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How to close a telephone call in Chinese – A problem for foreigners

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ABSTRACT

In this study, we examine why closing a telephone call in Chinese can trigger intercultural irritations for foreigners. We investigate such irritations by comparing ways in which learners and native speakers of Chinese end phone calls. We follow a tripartite research design anchored in speech acts and interaction. First, we administered Discourse Completion Tests (DCTs) to a group of advanced European learners of Chinese and a group of native speakers of Chinese, investigating how members of these groups close telephone calls. Second, we studied two corpora of telephone closing conversations, including a Chinese and an English as lingua franca corpus. Third, we considered whether the pragmatic differences observed through our DCTs reflect broader Chinese and Western conventions of telephone closing observed through our interactional corpora, and whether the behaviour of foreign speakers of Chinese may have been influenced by pragmatic transfer. Through the research outcomes we interpret the above-mentioned intercultural irritations.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In this study, we examine why closing a telephone call in Chinese may be challenging for foreigners. Phone calls have been sources of intercultural misunderstanding in the Chinese context (e.g. Kleiner & Pan 2006; Xiao & Huang 2016). According to our observation, advanced foreign learners of Chinese encountered two types of intercultural irritation regarding closing telephone calls with Chinese friends (see also Section 3):

1. Chinese telephone closing expressions are perceived to be abrupt or even rude.
2. It is difficult to discern exactly when a telephone conversation ends in Chinese because calls may not terminate with the expression *baibai* 拜拜 (for 'bye-bye').

Such irritations correlate with the fact that closing a call has an underlying sense of face-threat (Levinson 1983), and conventions through which such face-threat is mitigated may significantly vary across linguacultures. We believe that it is fruitful to consider how differences between telephone closing conventions in Chinese and Western linguacultures manifest themselves in Chinese L2 settings because this may allow us to look at the heart of the above-outlined irritations.

We follow a tripartite research design anchored in speech acts and interaction. First, we conducted Discourse Completion Tests (DCTs) with a group of advanced European speakers and a group of native speakers of Chinese, in order to understand how members of these groups end telephone calls in Chinese. We decided to focus on telephone calls in familiar relationships because in such relationships honorific closing formulae such as *nin-xian-mang-ba* 您先忙吧 (lit. 'be busy first') are not required, which makes closing telephone calls potentially less complicated. Second, we studied a Chinese and an English as lingua franca (ELF) interactional corpus of telephone closings. Third, we considered whether the pragmatic differences observed through our DCTs reflect Chinese and European linguacultural conventions of telephone closing as reflected by our interactional corpora, and whether our foreign speakers of Chinese were influenced by pragmatic transfer. Through our research outcomes we attempt to interpret the above-outlined irritations of advanced foreign speakers of Chinese.

The study of such learner irritations contributes to a broader project conducted by House and Kádár where we examine intercultural difficulties through the phenomenon of learner irritations (e.g. House & Kádár 2023). In this project we have devoted special attention to how interaction ritual situations such as the opening and closing an interaction, as well as removing oneself from an ongoing conversation trigger intercultural difficulties. Such situations can be defined as typically ritual because their interactional structural features follow (often ceremonial) pragmatic conventions. However, in our previous inquiries we have mainly focused on face-to-face interactions, and so the present ritual-anchored study of intercultural irritations triggered by closing phone calls fills a knowledge gap.

The structure of this study is the following. Section 2 provides a review of previous research, Section 3 presents our methodology and data, Section 4 is our analysis, while in Section 5 we conclude the present study.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Cook (1999), Davies (2004), Kubota (2016) and many others have pointed out that foreign speakers of a language should not be expected to imitate 'native speaker' practices. Accordingly,

we refrain from suggesting that foreign speakers of Chinese should follow native telephone closing conventions. Instead, we focus on what may trigger irritations for Chinese L2 learners. We also distance ourselves from the strong contrastive hypothesis that linguacultural differences automatically trigger L2 difficulties. Still, we believe that contrastive pragmatic differences between ELF and Chinese telephone closing conventions should not be neglected if one wishes to investigate the previously mentioned intercultural irritations.

Previous pragmatic and conversation analytic (CA) research on telephone closing is relevant for our study. Here we only mention some representative publications. In their classic, Schegloff & Sacks (1973) investigated the basic sequential organisation of telephone closings, laying down the foundations of this area. In another classic work, Button (1987) examined how participants negotiate the end of calls. In pragmatics, it was Levinson (1983, 316) who first pointed out that both overly hasty and overly slow telephone closing patterns may have negative influence on the relationship between the callers. This view of Levinson is particularly relevant for our study because the intercultural irritations studied also have the potential to negatively influence interpersonal relationships.

Later pragmatic research on telephone closing involves both the study of language behaviour in individual linguacultures (e.g. Harren & Raitaniemi 2008; Wright 2011; Kazemi 2019; Kim 2019; Mahzari 2019) and cross-cultural contrastive pragmatic inquiries (e.g. Pavlidou 1998; Allami et al. 2017). We hope to contribute to contrastive pragmatic research, by comparing Chinese and ELF telephone closing patterns with the aid of a finite system of speech acts (see more below). This approach differs from previous cross-cultural contrastive takes where scholars often compared telephone call closing patterns either by focusing on expressions or interactional strategies. To provide two representative examples here, in her contrastive Greek–German inquiry, Pavlidou (1998, 91) found that speakers of Greek use tag-questions which expect answer, while the comparable tag-particles used by speakers of German are ones which do not expect an answer. This expression-based analysis allowed Pavlidou to make broader inferences about Greek and German telephone closing behaviours. Unlike Pavlidou, Okamoto (1990; cited in Takami 2002) focused on strategies of telephone closing in Japanese by comparing Japanese with English (e.g. unlike speakers of English, Japanese speakers often use punch lines to start the closing section of a phone call). Since speech act represents a middle unit between expressions and discourse, we believe it is worth to conduct our contrastive pragmatic analysis from a speech act point of view. An advantage of approaching our data with the aid of a finite system of speech acts is that this approach allows us to consider every utterance in our entire data, instead of zeroing in on certain expression or strategy types. By looking at various speech act realisation types in our data we also venture beyond studies like Aston (1995) who compared Italian and English telephone closing patterns by focusing on the speech act of thanking only.

Research on telephone closing in Chinese with relevance for our study includes Sun (2005), Zhang (2013), Huang (2020), and – to a smaller degree – Dong & Wu (2020). Sun (2005) argued that speakers of Chinese often close telephone calls by uttering brief 'matter-of-fact announcements' such as 'let's finish here'. Sun's work has been illuminating for our inquiry because it draws attention to the importance of such utterances in Chinese telephone closing behaviour. Zhang (2013) also argued that in official interviews Chinese reporters use 'end markers' instead of leave-take forms. Huang (2020) examined Chinese telephone closings in familiar relationships and found that reaching a closure requires significant interactional collaboration between the

participants in comparison to English. We interpret this sense of 'collaboration' from an alternative angle, by considering the interactional dynamics of Chinese telephone closing both before and after a leave-taking occurred. Dong & Wu (2020) looked at what happens to relationships between callers in Chinese telephone call closings. While our study is language-anchored and unlike Dong and Wu we do not apply psychological concepts, we agree with Dong and Wu that the relationship between the participants may affect the closing phase of a telephone call.

In L2 pragmatics, telephone closings have been studied in various second language contexts such as Japanese (e.g. Ikeda 2009), Persian (Allami et al. 2017), Spanish (Alcón Soler 2000) and English (e.g. Sitthikoson & Sinwongsuwat 2017). Another area with relevance for our study includes L2 pragmatic research on phatic language use (e.g. Cruz 2013; Barron & Black 2015; Maíz-Arévalo 2017). Since in Chinese L2 pragmatics little attention has been dedicated to telephone closings and related phatic interaction (for an overview see Li 2023), we hope to contribute to these areas.

3. METHODOLOGY AND DATA

3.1. Methodology

Our study was motivated by intercultural irritations of advanced foreign speakers of Chinese, including 15 advanced speakers whom we interviewed ourselves and who have lived in China for at least 5 years, as well as 32 online accounts on websites such as www.sinosplice.com and chinese.stackexchange.com. As already noted, such irritations can be divided into two categories:

1. Chinese telephone closing expressions are perceived to be rude.
2. It is difficult to discern exactly when a telephone conversation ends in Chinese because speakers continue talking after uttering the closing expression *baibai*.

The following extracts drawn from www.sinosplice.com illustrate these irritation types:

I recall quite clearly the satisfaction I felt when I first became capable of conducting actual telephone conversations in Chinese. It made me feel I had really arrived, and I relished the achievement. It wasn't long before some communication issues spoiled my victory, though. Chinese people were saying things to me on the telephone that I wasn't accustomed to hearing, and *it didn't seem very nice*. … The "not very nice" things all seemed to come at the *end* of telephone conversations, and often from *friends*.

I mostly hear my [Chinese] girlfriend closing her conversations in a series of [words] like:
好。嗯。嗯。嗯嗯嗯。好。嗯。拜拜。嗯。嗯。拜拜！('Good. Um. Um. Uh-huh-huh. Good. Um. Bye-Bye. Um. Um. Bye-Bye!').

In order to examine such intercultural evaluations, we adopt two analytic procedures:

1. We approach Chinese telephone closing conventions through speech acts and interaction. This allows us to venture beyond the use of individual expressions which may trigger intercultural irritations, and instead focus on broader contrastive differences between Chinese and ELF interactional speech act realisation patterns in telephone closings, which may turn out to be responsible for intercultural irritations.

2. We avoid assuming at the outset that a telephone conversation should end with leave-taking.

As already noted, we follow a tripartite research design. First, we conducted DCTs with native Chinese speakers and European speakers of Chinese. Through these DCTs we not only investigated which speech acts members of these groups frequent before the speech act Leave-Take is realised, but also whether they prefer uttering anything after a Leave-Take was realised. While we are aware of criticisms of the DCT methodology (see Wojtaszek 2016 for an overview), we believe that DCT remains valuable for collecting comparable data from larger groups of language users. Second, we studied two interactional corpora featuring telephone closings, including a Chinese and an ELF corpus. We decided to compare our Chinese corpus with an ELF one because foreign speakers of Chinese involved in our DCTs came from different European countries, including Italy, Hungary and Germany. Third, we considered whether the pragmatic differences observed through our DCTs reflect broader linguacultural conventions of telephone closing, and also whether the behaviour of our foreign speakers of Chinese was influenced by pragmatic transfer.

We approach our data through a finite and minimalist speech act typology (Edmondson & House 1981; Edmondson, House & Kádár 2023), featured by Figure 1.

Having a finite speech act typology allows us to rigorously compare speech acts through which telephone closing is realised. Ever since Austin and Searle, the idea that speech act categories need to be finite has been present in pragmatics (Habermas 1979; Vanderveken 1990; Kissine 2013; Levinson 2017). The speech acts we propose are such simple and basic
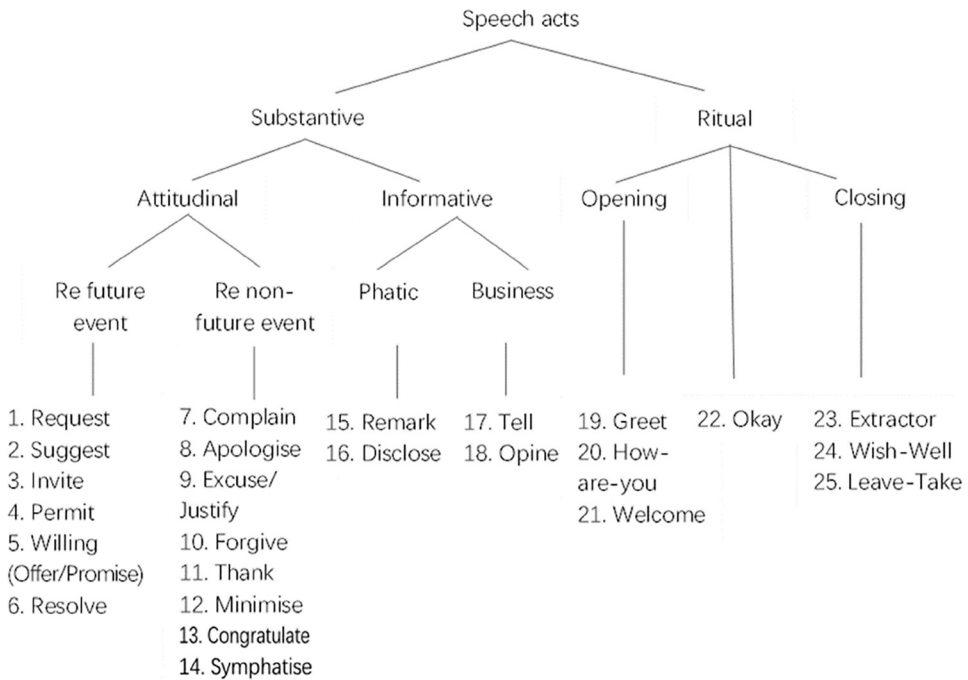

Figure 1. Our speech act typology

constituents of language use that they can easily be replicated in the study of interaction in our corpora (see House & Kádár 2023). As part of annotating speech acts in this system, we also consider Supportive Moves like Grounders (Blum-Kulka et al. 1989).

In this typology, speech acts are divided into Substantive (Attitudinal and Informative) and Ritual clusters. The Substantive categories Attitudinal and Informative are self-explanatory. The Ritual cluster involves illocutions which belong to the typically ritual phases of an interaction like closing. The label 'Ritual' does not imply that other speech acts can have no ritual value – an example is Apologise, which is an Attitudinal illocution that tends to be realised in ritual ways. In using this typology, it is important to consider how speech acts 'migrate' between clusters (House & Kádár 2021): for instance, if Apologise is frequently realised in telephone closing in a particular linguaculture it may mean that in this linguaculture it is conventionally part of Closing even though it does not belong to the Closing cluster of speech acts by default. In our study, we indicate speech acts in capital (e.g. 'Apologise' instead of 'apology').

3.2. Data

The DCTs were administered to a group of 30 advanced European speakers of Chinese with at least intermediate competence in Chinese, and another group of 30 native speakers of Chinese. We presented the following two scenarios to our participants, both featuring the closing of a telephone call in a familiar relationship:

(Scenario 1)

A and B are good friends having a casual conversation on the telephone. The following is said:

A: _____

B: 好，那挂吧！('Okay, let's hang off!')

A: 嗯嗯，好，拜拜！('Sure, okay, bye-bye!')

B: 拜拜！('Bye-bye!')

(Scenario 2)

A and B are good friends having a casual conversation on the telephone. The following is said:

A: 好，那挂吧！('Okay, let' hang off!')

B: 嗯嗯，好，拜拜！('Sure, okay, bye-bye!')

A: 拜拜！('Bye-bye!')

B: _____

A: _____

Please only fill in the blank lines if you feel that words are needed here.

The first DCT features a scenario where B utters the routine formula *gua-ba* ('let's hang off'), representing the speech act Suggest in a clearly friendly context. While this formula may sound irritating to the foreign ear, we set out from the assumption that the casual context in the

description of the DCT indicates that it is part of conventional closing talk. In the second DCT, we allowed participants not to respond after *baibai* was reciprocated to avoid eliciting utterances which they would not normally produce.

Our interactional data includes a Chinese and an ELF corpus of audio-recorded telephone call closings. We recorded telephone and WeChat calls by asking a network of friends and colleagues to audio-record their telephone calls. Our Chinese corpus includes telephone interactions between friends, close colleagues and family members, and our ELF corpus includes telephone calls between friends and close colleagues. The other participant in each call was made aware by our contact that the call will get recorded. None of the participants was made aware of our research goal, in order for them to avoid 'overperforming' when closing the calls. Our Chinese corpus comprises 84 closing episodes, and our ELF corpus includes 57 comparable episodes.

Following standard ethical procedures, we anonymised our data and removed any personal and sensitive information. We annotated speech acts in our audio-recorded data by following a coding scheme we outlined in House & Kádár (2023). To help the reader's work, our transcripts are arranged in tables, displaying the Chinese original text, the English translation and the speech act annotation in the same line.

4. ANALYSIS

4.1. Our DCTs

Tables 1 and 2 summarise the DCT responses of speakers of CFL (CFL).

Table 1. Responses of speakers of CFL (DCT 1)

Speech act type	Frequency (n. out of 30 responses)
Extractor	29/30
Remark	21/30
Apologise	11/30
Willing (Promise)	6/30

Table 2. Responses of speakers of CFL (DCT 2)

Speech act type	Frequency (n. out of 30 responses)
Ø	21/30
Thanks	5/30
Remark	3/30
Tell	2/30

Extracts (1) and (2) represent speech acts provided for our first DCT:

(1)

不好意思，	Apologies,	APOLOGISE
现在我有事，	I have something to do now,	EXTRACTOR
我有空时就发给你短信。	I will send you an SMS when I have time.	WILLING (PROMISE)

(2)

今天打电话特别开心。	Having chatted today was really happy.	REMARK
不好意思，	Apologies,	APOLOGISE
我慢慢必须挂电话了。	I have to slowly finish this call.	EXTRACTOR

As Table 1 shows, the most frequent speech act type in the first DCT scenario is Extractor, i.e. an illocution which provides a strategic signal anticipating the Leave-Take, and by means of which the speaker legitimises their imminent leave-taking by giving reasons for it. Nearly all participants realised this illocution, often in combination with the speech act Apologise (see also Robinson 2010 on Apologise in closing moves in English). The frequency of Extractor in the DCT involving foreign speakers of Chinese correlates with our previous research (House & Kádár 2023) where we found that speakers of English frequently use Extractor in leave-taking in all role relationships. Another frequent speech act type in our first DCT was Remark, a Phatic illocution through which the speaker shows themselves favourably disposed towards their addressee. Most Remarks were formulated as comments about the telephone call which is soon to reach a closure. Finally, various foreign respondents realised the speech act Willing (Promise), through which they ensured the other that the call will continue on another occasion.

In our second DCT, many foreign speakers of Chinese did not fill in the task. When we asked them about the reason for this choice, the general response was that there is no 'natural' way to continue the call. A minority of participants provided Thanks→Welcome/Minimise+speech act, Remark→Remark+speech act, and Tell→Tell pairs in the post-Leave-Take interactional slot, illustrated by extracts (3), (4) and (5):

(3)

A:		
谢谢你给我打了电话。	Thank you for calling me.	THANKS
B:		
不客气。	You're welcome.	WELCOME
听到你的声音很开心。	It was a pleasure to hear your voice.	REMARK

(4)

A:		
今天打语音好高兴了！	It was happy to call each other [on WeChat]!	Remark
B:		
真是！	Absolutely!	Remark
明天咱们再打个电话吧。	Let's talk tomorrow.	Suggest

(5)

A:		
期待马上再跟你打个电话。	I look forward to talking to you soon again.	Tell
B:		
我也期待	Me too.	Tell

Tables 3 and 4 summarise the DCT responses of native speakers of Chinese. As Tables 3 and 4 show, in our Chinese DCTs, the three most significant speech acts are Suggest, Resolve and Okay. Okay is a Ritual illocution, and its frequency here may correlate with the fact that it helps

Table 3. Responses of native speakers of Chinese (DCT 1)

Speech act type	Frequency (n. out of 30 responses)
Suggest	24/30
Okay	21/30
Resolve	18/20
Request	7/30
Tell	6/30
Extractor	3/30

Table 4. Responses of native speakers of Chinese (DCT 2)

Speech act type	Frequency (n. out of 30 responses)
Suggest	27/30
Resolve	20/30
Okay	8/30
Request	6/30

decreasing the potential face-threat triggered by the Leave-Take. The hearer-oriented speech act Suggest (e.g. 'you hang off first') and the speaker-oriented speech act Resolve (e.g. 'I hang off first', see also Sun 2005) are often adjacent in both of our Chinese DCTs, i.e. A first utters a Suggest which is responded with a Resolve, or vice versa.

The following extracts illustrate speech act realisation types in our first DCT:

(6)

行了，	Okay,	OKAY
你快去吧，	you should go,	SUGGEST
别耽误你工作。	do not get your work disturbed [by our call].	SUGGEST

(7)

那今天就聊到这儿吧，	Let's finish at this point today,	SUGGEST
怎么样？	how about that?	REQUEST (FOR INFORMATION)

(8)

好了，	Okay,	OKAY
先不跟你说啦，	I'd better not continue,	RESOLVE
我订的外卖到了，	my delivery arrived,	GROUNDER
去拿外卖咯！	I go and pick it up!	EXTRACTOR

As Table 4 shows, native speakers of Chinese, unlike foreign participants, all filled in the second DCT task, mostly by realising Suggest followed by another speech act. The following extracts illustrate two different Suggest types in our second DCT dataset:

(9)

Line 1:		
工作再累也要注意劳逸结合，	No matter how tiring work might be, you must take care of work-life balance,	SUGGEST
记得好好吃饭。	remember to eat well.	SUGGEST
Line 2:		
收到！	Okay!	OKAY
你也是，别总减肥了，	You too, don't diet,	SUGGEST
你一点也不胖，	you aren't fat at all,	OPINE
拜拜我的姐妹！	bye-bye, sis!	LEAVE-TAKE

(10)

Line 1:		
你先挂吧。	You hang off first.	SUGGEST
Line 2:		
我挂了，	I hang off,	RESOLVE
拜拜。	bye-bye.	LEAVE-TAKE

As extract (9) shows, DCT participants often provided Suggests through which they ritually expressed care for the recipient. Another form of the speech act Suggest, illustrated by extract (10), includes cases when respondents provided Suggests to encourage the other to *really* hang up after a Leave-Take was realised. Another frequent speech act type in this dataset was Request:

(11)

Line 1:		
晚上你再给我打啊。	Call me again in the evening.	REQUEST (TO-DO-X)
Line 2:		
知道了，	Okay,	OKAY
快去吧，	go first, quick,	SUGGEST
拜拜。	bye-bye.	LEAVE-TAKE

In summary, our DCT data has shown that foreign speakers and native speakers of Chinese followed significantly different pragmatic conventions of closing telephone calls in familiar relationships. In order to interpret these pragmatic differences, we have examined patterns of telephone closing in our interactional Chinese and ELF corpora.

4.2. Our Chinese telephone corpus

The following extract represents a typical way of telephone closing in our Chinese corpus:

(12)   Scenario: Closing conversation between two close friends:

1.	A: 准备几点睡觉啊？你啊？	A: What time are you going to bed? Heh?	REQUEST (FOR INFORMATION) REQUEST (FOR INFORMATION)
2.	B: 我再过一会儿吧，怎么了？	B: I'll wait a bit. What's the matter?	RESOLVE REQUEST (FOR INFORMATION)
3.	A: 我要睡了，我困死了啊。	A: I'm gonna sleep. I'm so sleepy.	RESOLVE TELL
4.	B: 行啊，那你睡吧。	B: Alright, go ahead and sleep.	OKAY SUGGEST
5.	A: 哦，你明天还早班啊？	A: Hm, you have a morning class tomorrow, right?	REQUEST (FOR INFORMATION)
6.	B: 有啊，所以我也要睡啦。	B: Yep, I do. So, I'll go to sleep too.	TELL RESOLVE
7.	A: 嗯，好。	A: Alright.	OKAY
8.	B: 嗯，行，你挂吧。	B: Yes, okay, you hang up.	OKAY SUGGEST
9.	A: 那挂吧，明天还有早班。行不？	A: Sure, let's hang up (because you) have a morning class tomorrow, okay?	OKAY SUGGEST GROUNDER
10.	B: 嗯，拜拜。	B: Okay, bye.	OKAY LEAVE-TAKE
11.	A: 那睡吧，啊！	A: Alright, you sleep! Okay?	OKAY SUGGEST REQUEST (FOR INFORMATION)
12.	B: 嗯嗯。	B: Yeah, yeah.	OKAY
13.	A: 啊，拜拜。	A: Okay, bye.	OKAY LEAVE-TAKE

In turn 1, A Initiates pre-closing by inquiring about when B is going to sleep: here the speech acts Request (for information) – indicating a departure from the main topic of the phone call – serve as a trigger for closure. In turn 2, B appears to have missed A's implied meaning as she realises a Resolve, followed by a Request (for information) expressing her uncertainty about the meaning of A. In turn 3, A chooses a more direct way to move towards closing the conversation as she announces that she is sleepy. In turn 4, after realising an Okay B responds with a Suggest, which is clearly phatic in nature because what B Suggests is what A announced to do anyway. In turns 5 and 6, the interactants exchange information about a class on the following day – this

exchange is phatic as A and B discuss information both of them appear to already know (see the formulation "you have a morning class").[1] In turns 6 and 7, the interactants once again reach an agreement that B will now go to sleep, and in turn 8 A encourages B again with a Suggest to sleep, which B accepts in turn 9. In turn 10, B realises the speech act Leave-Take. Yet, the conversation does not end here, a point which we will revisit later: in turn 11 A realises a phatic Okay→Suggest→Request (for information) sequence and the conversation only ends in turn 13.

Extract (12) shows that although Closing in our Chinese data is largely phatic in nature, the participants do not normally realise Phatic Remarks (cf. the Phatic cluster in Figure 1). Rather, they realise various Attitudinal (in particular, Suggest and Request) and Informative (in particular, Tell) illocutions, along with Ritual Okays. The preference for Suggests and Requests correlates with the frequency of particles, including *a* 啊, *ba* 吧 and *la* 啦: in the brief interaction featured above the participants utter altogether 11 of such particles. In Chinese phatic interaction such particles are frequented because they imply a friendly overtone, and so here they are likely to reinforce the phatic function of Suggests, Resolves and Requests (see more below).

Extract (12) illustrates the following conventional characteristics of telephone closing in our native Chinese data:

1. The speech act Suggest occurs frequently. Suggest has two types: Suggests through which care for the other is expressed and Suggests through which the recipient is encouraged to hang off.
2. Resolves are also frequent. As we could see in turns 3 and 4 of extract (1), Resolves are often in an adjacent relationship with Suggests.
3. Requests (for information) are also preferred. Phatic realisations of Request include cases where the speaker inquires about information they appear to already know.
4. Phatic Remarks are generally absent from closing.

These pragmatic features, in particular the preference for Suggests, are even more visible in scenarios like extract (13) where one of the participants is in a role where they are expected to ritually express care for the other:

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[1]See Senft (2009) on the phatic function of self-evident information.

(13)   Scenario: Telephone closing conversation between a grandmother (A) and her grandson:

1.	A: 好了，你要不要午休，下午还要出去玩不啦？	A: Okay, don't you want to take a nap? Aren't you going out in the afternoon?	OKAY SUGGEST REQUEST (FOR INFORMATION)
2.	B: 啥？一点半就上课了，还休啥啊，我能睡着吗？	B: Heh? I have a class at 1:30, no time for a freaking nap. How on earth could I sleep?	REQUEST (FOR INFORMATION) TELL TELL REQUEST (FOR INFORMATION)
3.	A: 啊，哈哈哈哈哈哈。那下午呢？	A: Ah, hahahahaha. How about the afternoon then?	SUGGEST
4.	B: 下午我室友他们说出去吃饭，去哪里玩我还不知道。	B: My roommates wanna go out for lunch in the afternoon. Not sure where we'll go out afterward.	TELL TELL
5.	A: 嗯嗯行，那你准备去上课吧。	A: Okay. You now go to class then.	OKAY SUGGEST
6.	B: 好吧，那我挂了。	B: Okay, I hang up then.	OKAY RESOLVE
7.	A: 好，那你下午出去钱够不够啊？我喊你爷爷给你转。	A: Alright, do you have enough money for the afternoon? I tell grampa to transfer some if you need.	OKAY REQUEST (FOR INFORMATION) WILLING (OFFER)
8.	B: 不要啦，我够的，你们买点好吃的吧。	B: Not needed, I have enough. Buy something delicious for yourselves instead.	TELL SUGGEST
9.	A: 你不够你就告诉我，我不跟你爸爸讲的。	A: If you're short of money, just let me know. I won't tell your dad.	SUGGEST WILLING (PROMISE)
10.	B: 哈哈哈哈哈，我骗你做什么。	B: [Hahahahaha], why would I lie to you?	REQUEST (FOR INFORMATION)
11.	A: 好啊，那你注意安全，早点回学校。	A: Okay then, take care, and return to school quick.	OKAY SUGGEST
12.	B: 我知道了，快挂吧。	B: Got it, just hang up.	OKAY SUGGEST
13.	A: 好好，拜拜。	A: Alright, bye.	OKAY LEAVE-TAKE
14.	B: 拜拜。	14. B: Bye-bye.	LEAVE-TAKE

In line 1, the grandmother initiates closing with a Phatic Suggest→Request (for information) sequence through which she moves away from the main topic of the phone call, indicating that the call is about to reach a closure, by ritually expressing care for her grandson. In turn 2, the grandson realises a Request→Tell→Tell→Request sequence, and in turns 3 and 4 the

interactants discuss trivialities concerning the grandson's afternoon programme. In turn 5, the grandmother utters an Okay, followed by a Suggest through which she again ritually expresses care for her grandson. In turn 6, the grandson aligns himself with this move (Goffman 1974), as he realises an Okay→Tell sequence. Similar to extract (11), the interaction does not end here: in turns 8–10 the participants engage again in phatic interaction, leading to an exchange of Suggests in turns 11–12, finally followed by reciprocated Leave-Takes in turns 13–14.

In our Chinese data, in 69 out of 84 interactions (82%) the interactants continue the conversation after the speech act Leave-Take is uttered. Extract (14) illustrates a typical post-Leave-Take exchange:

(14)   Scenario: Telephone closing conversation between two close friends:

1.	A: 唉，行吧，你睡，你要睡吗？	A: Ah, okay. Do you want to sleep?	OKAY REQUEST
2.	B: 我不睡，我一会得去查宿。	B: I don't sleep. I need to inspect the student dormitories later.	RESOLVE TELL
3.	A: 拜拜吧。	A: Goodbye then.	LEAVE-TAKE
4.	B: 好吧，拜拜，诶，你知道 XYZ 是谁吗？	B: Okay, goodbye. Hey, do you know who XYZ is?	OKAY LEAVE-TAKE REQUEST (FOR INFORMATION)
5.	A: 不知道啊，没听说过。	A: I don't know, I've never heard of him.	TELL TELL
6.	B: 嗯，那那个，哦，我看不到他朋友圈了，我忘了他叫什么，回头想起来了再跟你说吧。	B: Hmm, well, um, oh, I can't see his WeChat Moments anymore. I forgot his name, I may tell you when it pops to my mind.	TELL TELL WILLING (PROMISE)
7.	A: 行。	A: Okay!	OKAY
8.	B: 你要睡了吗？	B: You want to sleep?	REQUEST (FOR INFORMATION)
9.	A: 我，我要去洗漱了。	A: Uh, I need to go wash up.	TELL
10.	B: 行，那我也收拾收拾，我一会查宿去，我还要到底下去。	B: Okay, I'll tidy up too. I'll go downstairs to inspect the dormitories.	OKAY RESOLVE TELL
11.	A: 嗯嗯，好，拜拜。	A: Okay, okay, goodbye.	OKAY OKAY LEAVE-TAKE
12.	B: 拜拜。	B: Goodbye.	LEAVE-TAKE

In turn 1, A asks whether B is sleepy with a Request (for information), which is likely to indicate the speaker's wish to end the conversation (see also extract (11)), and the interactants reach a point of Leave-Take in turns 3–4 (in turn 4, the Leave-Take is transformed into a Suggest). However, in turn 4, B continues the call as she utters the Alerter[2] particle *ei* 诶 (trans. 'hey'), followed by a Request (for information) concerning an acquaintance. In turns 5–7 the participants exchange information about this acquaintance. In turn 8, B makes a repeated Request (for information) about whether A is sleepy. This ritual Request (for information) leads to another exchange of speech acts, and the interaction finally reaches a closure in turns 11–12.

If an exchange of Leave-Takes is followed by a further exchange in our Chinese corpus, the expression *baibai* is normally softened by a particle. Table 5 summarises the types of such particles in our Chinese corpus.

Table 5. Types and uses of particles co-occurring with *baibai-s* which do not end the interaction

Particle type	Frequency	Position (in relation to *baibai*) and role
ba 吧	35/69	Follows *baibai* and transforms Leave-Take into a Suggest[3]
en 嗯	30/69	Precedes *baibai* and decreases the definitive tone of Leave-Take
ei 诶	4/69	Uttered immediately after *baibai* as an Alerter indicating that the Leave-Take is not definitive

The frequency of these particles shows *baibai*s in our Chinese data can be tentative, giving an opportunity for – or even 'inviting' – continuation. Along with the above-outlined particles co-occurring with *baibai*, there are other frequent particle uses in our Chinese data:

- The particle *la* 啦 often replaces *le* 了 in the formula *guale* 挂了 ('I hang off'). While *guala* 挂啦 is also a Resolve, it is 'softer' than *guale*.
- *En* 嗯 often occurs in an adjacent way with the closing *baibai* (see also turn 16 in extract (15)).

Post-Leave-Take interaction is clearly phatic. In our case in our corpus, such a post-Leave-Take exchange helps an interactant to 'soften' what was said during the pre-Leave-Take phase, hence gaining a strategic function; see extract (15).

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[2]Edmondson & House (1981).

[3]See also Fang & Hengeveld (2020) on the softening function of *ba*.

(15)   Scenario: Telephone closing conversation between a grandmother (A) and her granddaughter (B):

1.	A: 行了，你中午先去休息。	A: Okay, you go have a nap.	OKAY SUGGEST
2.	B: 哈哈，嗯。	B: Haha, okay.	OKAY
3.	A: 我再跟你说一遍，你妈妈你爸爸的话，肯定叫你好好学，是哇？	A: I tell you again, your mom and dad definitely want you to study hard, right?	TELL REQUEST (FOR INFORMATION)
4.	B: 嗯。	B: Yeah.	OKAY
5.	A: 好好学习啊，不要，不要分散。你是…你…你有对象的话，就会分散，分散以后啊，那你就不行了，那你，你学习就下降了么。是哇？	A: Study hard, don't get distracted. If you ... if you … if you have a boyfriend, you'll get distracted, and once you get distracted, you won't be able to do well in your studies, right? Right?	SUGGEST OPINE OPINE REQUEST (FOR INFORMATION) REQUEST (FOR INFORMATION)
6.	B: 嗯。	B: Yeah.	OKAY
7.	A: 那我先吃饭了啊，完了中午之后你再给我打电话。	A: Well, I'm going to have lunch now. Call me in the afternoon.	RESOLVE REQUEST (TO-DO-X)
8.	B: 好的，拜拜。	B: Okay, bye bye.	OKAY LEAVE-TAKE
9.	A: 嗯，拜拜。	B: Alright, bye bye.	OKAY LEAVE-TAKE
10.	B: 嗯，你吃好啊，吃好喝好，休息啊休好，这就是对你的要求，啊？	9A: Yeah, make sure you eat well, drink well, and rest well. That's my expectation, okay?	OKAY SUGGEST SUGGEST TELL REQUEST (FOR INFORMATION)
11.	A: 嗯，好，嗯。	B: Right, okay, right.	OKAY
12.	B: 那我吃饭了，你下午再给我打过来啊。	A: I'll have my lunch now, give me a call in the afternoon.	RESOLVE REQUEST (TO-DO-X)
13.	A: 好好。	B: Okay, okay.	OKAY
14.	B: 咱们俩再说啊！	A: We'll talk more later!	SUGGEST
15.	A: 好，拜拜。	A: All right, bye bye.	OKAY LEAVE-TAKE
16.	B: 嗯嗯。	B: Hmm, alright.	OKAY

In turns 1–6 the grandmother admonishes her granddaughter, instructing her not to have a boyfriend and focus on her studies instead. The granddaughter clearly lacks enthusiasm about being admonished as she responds to her grandmother with curt Okays. The grandmother seems to recognise this lack of enthusiasm: in turn 10, following an exchange of Leave-Takes, she continues the interaction in a softer way as she ritually expresses her care for her grand-daughter with a Okay→Suggest→Suggest→Tell→Request (for information) sequence. By utter-ing these Suggests, she relapses to the conventional phatic Suggest realisation pattern which we could observe elsewhere in our data.

4.3. Our ELF telephone corpus

Extract (16) represents a typical closing interaction in our ELF corpus:

(16) Scenario: Telephone closing conversation between two friends:

1.	A: Uh, my meeting starts soon. It was cool to talk.	EXTRACTOR REMARK
2.	B: Yep. Absolutely!	REMARK
3.	A: Shall we call each other in a few days?	REQUEST (FOR INFORMATION)
4.	B: Sure, I'll take X to a trip on Tuesday, but apart from that we can talk just anytime.	RESOLVE SUGGESTS
5.	A: Great! So, talk to you soon then!	REMARK EXTRACTOR
6.	B: Talk to you soon! Bye-bye.	EXTRACTOR LEAVE-TAKE
7.	A: Bye.	LEAVE-TAKE

In turn 1, A first realises an Extractor and then a Remark, expressing his pleasure about the opportunity to talk with B, and in turn 2 B reciprocates this closing Remark. In turn 3, A realises a Request (for information) as to whether they should talk again soon, and in turn 4 B responds to this Request. In turn 5, A again realises a Phatic Remark, followed by an Extractor, which A reciprocates with an Extractor and a Leave-Take in turn 6, and in turn 7 A realises a Leave-Take.

Extract (16) illustrates the following characteristics of telephone closing in our ELF data:

1. The interactants ubiquitously (in all 57 extracts) realise the speech act Extractor, which helps them to move towards closing the interaction.
2. The interactants frequently (in 51 out of 57 extracts) realise Remarks, in order to decrease the face-threat triggered by the imminent leave-taking.

The importance and ubiquity of the speech act Extractor in our ELF data becomes partic-ularly visible in extract (17):

(17)   Scenario: Telephone closing between two friends:

1.	A: Okay, X, I'd better get going. I'll see you in two hours.	OKAY EXTRACTOR RESOLVE
2.	B: Make sure you dress warmly. It's freezing.	SUGGEST GROUNDER
3.	A: I know, absolutely brutal, just checked the Internet.	TELL REMARK TELL
4.	B: Seriously, my neighbour just slipped on the ice. In her age!	TELL OPINE
5.	A: Ugh, so sorry for her. Is she fine?	SYMPATHISE HOW-ARE-YOU
6.	B: Yes, was just a fright but her son took her to the emergency ward.	TELL
7.	A: Bloody hell. Anyway, I'd really better be off now.	OPINE EXTRACTOR
8.	B: Take care. See you soon then.	WISH-WELL LEAVE-TAKE
9.	A: Thanks. Bye.	THANKS LEAVE-TAKE
10.	B: Bye-bye.	LEAVE-TAKE

In turn 1, the interaction is about to reach a closure as A realises an Okay→Extractor→Resolve sequence, responded by B with a Suggest→Grounder sequence in turn 2. Unlike what we could observe in many cases in our Chinese data, the Suggest here is genuine rather than ritual because in turn 3 A provides a serious response to this Suggest. In turn 4, B informs A about an incident that happened to her neighbour, and in turns 5–6 the interactants discuss this incident. Finally, in turn 7 A relapses to closing as he utters an Extractor again, and in turn 8 B aligns herself with A, and the interaction reaches a closure in turns 9–10. In summary, extract (16) shows that in ELF settings the speech act Extractor not only helps to initiate the Closing phase but also to relapse to the ritual of closing if an interactional diversion occurs.

Post-Leave-Take exchanges in our ELF data only occur in 8 out of 57 (14%) cases. In 5 of these 8 cases, post-Leave-Take exchanges are brief, involving phatic exchanges of Willing (Promise)→speech act and positive Remark→speech act sequences. Extract (18) illustrates such as case:

(18)   Scenario: Telephone closing conversation between friends:

1.	A: Bye-bye.	LEAVE-TAKE
2.	B: Bye-bye.	LEAVE-TAKE
3.	A: See you soon!	WILLING (PROMISE)
4.	B: Looking forward to it! Bye!	WILLING (PROMISE) LEAVE-TAKE

Furthermore, in 3 cases in our ELF data, post-Leave-Take exchange becomes non-phatic in nature, representing real information exchange, as shown by extract (19):

(19)   Scenario: Telephone closing conversation between two friends:

1.	A: I have to take the dog out for a walk now.	EXTRACTOR
2.	B: Have fun! Don't forget the little bag.	WISH-WELL SUGGEST
3.	A: Haha, you bet! See you then.	TELL LEAVE-TAKE
4.	B: Bye-bye.	LEAVE-TAKE
5.	Hey, before we hang off, will you come to X's tomorrow?	REQUEST (FOR INFORMATION)
6.	A: Yeah, yeah, we will meet there, right?	TELL REQUEST (FOR INFORMATION)
7.	B: Yes, I'm goin'.	TELL
8.	A: Great! It will be awesome. So, we see each other soon then.	OPINE OPINE EXTRACTOR
9.	B: Yeah. See you soon.	LEAVE-TAKE
10.	A: Bye-bye.	LEAVE-TAKE

In turns 1–4, the interactants reach a closing. However, in turn 5 B realises a Request (for information). In turn 6, A responds to this Request with a Tell and a Request (for information), which is then responded with a Tell by B in turn 7. The information exchange here is meaningful, i.e. B is clearly interested in the actual answer of A.

4.4. Contrastive analysis

Noteworthy pragmatic characteristics of our Chinese corpus are the following:

1. The speech act Suggest occurs frequently. Suggests come in two types, including Suggests through which care for the other is expressed and others through which the other is encouraged to hang off.
2. Resolves are also frequent and are often adjacent with Suggests.
3. Requests (for information) are also preferred. Phatic realisations of Request include cases when the speaker inquires about information they already know.
4. Suggests, Resolves and Requests are often softened by particles. Further, particles often transform Leave-Take into Suggest, triggering post-Leave-Take interaction.
5. Phatic Remarks tend to be absent from telephone closing.
6. Post-Leave-Take exchange is frequent and extended.

In contrast, our ELF corpus has shown the following pragmatic characteristics:

1. The speech act Extractor is ubiquitously used.
2. The interactants also frequent Remarks, by means of which they decrease the face-threat triggered by the imminent leave-taking.
3. Post-Leave-Take exchange is less frequent and shorter than in our Chinese corpus, normally consisting of two-turn phatic exchanges.

4.5. Interpreting our DCTs through the contrastive outcomes

Let us now revisit the outcomes of our DCTs (see Table 6).

Table 6. Contrastive summary of our DCT results

Pre-Leave-Take	Speech acts realised by foreign speakers of Chinese	Speech acts realised by native speakers of Chinese
	Extractor	Suggest
	Remark	Okay
	Apologise	Resolve
	Willing (Promise)	Request
		Tell
		Extractor
Post-Leave-Take		
	Ø (in most cases)	Suggest
		Resolve
		Okay
		Request

The study of our interactional corpora has shown the following:

1. What we could observe in our Chinese native speaker DCT data reflects Chinese conventions of closing telephone talk in familiar relationships.
2. Many advanced speakers of Chinese are to be influenced by pragmatic transfer in Chinese telephone closing situations.

As regards the first point, it may not be far-fetching to argue that the most frequent speech acts in both pre- and post-Leave-Take position in Chinese telephone closing are Suggest and Resolve, often softened by particles. Furthermore, in Chinese familiar relationships the Leave-Take expression *baibai* is often used in a tentative way,[4] and most likely because of this

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[4]In certain dialects of Chinese like the Northern one spoken by the first author, *baibai* is very rarely used at all.

post-Leave-Take exchange is frequent in our data. The speech act Extractor is largely absent from both our DCTs and interactional Chinese data.

The fact that the speech act Extractor is frequented in both our Chinese as a second language DCTs and interactional ELF corpus shows that our foreign speakers of Chinese may have been influenced by pragmatic transfer. As our data shows, preference for Extractor in the ELF data comes hand-in-hand with the frequency of Phatic Remarks. Yet another pragmatic similarity between our Chinese L2 DCTs and interactional ELF corpus is that the interaction often terminates as the speech act Leave-Take is reciprocated.[5] While in our interactional ELF data post-Leave-Take interaction occasionally occurred, such interaction was briefer than its Chinese counterpart, which shows that Leave-Take in familiar relationships in English is more likely to be interpreted as a genuine farewell than *baibai* in Chinese.

5. CONCLUSION

Let us now revisit the two intercultural irritation types mentioned above in the light of our outcomes. The first irritation type concerning the perceived 'rudeness' of telephone closing in Chinese can be explained by the frequency of Suggests and Resolves, which are often adjacent, and the lack of Extractor and phatic Remarks in Chinese telephone closing. Expressions like *gua-la* 挂啦 ('I hang up') may indeed sound irritating to the foreign ear, especially if the speaker fails to recognise that the role of the particle *la* in this formula is to soften the utterance. As regards the second intercultural irritation that it is difficult for foreigners to discern exactly when a telephone conversation ends in Chinese, our data has shown that the expression *baibai* does not necessarily indicate the end of a telephone call. We could also see that speakers of Chinese use many particles, which always surround and, in certain cases, substitute for forms of Leave-Take (see e.g. extract (15), where *baibai* is adjacently responded to with the repeated particle *en'en*). In summary, our research has shown that the intercultural irritations we discussed relate to speech act realisation patterns deep seated in Chinese conventions of closing telephone calls. We believe that his result could have only been achieved through an approach which brings together speech acts and interaction, hence going beyond approaching Chinese telephone call closings by zeroing in on formulae.

In future research, it would be fruitful to consider whether other groups of foreign speakers of Chinese, such as speakers of Japanese and Korean, also experience irritations of a comparable scope with what were found in this study. It would also be important to venture beyond familiar relationships in the study of telephone closing in Chinese, e.g. by comparing our outcomes with telephone closings in formal relationships. We hope that our study will generate further interest in this area.

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[5]This phenomenon may correlate with the fact that here we look at telephone closing behaviour in familiar relationships. As Clark & French (1981) pointed out, phone calls in distant relationship in English can finish with an exchange of thanking expressions.

FUNDING

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