., Androutsopoulos, J., Sebba, M., & Johnson, S. *Orthography as social action: Scripts, spelling, identity and power*. (1-19)Berlin, Germany: de Gruyter Mouton

Sebba, M. (2011). *Spelling and society : The culture and politics of orthography around the world* Cambridge ; New York : Cambridge University Press, 2011; 1st pbk. ed.

Shi, M., (2012). *Brand management via China's Sina Weibo: Case studies on Durex and VANCL* (A Capstone Project). Faculty of the American University School of Communication in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements. Retrieved from American University (<https://www.american.edu/soc/communication/upload/Meng-Shi.pdf>)

Shi, S., Chen, Y., & Chow, W. S. (2016). Key values driving continued interaction on brand pages in social media: An examination across genders. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 62, 578-589.

Smith, B. G., & Gallicano, T. D. (2015). Terms of engagement: Analyzing public engagement with organizations through social media. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 53, 82-90.

Spitzmüller, J. (2012) Floating ideologies: Metamorphoses of graphic“Germanness”. In Jaffe, A., Androutsopoulos, J., Sebba, M., & Johnson, S. *Orthography as social action: Scripts, spelling, identity and power*. (255-288)Berlin, Germany: de Gruyter Mouton

- Sovboda, A. (1968). The hierarchy of communicative units and fields as illustrated by English attributive constructions. *Brno Studies in English*, 7, 49-101.
- Sullivan, J. (2012). A tale of two microblogs in China. *Media, Culture & Society*, 34(6), 773-783. doi:10.1177/0163443712448951
- Sun, C. (2006). *Chinese : a linguistic introduction*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Swales, J. (1981). *Aspects of article introductions*. Language Studies Unit, The University of Aston in Birmingham.
- Swales, J. (1990). *Genre analysis : English in academic and research settings*. Cambridge [England]: Cambridge University Press.
- Swales, J. (2004). *Research genres : explorations and applications*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Tang, Q. (2014). *A Study of Chinese Internet Homophones from the Systemic Functional Perspectives*(master's thesis). Retrieved from University of Alberta Education and Research Archive (<https://era.library.ualberta.ca/files/fq977w11w>)
- Wales, K. (1996). *Personal pronouns in present-day English*. Cambridge [England]: Cambridge University Press.
- Wang, C. L. (2000). 人称代词“他”的照应功能研究
“renchengdaici“ta”dezhaoyingongnengyanjiu”[On the anaphoric function of the personal pronoun ta (他)]. *中国语文 “zhongguoyuwen” [Studies of the Chinese Language]*, 3, 228-237.
- Wang, Y. Y.王媛媛. (2010)从“ta”看“他”与“她”“cong “ta” kan “ta” yu “ta” [looking at ta(he) and ta(she) from ta]大众文艺(快活林) “dazhongwenyi (kuaihuolin)”[*Art And Literature For The Masse*] (6), 78.

- Wu, C. (2003). 中国网络语言研究概观“zhongguowanglouwuyanyanjiugaiguan”[A survey of China’s cyber-language study]. *Journal of Social Science of Hunan Normal University*, 32(6), 102-105.
- Yang, C. (2007). Chinese Internet Language: A Sociolinguistic Analysis of Adaptations of the Chinese Writing System. *Language@Internet*, 4(2).
- Yao, Z. (2005). 略论网络语言中的词汇变异现象“Lüelunwangluoyuyanzhong de cihuibianyixianxiang”[A brief discussion of lexical deviations in internet language]. *Journal of Luoyang Normal University* 6, 99-103.
- Yuan, E. J. (2012). Language as Social Practice on the Chinese Internet. In K. St. Amant, & S. Kelsey (Eds.), *Computer-Mediated Communication across Cultures: International Interactions in Online Environments* (pp. 266-281). Hershey, PA: IGI Global. doi:10.4018/978-1-60960-833-0.ch018
- Zhan, X. H. 詹秀华. (2013). 说“TA”. “shou ‘TA’”[Let’s talk about “TA”] *廊坊师范学院学报 (社会科学版)* “Langfangshifanxueyuanxuebao (shehuikexue ban)” [*Journal of Langfang Teachers College(Social Sciences Edition)*], 29(6), 36-38.
- Zhang, B. M. 張寶明.(2007). 她從哪裡來？現代女性指稱的源流考釋 . “tacongnaillai?Xiandainvxingzhicheng de yuanliukaoshi” [Where did ta(female) come from? An explanation of the origin and development of modern female gender referents] *歷史月刊* “lishiyuekan” [*Historical Monthly*] 123.
- Zhang, Y.H. 张云辉(2007). 网络语言的词汇语法特征 “wanglouwuyuan de cihuiyufatezheng”[The Grammatical Features of the Internet Language Lexicon]. *中国语文* “zhongguoyuwen” [*Studies of the Chinese Language*], 6, 531–535.
- Zheng, Q. J. 郑庆君 (2007). “互文”型手机短信及其语篇特征探析“‘Hu wen’ xingshoujiduanxinji qi yupiantezhengtanxi” [A Study of the Intertextual Cell Phone Messages

and Their Texture]. *语言教学与研究* “yuyenjiaoxueyuyanjiu” [*Language Teaching and Linguistic Studies*], 5(82-89).

Zhong, Z. J. 钟之静. (2015). 网络新词汇 ta 的第三人称代词三分法意义的分析.

“Wanglouxincihui ta de di san renchengdaici san fenfayiyi de fenxi”. [Analysis of the three meanings of the third person pronoun new Internet word ta] *湖北科技学院学报*

“*hubeijiaoxuexueyuanxuebao*” [*Journal of Hubei University of Science and Technology*], 35(5), 77-79.

Appendix A: Coding Symbols

TANP	A <i>ta</i> noun phrase
M1	First Rhetorical Move
M2	Second Rhetorical Move
M2 ^{PERS}	Step within the Second Rhetorical Move responsible for persuasion
M2 ^{DESCR}	Step within the Second Rhetorical Move responsible for objective description
M3	Third Rhetorical Move
<u>Text</u>	Single underlined text indicates M1 in the textual analysis
<u><u>Text</u></u>	Double underlined text indicates M2 in the textual analysis
[[Text]]	Double brackets within which text is enclosed indicates M3 in the textual analysis