

Assigning femininity: The use of gendered second- and third-person pronouns in contemporary Chinese

Maari Kansa

Bachelor's Thesis

Chinese Language, Bachelor of Arts

School of Language and Translation Studies

Faculty of Humanities

University of Turku

June 2024

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Kandidaatintutkielma

Humanististen tieteiden kandidaatti, kiinan kieli

Maari Kansa

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Sivumäärä: 26 sivua, 11 liitettä

Tiivistelmä

Tässä kandidaatintutkielmassa perehdytään kirjoitetun kiinan kielen toisen ja kolmannen persoonan pronomien käyttöön ja käyttöön liittyviin asenteihin tilanteissa, joissa viitataan naispuoliseen henkilöön. Sukupuolitettujen persoonapronomien käyttöä ja niiden vuorovaikutusta sukupuoliroolien kanssa ei ole vielä kattavasti kartoitettu, joten tämä tutkielma toimii keskustelun aloittajana ja mahdollisena pohjana tulevalle laajemmalle tutkimukselle. Tutkimuksen tavoitteena on päästä lähemmäs kokonaisvaltaista ymmärrystä kirjoitetun kiinan ja kiinan puhujien sukupuoli-identiteetin vuorovaikutuksesta ja pronomien käytössä tapahtuneista muutoksista. Kerättyjen materiaalien ja muiden alan tutkimusten pohjalta voimme pohtia myös sukupuolitettun kielen merkitystä yleisesti.

Tätä tutkielmaa varten äidinkielliset naispuoliset vastaajat täyttivät internetin kautta kyselyn, tuottivat itse lyhyitä esimerkkitekstejä ja osallistuivat vapaaehtoiseen haastatteluun, josta saatujen tietojen avulla saamme alustavan käsityksen persoonapronomien käyttöön liittyvistä tavoista ja asenteista naisten keskuudessa. Kyselyn, esimerkkitekstien ja haastattelujen pohjalta saatu käsitys persoonapronomien käytöstä osoittaa kiinankielisten nuorten naisten asenteen olevan selkeästi perinteisesti hyväksytyjä sääntöjä rennompi ja progressiivisempi, ja viittaa eroihin käyttötavoissa kiinalaisten ja taiwanilaisten puhujien välillä. Etenkin taiwanilaisten osallistujien keskuudessa sukupuolineutraalien sekä samanaikaisesti maskuliinisten kirjoitusmerkkien “你” (2. persoona) ja “他” (3. persoona) katsotaan sopivan toisen ja kolmannen persoonan pronomineiksi myös silloin, kun niitä käytetään viittaamaan selkeästi naispuolisiin henkilöihin. Haastatteluihin osallistuneet henkilöt kertoivat myös huomanneensa, että epävirallisessa kontekstissa monet tekstin tuottajat “ovat laiskoja” ja välttävät feminiinien pronomien käyttöä, sillä niitä varten kirjoittaja joutuu erikseen valitsemaan oikean kirjoitusmerkin näppäimistön tarjoamista vaihtoehdoista. Nämä löydöt osoittavat nykypäivän kiinankielisten puhujien keskuudessa olevan variaatiota ja selkeitä poikkeamia perinteisiin sääntöihin verrattaessa. Jotta kuva kiinan kielen muutoksista ja sen puhujien näkökulmista tulisi selkeämmäksi, olisi aiheesta tarpeen tehdä tätä tutkielmaa kattavampia jatkotutkimuksia.

Key words: gender pronouns, gender identity, Chinese pronouns, sociolinguistics.

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1 Introduction

Gender expression and gender roles have become hot topics in the political sphere of the 21st century and the everyday lives of regular people. Still, they are not newcomers when it comes to the field of linguistic studies. The relationship between gender and language has been a topic of interest for sociolinguists due to how language has historically reflected societal views on gender and how identities have been portrayed through language (Chan 2002, Moser 1997, Crawford 1995, McConnell-Ginet 1988). Written forms of contemporary Mandarin show clear distinction when speaking of persons of different genders through words referring to specific genders and the use of gendered personal pronouns, and the history of gendered personal pronouns in written Chinese is well documented (Hong 2020, Xiao 2013, Huang 2007, Moser 1997, Farris 1988). However, there appears to be a gap in literature when it comes to exploring the current usage of these pronouns in everyday life, as well as the attitudes surrounding their use. In this research paper, we will be attempting to shed light on contemporary attitudes towards gendered pronouns and the phenomena surrounding their usage. This way, we can examine the interactions between language and societal attitudes towards gender and how the changes happening today are reflected in a specific language. Although gendered words have existed in Chinese languages since ancient times, the development of gendered pronouns has its roots in the 20th century, and it continues to be a topic of discussion among linguists and scholars today.

1.1 On discussing gender

To properly grasp the concepts of gender that are relevant to the topic of this research paper, I will briefly define different dimensions of the concept of “gender.” For this, I will be borrowing from the definitions laid out in *Syntactic and cognitive issues in investigating gendered coreference* by L. Ackerman (2019), and the concept of gender as a community of practice (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 2007, 1992).

From the work of researchers in different fields, Ackerman introduces three main concepts of gender, one of which can be further expanded into three different sub-categories. The main concepts are **grammatical gender**, **conceptual gender**, and **biosocial gender**. Conceptual gender refers to gender conceptualized and applied by an individual to refer to another, and therefore, this term will interact heavily with every other concept. Conceptual gender is one of

the main focuses of my research, along with biosocial gender, which encompasses gender roles, gender expression, and gender identity. The Chinese language has no grammatical gender. Therefore, it is irrelevant to this paper.

Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2007, 1992) explore in depth the phenomena of gender as a community of practice and how gender interacts with other communities of practice. In *Think Practically and Look Locally: Language and Gender as Community-Based Practice* (1992), Eckert and McConnell-Ginet discuss the complexities of gender generalizations and the mutual interaction between an individual's gender and the communities they are members of. Although there can be vast differences between individuals and between cultures, gender should not be disregarded as a unifying community among people. The following quote from page 471 of the same journal article helps to summarise the intersectionality of gender and community: "Gender can be thought of as a sex-based way of experiencing other social attributes such as class, ethnicity, or age [--] To examine gender independently as if it were just "added on" to such other aspects of identity is to miss its significance and force."

As a final note, it ought to be reminded that in accordance with the latest understanding in psychology and biology, gender and sex refer to two different concepts. In this paper, "woman" and "female" refer to the societal constructs of gender roles and gender expression, not physiological phenotypes or biological features.

1.2 History of written Chinese singular and plural third-person pronouns

In spoken Mandarin Chinese, there is only one word for the singular and plural third-person pronouns, "tā" and "tāmen," respectively. For most of the history of written Chinese, pronouns remained gender-neutral as well. This lack of gender-specific pronouns has survived in written forms of Chinese dialects, most often as some variant of classical Chinese 佢 or 伊. However, a distinction is made between male and female genders in modern written Mandarin Chinese.

Classical Chinese uses many different third-person pronouns, but none differentiate between male and female. It was not until the beginning of the 20th century and during the May Fourth Movement that proposed gendered third-person pronouns appeared for written and spoken Mandarin Chinese (Huang, 2009). The most popular contenders for a female third-person pronoun were 伊 and the newly constructed character 她. The consensus eventually landed on

the written form of “she” being the Chinese character 她, and the pronunciation of “tā” standing for all third-person pronouns in spoken Mandarin Chinese.

1.3 The essence and implications of “她”

In its basic essence, 她 is a character created by combining the Chinese character 女 (nǚ), which stands for “female,” and the already existing third-person pronoun 他. With the introduction of gendered pronouns, there were discussions on creating a similar third-person pronoun with a male marker (男+也), but this variant never caught on. The equivalent of “he” remained as the original form of tā, 他. The radical “亻” in 他 is derived from the character 人 (rén), which means “human” or “man”. It is analogous to the English word “man,” which can be used to refer to both female and male-identifying people, as in the terms “mankind” and “manmade.” However, due to the prevalence of patriarchy, the prototype of “man” is indeed a *male* human, and thus the meaning is skewed. The plural form of 他, which is 他們, can likewise be used to refer to a mixed group of people, whereas 她們 would be deemed grammatically incorrect. This phenomenon can be seen as being reflective of the patriarchal nature of Chinese society and language, where “male” is assumed to be the standard to which “female” is an exception. This concept has been explored in depth by Farris in her article *Gender and Grammar in Chinese* (Farris, 1988) and is not unique in the grand scope of languages throughout human societies.

Recently, a handful of attempts to create more gender-inclusive language have been proposed. For example, there has been an emergence of people using the pinyin spelling “ta” or “TA” instead of writing a Chinese character to avoid having to signify any binary gender (Sluchinski 2017). However, this variant is not widely accepted and remains colloquial with sometimes even gimmicky undertones.

1.4 The current understanding of “妳” and why this paper is being written

A similar type of written differentiation made for the female gender can be seen in the written second-person pronoun 妳 used in traditional Chinese script to replace 你 when the referent is a woman. 妳 in Classical Chinese was a variant of 奶 and 孃 (Handian) but was later adapted as a personal pronoun in Taiwan and Hong Kong (Moser 1997). However, unlike 她, there is

close to no reputable literature on 妳 and its significance: it is viewed simply as a character that is used as the second-person pronoun for female referents in Mandarin written with traditional characters.

The appearance of the second-person pronoun 妳 is frequent in communication and serves as a direct example of marked gender in language. Therefore, research on the usage of the pronoun would be beneficial. Research of 妳 might also help to spark conversation around inclusivity in language and the importance people place on the performance of gender in a society of growing acceptance towards deviance from traditional gender norms and binary gender identities.

The research questions that will be explored in this paper are as follows:

1. How strict is the use of 她 when referring to women in written communication, such as texting? Can 他 be used as a gender-neutral pronoun in contemporary Mandarin Chinese?
2. What is the current usage frequency of 妳? What contexts is it most prevalent in?
3. How do native speakers conceive the use of Mandarin Chinese gendered pronouns?
4. What are the differences in opinion between Taiwanese and non-Taiwanese speakers?

2 Methodology

2.1 Research design

This paper aims to provide relatively comprehensive insight into the contemporary use of gendered pronouns (especially 妳) in written Chinese as in-depth as possible within the limited resources and time that is included in the process of composing a bachelor's thesis. Extensive research has been conducted on the history of Chinese characters, referred to as "hanzi" hereafter, for brevity, particularly regarding contemporary personal pronouns in Mandarin Chinese. As such, the focus of this thesis now shifts towards exploring the societal implications and personal attitudes of individuals who speak Chinese, specifically in terms of their daily use of pronouns. In this chapter, I will begin my dissection of the topic by laying out the methodology of my data collection process and explaining in depth how the chosen methods relate to and benefit the overarching goal of this paper. After introducing the methodology and the inevitable limitations and inaccuracies of my research, I will present the preliminary findings in a more comprehensive way. With the assistance of the data that has been collected, I will compare my findings with other sociolinguistic studies on the topic and provide critical discussions in later chapters.

2.2 Data collection methods

For this paper, I decided to adopt a mixed methods approach in my research, emphasizing qualitative research instead of quantitative due to time and resource restrictions. With a topic such as the societal implications of using specific gendered pronouns, it is integral to have both data on some of the usual trends of language use and a more in-depth understanding of the reasonings behind this usage and the individual points of view surrounding the topic. In this chapter, I would like to acknowledge that the findings of this research paper cannot be used as statistical data for large societal trends or as indicative of all opinions within any particular group of people. Rather, these findings are intended to serve as case studies and provide a basis for discussion, as well as potentially encourage further research into contemporary gendered pronouns in written Chinese.

2.3 The composition of the survey

My research was conducted via the means of a general online survey shared among my own associates (N=4) and their own respective groups of associates (N=6), as well as a short online interview where two participants were able to expand upon the answers they gave on the survey. The method of gathering respondents for the online survey in itself creates a certain bias for the received answers due to the limited variety in participants' identities and lived experiences. The survey was mostly distributed among Taiwanese women either currently in university or with an already existing degree between the ages of 18-30, and thus, the discussion around the findings of this paper will be conducted with the fair acknowledgment of the narrow window of data available.

The survey's questions included a short section of demographic information: Native language, gender, age, education language, communication language, and general place of residence. These questions can help explain some of the differences between the linguistic behaviors of participants and are valuable information among the data gathered from this survey that can be used to compare different answers and be linked to broader social phenomena in discussions on this topic.

The following section in the online survey included seven (7) questions with sample texts of varying formalities and genres, to which the participants were encouraged to answer on a scale of 1-5: 1 = natural language, and 5 = odd/incorrect language. Some of the sample texts given were control questions meant to also serve as obstructions from the main goal of the survey, while others were created to examine the effects that unconventional use of gendered pronouns might have on the perceived "correctness" of the language. Unconventional use in this context refers to usage that differs in any form from textbook examples and broadly taught grammatical conventions, i.e., using 他 for distinctly female persons, using 妳 outside of informal communication, and using TA instead of any hanzi. However, many of these questions cannot be blindly trusted to give reliable results since other factors might affect an individual's perception of the use of language, such as subjective opinions and experiences. For example, some people might view overly friendly and informal blog posts as feeling odd based on personal preferences, and language that is too formal among similarly aged people might be marked as odd due to its stiffness. The most reliable sample texts are, therefore, texts

that have rigid forms and conventions, such as formal biographical texts and informative posters (both being examples of some of the sample texts used in the survey).

The third section of the survey comprised six (6) free-form questions where participants were instructed to compose short texts based on given prompts of varying formalities and relationships between the “sender” (the participant composing the piece of text) and the “recipient(s)” (the imaginary character(s) included in the given prompt). This section aimed to gather authentic input from native speakers and analyze their use of gendered pronouns through these produced samples, including the possible outcome of participants avoiding using personal pronouns.

The second to last section of the survey included simple, straightforward questions on the participant’s personal habits of using second- and third-person gendered pronouns and one question where the participant could fill out whether the people they often interact with use the same kinds of pronouns or if there are any differences. These questions were intended to gather data on the overall saturation of different gendered pronouns in written language, and the last question was to complement this information by providing an even larger, although vaguer, glimpse into the day-to-day usage that individuals perceive around them.

The last section of the survey included a question on whether the participants wanted to take part in an online interview and asked them to leave a public social media handle or another way for me to contact them. Every participant had the option to answer the entire questionnaire anonymously, with the only exception being this last question I could use to approach them with further questions about my research and the personal interviews conducted after the questionnaire.

Due to the sensitivity of the subject, privacy was a principal factor in this survey's creation. The limited access and anonymous nature of the survey, however, resulted in a certain vagueness in many of the answers received, as many participants tended not to elaborate on their views. For further reproductions of this type of research, emphasis should be placed on reaching a broader audience to gather more robust data. Conducting more personal interviews would also help improve the findings' accuracy and depth.

2.4 The interview

The method and findings of the interviews conducted to further the understanding of this research topic will be mentioned briefly due to the small number of interviews. The interviews were conducted after receiving the consent of a participant at the end of the online survey discussed in the above paragraphs. The intention behind interviewing willing participants was to elaborate on their answers and opinions and to discuss any societal trends, phenomena, and general opinions that native speakers might have a better insight into compared to someone learning Mandarin Chinese as a foreign language.

Though a small number of interviews might not serve as any addition to quantitative data, they still act as excellent qualitative case studies into the topic and allow for discussing the topic at hand through the experiences and lived knowledge of a native speaker of Chinese.

3 Findings

In this chapter, I will provide a detailed breakdown of my research findings. To help readers comprehend the results presented in this chapter, I will begin by laying out the questions and answers of the online survey before moving on to the interview questions and answers. The next chapter will discuss the relevancy of these findings and further explore how the situation with written Chinese compares to other languages. It will also include a more in-depth discussion on the importance of researching and understanding the use of and attitudes toward gendered language.

3.1 Data presentation

The survey and interview questions were conducted in Mandarin Chinese, so all questions and answers presented here have been translated into English. Efforts have been made to keep the meaning and nuances as close to the original Chinese versions as possible, and explanations and further context will be included when necessary. I have also included some of the original texts and answers directly in the text. In total, ten (10) people took part in the survey, and four (4) people agreed to answer interview questions, of which two (2) completed their interviews.

3.1.1 Section 1 of the survey

The first section of the survey comprised questions mapping out the demographic background of each participant. The first question of this section was “母語,” “Mother tongue,” the most fitting term for “Native language” in this context. All ten respondents chose Mandarin Chinese as their native language. The option was marked as “普通話/國語/華語”. The reason why this option included multiple terms for the same language was to avoid possible confusion or unclarity. Other options for this choice included “Taiwanese Hokkien/Southern Min/Fujianese,” “Hakka,” “Cantonese,” “English,” and “Other,” with the option to write out the correct answer. Due to the young age of all participants, it is unsurprising that Mandarin Chinese is the reported native language for all of them. According to the “2020 Population and Household General Survey, Initial Statistics Summary and Analysis” published by the Directorate General of Budget, Accounting and Statistics of the Republic of China in 2021, the percentage of people aged 14-24 who reported Southern Min as their “current main language” was only 11.4%, which is lower than the national average of 31.7%. The majority

of respondents reported Southern min as their second language, with the national average at 54.3% among those who answered (2021, pg.10).

The second question was about the participants' gender, with, once again, unanimous answers from all ten participants choosing the answer "Woman." It is important to note that while the English language has two different words for "sex" (biological phenotypes, etc.) and for "gender" (societal constructs and presentation, etc.), this differentiation is not made in Chinese; "性別" can be translated as either of the previous words in English. For the answers to this question, the options "Woman," "Man," "Other," and "Prefer not to say" were included, which provided sufficient context for the intended meaning of the question.

The age of the participants continues the trend of homogeneity: Seven of the ten participants chose the age range of "18-25," two participants chose "26-30," and one chose "30-40." The last option not chosen by any of the respondents was the age "40+." The youthfulness of the participants was anticipated in light of the survey methodology employed in the study.

At the fourth question, variation can be spotted in the answers given by the respondents. Six respondents chose Mandarin Chinese as their "Language used in education," while four chose English. The options were the same as the ones for the participant's native language. The next question, "Most often used languages of communication," was answered by writing the answer in a text form with the limitation of at most three languages. This restriction was made to keep the statistics more concise. The answers given by participants were (translated into English): "Mandarin Chinese" 100%, "English" 70%, "Chinese Regional Dialect" 10% (dialect unspecified, written out as "中文方言"), "Korean" 10% (combined percentages here do not equal to 100%. Instead: reported by ten respondents = 100%; one respondent = 10%).

The final question in the first section of the survey asked for the country or region of residence ("經常居住地 (國家或地區)"). The participants answered this question by typing their answers in a text field. The received answers were: "Taiwan" 50%, "China (and the name of a city)" 30%, "Finland and Hubei" 10%, and "France" 10%.

The answers to these questions show that the respondents are relatively young Chinese-speaking women. In some of the following paragraphs, the respondents are split into Taiwanese and non-Taiwanese participants based on their use of traditional/simplified characters and the reported area of residence. The separation of the respondents' answers was

mainly due to the use of different writing systems. Another reason for separating the responses was the difference in policies regarding Chinese language education in Taiwan and Mainland China. This could have led to variation in the participants' pronoun usage.

3.1.2 Section 2 of the survey

Section two included the participants answering questions on their feelings towards the provided sample texts on a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being “Natural language use” (original text: “用語很自然”), 5 being “Odd or incorrect language use” (original text: “用語很奇怪／不對”), and 3 being neither. While filling out the survey, the questions in this section were randomized, but I will be referring to these questions in the order they were originally composed. The original sample texts are attached in the appendix.

The first question included a sample text written in traditional characters of a fictional conversation between an elder sister and a younger sister. The conversation was written in a casual style. For both the second- and third-person pronouns, the generic pronouns 你 and 他 are used despite other indicators for gender, such as the terms for elder and younger sister and the traditionally feminine name of the friend (“婷婷”). Non-Taiwanese deemed the text more natural than not, with an average score of 1.8. The average of Taiwanese participants amounted to 2.0. However, this difference is relatively insignificant, as is clear from Table 1.

Table 1. Answers to sample text 1

Use of language is:	1 Natural	2 Somewhat natural	3 Neutral	4 Somewhat unnatural	5 Unnatural	Average	Total answers (N)
Taiwanese respondents (N)	2 (40.0%)	2 (40.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (20.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2.0	5
Non-Taiwanese respondents (N)	3 (60.0%)	1 (20.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (20.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1.8	5
Total respondents (N)	5	3	0	2	0		10

The second sample text was a biographical description of Marie Curie, presented as a student's homework composition. Much like the above sample, this sample only used the character 他 despite the gender of the person being written about. 70% of all participants rated this sample as either “1” or “2,” deeming the text as very natural/somewhat natural. Three

people chose the neutral option “3”. From Table 2, we see that Taiwanese respondents leaned more towards natural language use in this instance, with an average score of 1.8, while non-Taiwanese, on average, answered with choices closer to the middle with a score of 2.0.

Table 2. Answers to sample text 2

Use of language is:	1 Natural	2 Somewhat natural	3 Neutral	4 Somewhat unnatural	5 Unnatural	Average	Total answers (N)
Taiwanese respondents (N)	2 (40.0%)	2 (40.0%)	1 (20.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1.8	5
Non-Taiwanese respondents (N)	1 (20.0%)	2 (40.0%)	2 (40.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2.2	5
Total respondents (N)	3	4	3	0	0		10

The third sample was another text message between two people, this time between two classmates. One of the classmates is indicated to be male by both the pronoun use and the masculine name chosen for him (“李建國”)¹, while the other one is indicated to be female with the use of feminine pronouns (妳/她). These two fictional characters are indicated as not knowing each other well. The total answers are quite evenly divided among Taiwanese respondents, with only option “3” receiving more than one vote. Two of the non-Taiwanese respondents chose “1,” and three chose “2,” making their average score 1.6, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Answers for sample text 3

Use of language is:	1 Natural	2 Somewhat natural	3 Neutral	4 Somewhat unnatural	5 Unnatural	Average	Total answers (N)
Taiwanese respondents (N)	1 (20.0%)	1 (20.0%)	2 (40.0%)	1 (20.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2.6	5
Non-Taiwanese respondents (N)	2 (40.0%)	3 (60.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1.6	5
Total respondents (N)	3	4	2	1	0		10

¹ During the writing of the third sample text, I was not made aware that the name 建國 is most common among older men. Therefore, this name choice might have influenced the answers given.

The fourth sample text is an excerpt from an imaginary report on Taiwanese employment, written in a formal style. This text was meant to act as a filler task in the survey but will be briefly mentioned since it surprisingly divided the respondents' opinions despite being intended as neutral text. In total, three participants chose the option "3" (10%) or "4" (20%).

The fifth sample text included an excerpt from an imaginary blog post written in a colloquial style. The pronouns used in this text were all replaced by "TA" (no hanzi). A majority of the respondents chose the option "4" (60%), describing the text as somewhat odd/incorrect. Of these answers, every Taiwanese respondent chose the answer "4," while non-Taiwanese people preferred the answer "3." The mostly negative judgment seen in Table 4 is most likely because the pronoun "TA" is not used in Taiwan since it is written using the Pinyin romanization system, while Taiwan uses a system called "Zhuyin" or "Bopomofo" (with which "tā" would be written as "ㄊㄚ"). It can also appear strange when referring to clearly gendered referents, such as "mother" and "father."

Table 4. Answers to sample text 5

Use of language is:	1 Natural	2 Somewhat natural	3 Neutral	4 Somewhat unnatural	5 Unnatural	Average	Total answers (N)
Taiwanese respondents (N)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	5 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	4.0	5
Non-Taiwanese respondents (N)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (80.0%)	1 (20.0%)	0 (0.0%)	3.2	5
Total respondents (N)	0	0	4	6	0		10

The final sample text was a real-life example of text on a poster spotted in the Taipei metro system in 2023. The original text is provided directly below:

捷運上貼著一張海報：

「拒絕性騷擾：當你（妳）遭遇或發現性騷擾時，勇敢說不迅速報案！」

Translation:

“There is a poster in the metro:

「 Refuse sexual harassment: In the case where you_[m./n.]² (you_[f.])³ encounter or notice sexual harassment, bravely say no and promptly report [it]! 」”.

An overwhelming majority of the Taiwanese respondents chose the option “1,” while some non-Taiwanese respondents even deemed the text odd/incorrect, as is seen in Table 5.

Table 5. Answers to sample text 6

Use of language is:	1 Natural	2 Somewhat natural	3 Neutral	4 Somewhat unnatural	5 Unnatural	Average	Total answers (N)
Taiwanese respondents (N)	4 (80.0%)	1 (20.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1.2	5
Non-Taiwanese respondents (N)	1 (20,0%)	2 (40,0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (20.0%)	1 (0.0%)	2.8	5
Total respondents (N)	5	3	0	1	1		10

3.1.3 Section 3 of the survey

In section three, I asked the participants to write short texts based on simple prompts provided in each question, describing the situation in which the respondents ought to imagine themselves. This section was created to gather authentic text composed by native speakers of Mandarin Chinese. The fictional people included in the prompts were implied to be women through names and terms such as “aunt.” The original texts are included in the appendices.

The first prompt asked the respondents to write a thank-you letter/message to their very close aunt, who had recently given them a gift. The answers to this prompt included various registers, ranging from humble, down-up hierarchical communication to extremely informal.

² “[m./n.]” = masculine/neutral pronoun; 你/他.

³ “[f.]” = feminine pronoun; 妳/她.

All possible second-person pronouns were used. Two Taiwanese respondents used 妳, two used 你, and one used the polite pronoun 您. Two non-Taiwanese participants only referred to the aunt by “aunt.”

Table 6. Answers to prompt 1

Second-person pronouns are marked in **bold>. The English translation is provided in the appendixes.**

Resp. ⁴ number	Answers by Taiwanese respondents	Resp. number	Answers by non-Taiwanese respondents
1	阿姨： 收到 您 的巧克力了，非常感謝！ 我和妹妹都非常喜歡❤️	6	阿姨 您 好， 您 寄给我的德式巧克力我收到了，真的非常美味！包装也很精致，非常感谢 您 的礼物。
2	阿姨我收到巧克力了!!! 謝謝 你 😘😘 真的好好吃欸 (感謝的貼圖)	7	谢谢阿姨的巧克力，我很喜欢！
3	阿姨～謝謝 你 送的德式巧克力！我吃的很開心，家人們也都說很好吃！愛你	8	阿姨： 我上周已经收到 你 寄给我的巧克力，非常好吃，我很喜欢！谢谢 你 总是给我寄好吃的东西，让我感到非常幸福。注意身体，想你哦！
4	謝謝阿姨給我的巧克力！ 下次我出去玩也準備伴手禮給 妳 ！	9	谢谢阿姨的巧克力，爱吃！
5	阿姨～～我收到上次 妳 寄給我的巧克力了，超好吃的！感謝阿姨😊	10	巧克力很好吃！谢谢阿姨！

The second prompt asked the respondents to invite their fictional friend, “Meiling (美玲),” to a café after hearing the news that she is pregnant. The messages created by respondents were mostly written in an informal register. Three of the five Taiwanese answers included the pronoun “妳,” and two included “你.” A noteworthy mention is that more respondents used

⁴ Resp. = Respondent

the pronoun “妳” here than in the previous one. Respondent 2, who used the female-specific “妳” in this prompt, had used “你” in the previous one.

In the third prompt, the respondents were prompted to create a short dialogue between two people. The setting included three friends Little Lin (“小林”, a diminutive form of a common last name), Yijun (“怡君,” a traditionally feminine name), and Yating “雅婷,” also a traditionally feminine name) planning a party together, but on the day of the party, a ghost steals Little Lin’s plates and cups. The texts were written in the style of informal dialogue manuscripts. This unusual setting for the dialogue was created to simulate the creative writing process. All answers to this prompt used 你 as the only second-person pronoun within the dialogue.

The fourth prompt asked the respondents to assume the role of a literature teacher and respond to an e-mail from their “student,” Chen Shufen (“陳淑芬,” a traditionally feminine name). All of the texts were written in a relatively formal register, in a top-down hierarchy. Two out of five Taiwanese respondents used “妳” to address the student, one used “你,” and one abstained from using a personal pronoun. Two of the five non-Taiwanese people used no pronouns, and the rest used “你” (3/5).

The fifth prompt asked the respondents to compose an e-mail for their new co-worker who has left trash under their table at a company where they have recently started working. The co-worker’s name is again traditionally feminine, Tang Meihua (“唐美華”). The texts were composed in a formal register (writer as a hierarchical inferior), but some retained very clear colloquial characteristics (writer and reader as hierarchical equals). Taiwanese respondents used all the possible second-person pronouns in their texts; “您” appeared in two of the gathered samples, “妳” in two, and “你” in one. Among non-Taiwanese, four out of five used “你” and one did not use any second-person pronoun.

From Table 6 and Table 7 we can observe the the total usage frequencies observed among respondents. The tables are separated based on the writing system used by the respondents, which is highly linked to their place of residence. For convenience and coherence, the groups are labeled as “Taiwanese” and “non-Taiwanese.”

Table 6. Total pronoun frequencies per Taiwanese participant in survey section 3

	(N = composed texts including the pronoun)			
	你 (m./n.)	妳 (f.)	您 (cour.) ⁵	No pronoun
Participant 1	2	0	2	1
Participant 2	3	2	0	0
Participant 3	4	0	1	0
Participant 4	1	4	0	0
Participant 5	0	4	0	1
Total frequency	10	10	3	2

Table 7. Total pronoun frequencies per non-Taiwanese participant in survey section 3

	(N = composed texts including the pronoun)			
	你 (m./n.)	妳 (f.)	您 (cour.)	No pronoun
Participant 6	4	0	1	0
Participant 7	4	0	0	1
Participant 8	5	0	0	0
Participant 9	2	0	0	3
Participant 10	0	0	0	5
Total frequency	15	0	1	9

3.1.4 Section 4 of the survey

Section four presented the respondents with straightforward questions regarding the use of second and third-person personal pronouns relevant to their lives. All of the questions were multiple-choice questions, and the respondents could choose more than one answer.

The first question was written out as “The second-person pronouns I use” (original text: “我使用的第二人稱代名詞,” (“I/我” refers to the respondent) and included an instruction to choose every fitting option (original text: “請選所有的合適的選擇”). On the next question about the participants’ use of third-person pronouns, all non-Taiwanese respondents reported using “TA” or “ta.”

⁵“(cour.)” = courteous

Table 7. Answers to question 1 of survey section 4

	Answers from Taiwanese (N)	Answers from Non- Taiwanese (N)	Total answers (N)
你 (m./n.)	4 (80.0%)	5 (100.0%)	9
妳 (f.)	5 (100.0%)	0 (40.0%)	5
您 (cour.)	4 (80.0%)	2 (40.0%)	6
Total answers (N)	13	7	20

Table 8. Answers to question 2 of survey section 4

	Answers from Taiwanese (N)	Answers from Non- Taiwanese (N)	Total answers (N)
他 (m./n.)	4 (80.0%)	3 (60.0%)	7
她 (f.)	5 (100.0%)	3 (60.0%)	8
TA 或 ta (n.)	0 (0.0%)	5 (40.0%)	5
Total answers (N)	9	11	20

As seen above in the two questions and their results, some respondents only chose the feminine pronoun options (or only the gender-neutral “TA” in the question on third-person pronouns), which might not actually be indicative of their personal usage habits but instead be the result of unclear instructions or misunderstandings of the wording of the question, since it could also be interpreted to mean which pronoun the respondent themselves identifies with, i.e., their preferred pronouns. A better wording for this question would have been, for example, “The pronouns I use when writing,” to eliminate the chance of misunderstanding.

For the third question of this section, the respondents evaluated whether the people they know have the same usage habits as they do. If they answered “No,” the participants were prompted to fill out a short explanation of the different habits they have observed. The answers to this

question cannot be extrapolated as raw data since the answers are heavily subjective due to being simply personal evaluations from the participants of the survey. This question was meant to give a simple overview of the situation from the point of view of the respondents.

Of the Taiwanese respondents, a majority reported that the people they know use the same pronouns they answered with. One person expanded upon their choice of “No”: “Usually everyone uses 你/他” (original text: “通常大家都用你/他”).

3.1.5 The interviews

Four of the ten participants (three Taiwanese and one non-Taiwanese) agreed to an interview and answer supplementary questions. Two people participated in the short interview in time.

The interviews were conducted in Chinese, so the questions and portions of the answers will be translated into English, and some additional context will be provided if necessary. The questions and results were as follows:

1. “What is your understanding of the history of the two hanzi 你 and 她?”

Neither of the participants knew the history of the hanzi and were, therefore, asked to assume the origins based on their prior knowledge. The assumptions provided by interviewees were that the hanzi gradually developed from pictographic characters or that they were similar to other hanzi that have had the radical for woman, “女” and simply exist to differentiate men and women. The interviewees did not expect the hanzi to be only recently developed.

2. “In your opinion, what are the advantages of using gendered personal pronouns? Are there any drawbacks?”

Both interviewees reported that the advantage they can think of is that you can quickly convey the gender of the referent using pronouns, but they did not mention other advantages. On the drawbacks of gendered pronouns, one of the interviewees mentioned that it is difficult to properly describe and categorize sex and gender with the currently existing pronouns (Original: “無法準確分班是在描述其生理性別還是心理性別”) Having to differentiate between male and female personal pronouns was also described as “inconvenient” (麻煩).

3. “Have you noticed any interesting phenomena regarding the usage of gendered personal pronouns?”

The interviewees both mentioned seeing people use only 你 and 他 for all genders for the sake of convenience. One interviewee also mentioned that there is no context where 她 is necessary, and it is not incorrect to use 你 and 他 for all genders.

4. “In your opinion, what is the relationship between “妳”/“她” and gender identity, gender expression [and/or] gender roles? (Positives, negatives, gender equality, etc.)”

For this question, I wish to include a longer quote from one of the interviewees:

“I believe that [gender/sex] is fluid. Since there is no way to describe the sex or gender of the other party accurately, then frankly, there is no need to use pronouns to differentiate men and women. Because in these times, men and women are encouraged to be able to freely pursue [their] personal dreams, differentiating gender is less and less important. The important [thing] is what this individual likes, what [they] believe to be important, and not their gender.”

The other interviewee mentioned that 他 has a feeling of gender equality because it does not have any inherent markers of gender. This interviewee also brought up the pronoun “TA” used in China. However, because it was written in pinyin (a transliteration system for Chinese) and not Zhuyin (the system used in Taiwan), she mentioned that it could not realistically be used in the Taiwanese context. Therefore, the pronoun 他 is most suitable for non-binary usage.

4 Discussion

4.1 Key findings

According to the answers provided by the survey participants and the interviews, the usage of gendered personal pronouns for women in contemporary Mandarin Chinese is not always strictly tied to grammatical rules. Within the answers to the research survey, Taiwanese respondents held a relatively accepting view of the use of 他 when referring to women, and the constant use of 妳 was even seen as unusual when done by a writer assumed male. This hints at a clear understanding of the link between blatantly gendered pronouns and rigid assumptions of gender roles, as the use of them evokes the feeling of emphasizing and assuming aspects of the reader's gender in a way that the use of 你 does not.

Noticeable variations can be spotted in pronoun usage between different language users depending on their experiences and beliefs. Among five Taiwanese participants, three individuals used 妳 at least once in their composed texts, and two of these three used 妳 in all but one text. The rule of using the pronouns 妳 and 她 when referring to women is not as strict as, for example, using “she” in the English language, and the female-specific personal pronouns can be replaced with 你 and 他 in most contexts without the text being deemed incorrect. The data and answers provided in the interviews seem to point toward the pronouns 你 and 他 being accepted as gender-neutral among young adults in Taiwan. As noted by the interviewees, many people opt to only use the hanzi “你” and “他” due to the convenience of not choosing the right hanzi according to the referent's gender. Non-Taiwanese respondents held a slightly more rigid view of second and third-person pronouns and favored using “TA” for gender-neutral purposes.

It can also be inferred that 妳 seems to be reserved primarily for casual situations among already familiar people when women use it. However, it frequently appears in movie subtitles, songs, books, and advertisements. The intimate semantic valence of this pronoun appears to be ignored when the text is produced to be publicly consumed instead of privately viewed by a specific receiver. This could be indicative of a shift in attitudes among Taiwanese women. Highlighting the gender of the referent might seem unnecessary when it is not relevant to the conversation, especially when taking into account the fluidity of sex and gender.

4.2 Revisiting the research questions

After going through the key findings, we have arrived at our answers to the research questions presented at the beginning of this paper:

1. How strict is the use of 她 when referring to women in written communication, such as texting? Can 他 be used as a gender-neutral pronoun in contemporary Mandarin Chinese?

In many cases, it is acceptable to use 他 as a gender-neutral pronoun when referring to a woman. However, depending on the context, it might appear strange to native speakers, and 她 is undeniably the most common pronoun used for women. The more severed the text is from interpersonal communication and the more general it is, the more likely it is for 他 to be accepted as a fitting third-person pronoun. In casual conversations, the acceptance of 他 as gender-neutral depends on previous experiences with this usage behavior.

2. What is the current usage frequency of 妳? What contexts is it most prevalent in?

In interpersonal communication, the usage patterns of 妳 are mainly based on personal preferences. In a group of five Taiwanese women, 妳 was used by three in at least one composed text, although every group member reported using the pronoun. Two of the three users included 妳 in all but one composed text, regardless of the relationship between the writer and the reader.

According to the survey findings, 妳 is deemed most appropriate in conversations between close female friends of roughly the same age. Among young Taiwanese women, the view of 妳 is relatively intimate, unlike the more neutral view towards 她. This could be due to the relative recency of the hanzi.

In a broader context, 妳 is frequent in factual and fictive texts directed at a relatively broad and indirect audience (outside of the immediate social network of the writer), used to refer to any female persons of any status. This referent can be either the reader (in infomercials, ads) or a referent within the text itself (in songs, movies).

3. How do native speakers conceive the use of Mandarin Chinese gendered pronouns?

According to the survey data and the answers to the interview questions, Chinese-speaking young adult/adult women (age 18-40) do not have a rigid view on second and third-person gendered pronouns and do not always follow the conventional, expected use of said pronouns. Among this group of people, there are also acknowledgments of the inconvenience of properly encompassing the fluid nature of gender with pronouns tied to two binary genders.

4. What are the differences in opinion between Taiwanese and non-Taiwanese speakers?

One central point of interest is the preconceived notion among non-Taiwanese women that the use of 妳 is similar to 她 when Taiwanese women seem to have a more complex view of the pronoun. There is also a difference in novel gender-neutral pronouns: “TA” is not used at all in Taiwan, while non-Taiwanese respondents reported surprisingly frequent use of the pronoun. When asked about the case of non-binary gender expression, Taiwanese interviewees speculated that the most common resolution is to use 你 and 他.

4.3 Interaction with other research and new contributions

Much of the pre-existing research treats the gender distinction between 他 and 她 in written Chinese as an objective truth. At the same time, the gender-neutrality of the Chinese third-person pronoun is only considered possible in spoken language. Two contexts in which the hanzi 他 is often mentioned as serving a gender-neutral role are when it is used as a plural (他們) to refer to a mixed group or when the referent is generic or of unknown gender (Hong, 2020; Moser, 1997). One of the only mentions in English research about the use of 妳 comes from *Covert Sexism in Mandarin Chinese*, a paper written for *Sino-Platonic Papers* in 1997 by David Moser, in which he states that the pronoun has appeared in areas that use traditional characters, expanding the already existing gender inequality spawned by the creation of 她. These statements are deemed to be technically accurate, especially in the grand scheme of all Mandarin Chinese speakers. However, the assumed universality of these usage patterns highlights a clear research gap in contemporary personal pronoun usage among younger generations and different minorities. The results of my study seem to challenge the prevailing ideology of gendered pronoun usage in Mandarin Chinese, as the respondents/interviewees seemed to hold a relatively lax approach to the use of gendered personal pronouns about women. The existing research is also heavily focused on pronoun usage in China, leaving the

use of written personal pronouns in Taiwan as only a brief mention at the side of the discussion. This shows a clear research gap that this paper attempts to begin to fill partially.

In order to stay within the similar (but not identical) cultural sphere of East-Asian countries, it could be beneficial to compare the gendered pronoun use of Taiwanese Mandarin Chinese and the Japanese language. Both Mandarin Chinese and Japanese implemented more strict gendering rules into the pronoun usages of their respective languages relatively late in the early twentieth century after significant exposure to the English language. So they are comparable in that aspect as well. In modern Japanese, “he” is written as “彼,” which literally translates to “that (person),” and “she” is “彼女,” which translates to “that woman.” However, direct personal pronouns are often avoided and replaced by names, titles, or neutral terms such as “this person” or “that person,” especially when the speaker has a lower hierarchical status or the relationship between the speaker and the referent is not particularly close; These gendered third-person pronouns are most prominent in translation purposes and when it is necessary to convey a specific meaning or feeling (Yamada, 1993). Similarly, Chinese speakers avoid direct personal pronouns when conveying a polite register in their text. At the same time, in English, this type of avoidance would sound strange to native speakers. Chinese, however, does use pronouns much more frequently. Thus, the problem of needing to gender the referents is more relevant than it is in the context of Japanese, where “that person” is a valid form of referring to people of any gender (1993).

If we aim to scrutinize the utilization of pronouns in the context of regular gender expression in another East-Asian nation, an area of focus could be the association between the non-conventional use of second- and third-person pronouns by young Taiwanese females and the employment of first-person pronouns by young Japanese females. This comparison could provide insights into the linguistic and cultural nuances of these two societies and could potentially contribute to a deeper understanding of gender expression in East Asia. In a study published in 2004, among the reported 17 schoolgirls, a majority of them used first-person pronouns that are generally thought to be used by men/boys instead of the expected feminine pronouns (Miyazaki, 2004). Similarly, the people I interviewed for this research paper reported their friends using 你 and 他 for everyone, even though this could be viewed as “incorrect” based on the general rules of Chinese gendered personal pronouns. On par with this, the Japanese first-person pronoun 自分 (“jibun”), which was in the past used exclusively

by men in the military and by pro-wrestlers (Kigawa, 2011), has now become increasingly a neutral pronoun used by all genders due to the original meaning of “oneself” with no semantic reference to masculinity. Perhaps in the future, the same type of change could happen to some of the Chinese personal pronouns since they also lack any solid connection to masculinity or maleness. The lack of gendered restrictions on an individual’s use of language helps to advance gender equality with the blurring of strict gender roles enforced by language and with the increased individual freedom of choosing a fitting style of expressing oneself without having to fit into predetermined categories.

On the topic of gender identities and minorities, as discussed in the interviews conducted for this research paper, we ought to look at the relationship between gendered personal pronouns and sexual and gender minorities and why the inclusive use of pronouns matters. In an article published in 2021 in the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, researchers found that including pronouns in an employee’s biography increased the sense of security among people of sexual and gender minorities (India et al. 2011). In the interviews I conducted, one of the interviewees pointed out the inconvenience and limitations of having binary gendered personal pronouns that are unable to express the range of sex and gender properly. Gender and sex are both highly complex constructs, and therefore, gender-inclusive language, discourse around the reinforcement of gender binaries via the use of limiting personal pronouns, and the development of gender-neutral ways of addressing people are crucial to the well-being and sense of security of minorities and should be researched not only in English-speaking societies but also in places such as China and Taiwan.

Overall, the findings of this paper point to the existence of unexplored differences in the real-life use of language and the generally accepted “proper” way of writing Mandarin Chinese. The results show a possible shift in how younger generations view gender and gender roles. Marking gender in written communication is not an essential part of communication, and there is increasing acceptance of unconventional language usage regarding personal pronouns. Individual preferences and expressions are increasingly frequent, and the pressure to fit into pre-existing roles and categories is slowly diminishing.

5 Conclusion

5.1 Summary of the findings

Below, I have listed the most important contributions of this paper to the understanding of the contemporary use of Mandarin Chinese second- and third-person pronouns about women:

- 妳 is used most often between two women who know each other well, and its use depends more on personal habits than on any set rules
- 她 is used in all contexts and has been solidified in written Mandarin Chinese more firmly than 妳
- Avoiding the use of 妳 and/or 她 in casual conversations between people who share a close relationship can seem unnatural to native speakers. However, it is not deemed strictly incorrect when used in a broader context, such as when referring to public figures, etc.
 - However, when the writers are implied not to have a close relationship, the insistence on using feminine pronouns can also seem unusual, especially in the context of an unfamiliar man referring to a woman.
- Respondents who used simplified characters assumed the pronoun 妳 to be more unilaterally used than it is, according to the Taiwanese respondents.
- The unisex use of 他 seems to be more generally accepted among Taiwanese Mandarin Chinese speakers than among non-Taiwanese
- The unisex pronoun “TA” is not used in Taiwan. For cases where the writer wishes to leave out the gender of an individual or refer to a referent of non-binary genders, 他 is suggested.

5.2 Reflection, limitations, and future avenues

Gendered pronouns play a large part in expressing gender roles and expectations and might cause individuals to feel limited or uncomfortable when they are used outside of their comfort zone. Much of the personal pronoun usage we explored in this paper reflected the notion of increasing understanding of the complexity of gender and of the shift towards the development of more inclusive language that does not make readers feel like they are being conceived primarily through their gender, especially in the eyes of non-familiar people.

The issue of gender-inclusive language is only briefly touched on in this research paper, and thus, more in-depth research could be done into the use of pronouns within LGBTQ+ communities in Taiwan. This research paper also focused heavily on the use of personal pronouns about women, so the opinions and pronoun usage patterns of men ought to also be included in future research into the field of Mandarin Chinese gender pronouns. The Japanese research into gender and personal pronouns mentioned earlier offers some indication of what could be done with research regarding the use of Chinese gender pronouns: More field work and more research into the usage habits of interpersonal conversations. I have found interviews to offer the most in-depth answers and are useful in understanding the complexity of the interaction between language and gender.

There are two important paths to take in the future: quantitative and qualitative data on the limitations and possibilities of personal pronouns in Mandarin Chinese and their significance for the quality of life of minorities.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Survey section 2 sample figure 1

姐姐和妹妹的訊息：

你吃了沒有？我去買豆花 你也要嗎

當然 😍

綠豆豆花o不ok？

哈哈 ok啦～ 姐姐給你買個綠豆豆花 😊

婷婷呢？他已經回家了嗎？

沒有 😊 但他說你不用花錢給他買豆花ㄟ
他冰箱裡有太多東西了 所以一回家就要做飯

【1=用語很自然——5=用語很奇怪/不對】

Appendix 2: Survey section 2 sample text 2

一個學生寫的作文：

「瑪麗亞·斯克沃多夫斯卡·居里

瑪麗亞居里是波蘭裔法國籍物理學家、化學家、放射性研究的先驅者、且巴黎大學第一位女教授。他是首位獲得諾貝爾獎的女性。瑪麗亞生於華沙，在波蘭生活至 24 歲，1891 年追隨姊姊至巴黎讀書。1903 年……」

【1=用語很自然——5=用語很奇怪/不對】

Appendix 3: Survey section 2 sample figure 3

兩個同學們的訊息：

妳好！我是綜合英文課的李建國，坐在妳的旁邊。何師姐把我編在妳和賴美真的小組了，所以我想問妳們什麼時候要開始做PPT？妳們組有LINE群組嗎？

建國同學你好，歡迎加入第三組！我們就有一個群組，下班以後我可以邀請你囉😊 大家一起努力吧～

【1=用語很自然——5=用語很奇怪/不對】

Appendix 4: Survey section 2 sample text 4

就業情況報告：

「在薪資發展上，台灣經常性薪資（每月的：包括本薪、固定津貼、獎金）已超 4.5 萬臺幣，最低工資約為 3 萬臺幣。2000 年經常性薪資約為 3.5 萬臺幣；2000 年至 2023 年，台灣經常性薪資上升了 34%。各個工業之中，製造業最熱門，批發業次之。截至 2022 年，製造業受雇員工比例約為 26%，批發業約為 16%。於 2023 年製造業的經常性薪資為 43 千臺幣，約高於國均 3 千臺幣。」

【1=用語很自然——5=用語很奇怪/不對】

Appendix 5: Survey section 2 sample text 5

一個博客上的故事：

「我一直說我是個丟三落四的人；上周有人問我有沒有什麼有趣的例子可以跟你們大家分享一下。

其實例子真的太多了 (o;TωT)o

比如：上個月，我家人都一起去倫敦旅行。我們先在一家豪華的餐廳吃飯，再去逛逛倫敦自然博物館……

坐車的時候，我們全家一邊聽音樂一邊講話，所以我沒想到應該告訴好友那天的故事。當在加油站的外面停下來時，我才發覺一個短信也還沒傳送。我伸手拿口袋裏的手機的時候，卻只抓到了空氣。我的心臟快從胸中逃跑出去了！我馬上告訴媽媽我的手機丟了，並拜托爸爸把車開回到博物館去找一找手機。但父母說我們已經離博物館太遠了。媽媽拿者 TA 自己的手機，給博物館打了電話，問 TA 們有沒有看見了一個淺橙色的手機……

……然後媽媽說：“博物館的人員找到了你的手機啊。TA 們把手機拿到諮詢臺了”。原來博物館人員救了我手機的命。此外，媽媽的一個熟人原來正好也去倫敦旅行，可以給我我的手機。」

【1=用語很自然——5=用語很奇怪/不對】

Appendix 6: Survey section 2 sample text 6

捷運上貼著一張海報：

「拒絕性騷擾：當你（妳）遭遇或發現性騷擾時，勇敢說不迅速報案！」

【1=用語很自然——5=用語很奇怪/不對】

Appendix 7: Survey section 3 prompt 1 original text

你和你的阿姨的關係非常好。上個星期阿姨給你寄出了一盒德式巧克力，請寫封信感謝阿姨：

Resp. number	Answers by Taiwanese respondents	Resp. number	Answers by non-Taiwanese respondents
1	阿姨： 收到您的巧克力了，非常感謝！ 我和妹妹都非常喜歡❤️	6	阿姨您好，您寄给我的德式巧克力我收到了，真的非常美味！包装也很精致，非常感谢您的礼物。
2	阿姨我收到巧克力了!!! 謝謝你😘😘 真的好好吃欸 (感謝的貼圖)	7	谢谢阿姨的巧克力，我很喜欢！
3	阿姨～謝謝你送的德式巧克力！我吃的很開心，家人們也都說很好吃！愛你	8	阿姨： 我上周已经收到你寄给我的巧克力，非常好吃，我很喜欢！谢谢你总是给我寄好吃的东西，让我感到非常幸福。注意身体，想你哦！
4	謝謝阿姨給我的巧克力！ 下次我出去玩也準備伴手禮給妳！	9	谢谢阿姨的巧克力，爱吃！
5	阿姨～～我收到上次妳寄給我的巧克力了，超好吃的！感謝阿姨😊	10	巧克力很好吃！谢谢阿姨！

Appendix 8: Survey section 3 prompt 1 English translation

You_[m./n.]⁶ and your aunt have a great relationship. Last week [she] sent you a box of German chocolate, please write a letter [to] thank [your] aunt:

Resp. number	Answers by Taiwanese respondents	Resp. number	Answers by non-Taiwanese respondents
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⁶ “[m./n.]” = masculine/neutral

1	Aunt: [I] received your _[cour.] ⁷ chocolates, [I] am very grateful! Me and [my] little sister like [them] very much ❤️	6	Hello [you] _[cour.] aunt, I received the chocolates you _[cour.] sent me, [they are] really extraordinarily delicious! The package is also exquisite, thank you _[cour.] sincerely for the gift.
2	Aunt I received [the] chocolates!!! Thank you _[f.] ⁸ 😊😊 [They are] really very tasty (A thank you sticker)	7	Thank [you] aunt [for the] chocolates, I really like [them]!
3	Aunt~ Thank you _[m./n.] [for] the sent German chocolates! I ate very happily, [my] family also all said [the chocolates] were tasty! Love you _[m./n.]	8	Aunt: I already received the chocolates you _[m./n.] sent me, [they are] very tasty, I really like [them]! Thank you _[m./n.] for always sending me tasty things, [they] make me feel very happy. Take care of [your] health, miss you _[m./n.] !
4	Thank [you] aunt [for] the chocolates given to me! Next time I travel, [I] will also prepare a souvenir for you _[f.] !	9	Thank [you] aunt [for the] chocolates, delicious!
5	Aunt~~I received the chocolates you _[f.] sent to me last time, [they] are super tasty! Thank [you] aunt 😊	10	The chocolates are tasty! Thank [you] aunt!

Appendix 9: Survey section 3 prompt 2

小林、怡君和雅婷要舉辦一個小派對。朋友們打算一起做飯，但當天小林的杯子、盤子居然都被幽靈偷走了。雅婷剛來到小林的家，請寫小林和雅婷的對白：

⁷ “you_[cour.]” = courteous second-person pronoun; 您.

⁸ “[f.]” = feminine

Resp. number	Answers by Taiwanese respondents	Resp. number	Answers by non-Taiwanese respondents
1	<p>雅婷：小林～好久不見</p> <p>小林：那個你先聽我說...我知道這很荒謬，但我家的餐具都被幽靈偷走了.....</p> <p>雅婷：什麼！？那也沒有辦法，現在去找他們要回來吧！</p> <p>小林：蛤？</p>	6	<p>雅婷：看到你这么焦急，是发生了什么事了吗？</p> <p>小林：我的杯子、盘子都不见了！我猜是被幽灵偷走了。</p> <p>雅婷：怎么会这样？那确实是一个问题。不过，你有在家里找找吗？说不定是被你随意丢在看不见的地方了，先不要着急，我们一起找找看吧。</p>
2	<p>小林：我跟你說！我的杯子跟盤子被幽靈偷走了！</p> <p>雅婷：蛤？！真的假的？</p> <p>小林：對啊！我傻眼到不行欸！難得要一起煮飯，竟然餐具都被偷走</p>	7	<p>小林：你相信吗，我的杯子和盘子都被幽灵偷走了。</p> <p>雅婷：鬼才信！</p>
3	<p>雅婷：小林你的餐具不知道為什麼都不見了</p> <p>小林：怎麼會？難不成有鬼？</p> <p>雅婷：會不會被幽靈偷走了？</p>	8	<p>雅婷：小林，你在找什么？</p> <p>小林：天呐，雅婷，我刚刚想要把杯子和盘子拿出来，但发现它们都不见了！</p> <p>雅婷：什么？不会吧！这怎么可能发生！？</p> <p>小林：我猜测应该是被幽灵偷走了，可恶！</p> <p>雅婷：幽灵！？你不要吓我！</p>
4	<p>小林：你知道嗎？</p> <p>雅婷：知道什麼？</p> <p>小林：我的餐具全都不見了！！</p> <p>雅婷：蛤？被偷了嗎？</p> <p>小林：可能被幽靈偷了吧！</p> <p>雅婷：你在開玩笑嗎？哪有什麼幽靈</p> <p>小林：沒有更好的解釋了！</p> <p>雅婷：OK 你說是就是吧！</p>	9	<p>我的盘子都被偷走了</p>
5	<p>小林：見鬼了！我的杯子跟盤子全部不見欸。</p> <p>雅婷：怎麼可能？！我們再去找找看。</p>	10	<p>森么？怎么会这样吼？！</p> <p>靠杯，这什么鬼啊！</p>

Appendix 10: Survey section 3 prompt 3

你是一個文學教授。你的學生陳淑芬給你發送了一封電子郵件，因病請假一天。但是，今天有這門課程的期末考試，你會怎麼答復？請給陳淑芬寫一封電郵：

Resp. number	Answers by Taiwanese respondents	Resp. number	Answers by non-Taiwanese respondents
1	<p>淑芬：</p> <p>本週為課程最後一次期末測驗，若缺席考試將嚴重影響分數，特此告知。</p> <p>XXX</p>	6	<p>陈淑芬同学你好，首先希望你多保重身体，能早日康复。关于你要请假的这件事，我需要对你说，今天是我们这门课程的期末考试，这其实很重要，所以如果你能来考试，那是最好的，如果生病很严重不能来考试的话，那也请在学院系统里申请延期考试以获取该课程的学分。</p>
2	<p>陳同學你好：</p> <p>已收到你的請假信件，請保重。由於今天同時是期末考試，請於下次上課時找我補考，謝謝。</p>	7	<p>如果没有特殊原因的话还是希望你参加，因为今天是期末考试，错过了会很麻烦。</p>
3	<p>同學你好，今天有期末考試，請提供相關就醫證明，否則將扣分處理。</p>	8	<p>陈淑芬同学，</p> <p>很抱歉听到你生病的消息。今天我本应该同意你的请假申请，但是按照计划这次课程将会举行期末考试。如果你的病情有所好转，希望你能够来参加考试，以获得期末成绩。如若实在有特殊情况，请联系我为你安排补考事宜。</p> <p>祝早日康复。</p> <p>XX 老师</p>
4	<p>淑芬 同學：</p> <p>妳好，已收到妳請病假的來信，由於今天是本門課的期末考試，請在下個星期日前和助教約時間進行補考，為求公平，妳的補考成績會是原始成績乘以 0.8。</p> <p>祝早日康復</p>	9	<p>这门课是期末考试 请务必要来参加 否则后果自负</p>

Resp. number	Answers by Taiwanese respondents	Resp. number	Answers by non-Taiwanese respondents
5	<p>XX 教授</p> <p>淑芬同學你好：</p> <p>祝福妳早日康復。但是今天是這堂課的期末考試，請記得下次來找老師補考唷！</p>	10	好好休息，晚点邮件联系补考时间。

Appendix 11: Survey section 3 prompt 4

上個星期你進入了一家新公司。辦公室的同時都對你很好，但昨天你發現了你的桌子的下面有一堆糖紙。你猜想坐在你對面的唐美華把那些糖紙扔在桌子的下面。請給唐美華寫一封電郵：

Resp. number	Answers by Taiwanese respondents	Resp. number	Answers by non-Taiwanese respondents
1	<p>您好：</p> <p>我是上週剛進入部門，坐在您對面的XXX。感謝這幾天以來的照顧與包容，目前一切適應良好。</p> <p>然而昨天發現我的座位下方有一些紙屑，因為位置相鄰，若誤會的話很抱歉，不過我猜想紙屑是來自於您，不介意的話能再麻煩您順手清理掉嗎？</p> <p>非常感謝！</p> <p>祝 平安順心</p> <p>XXX 敬上</p>	6	唐美华你好，冒昧打扰你了，请问我桌子下面的糖纸会是你的吗？我猜想可能是你们昨天在这里庆祝合作项目成功，所以有了这些糖纸。如果不是你的，那真的很抱歉。
2	<p>美華妳好：</p> <p>我是坐在你對面的新同事 XX～這幾天發現我們的桌子底下出現了好多糖紙😁😁 想問一下你知不知道它們怎麼出現的，每天都要清理真的好困擾呀... 因為你比較資深，想說你可能比我更了解辦公室的情況🙄 我想到的解決辦法是在附近多放一個垃圾</p>	7	我的桌子下面有一堆糖纸，请问是你扔的吗

Resp. number	Answers by Taiwanese respondents	Resp. number	Answers by non-Taiwanese respondents
	桶，不知道 你 覺得怎麼樣？不好意思打擾 你 了，謝謝 你 讀完這封 email！ XX		
3	唐小姐 您 好，近日發現我的桌子下方有一堆糖紙，不知道 您 是否有看到是誰放的，若知情，煩請告知我。謝謝！	8	美华， 你好 。我昨天发现桌子下面有一堆糖纸，不知道 你 有没有注意到是谁放在这里的？如果 你 知道的话，请告诉我！谢谢！
4	美華： 妳 好，我是坐在 妳 對面的同事 XXX。 感謝 妳 對我的照顧。有一件事情困擾我，想向 妳 請教，桌子下面的糖果紙是要準備丟掉的嗎？還是其他人不小心掉在這裡的呢？ 祝 順心 XXX	9	哈哈！想问一下我桌子上的糖纸是 你 不小心弄到这边的吗
5	美華 你好 ， 我在我的座位下方發現了一些糖果紙，想知道那些是不是 妳 之前不小心掉下去的。別擔心，我已經撿起來丟到垃圾桶囉。	10	乱扔糖纸很没素质诶，以后不要这样了。