

A Study of Conversation in Internet Forum from the Perspective of Identity Construction

Zi Li^{1*}

¹ School of Foreign Studies, Nanjing University of Science and Technology, Nanjing, China

Email Address

2826536920@qq.com (Zi Li)

*Correspondence: 2826536920@qq.com

Received: 25 November 2025; **Accepted:** 12 December 2025; **Published:** 30 January 2026

Abstract:

Identity is dynamically constructed in social interaction rather than being fixed, and its construction relies on both explicit and latent resources. This study conducts a case analysis of conversations between two strangers on Hupu, a Chinese internet forum, focusing on how the identities of expert and novice are made relevant through interactants' turn-at-talk social actions. This research bears both theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, it expands and enriches the scope and methods of identity construction research in Chinese discourse. Practically, amid the information age with prevalent online communication, this study deepens people's understanding of internet users' identities and further facilitates the maintenance and construction of online forums. The research contributes to filling the gap in identity construction research in internet conversational contexts from the conversation analysis perspective.

Keywords:

Identity Construction, Internet Forum, Social Interaction

1. Introduction

1.1. General Introduction

As social members, interactants in various social relationships and social life carry many an identities, such identities may be either potential or obvious. However, such identities are not invariable, they actually Be during the process interlocutors or interactants talk or communicate with each other. Identity is "something that is used in talk: something that is part and parcel of the routines of everyday life, brought off in the fine detail of everyday interaction" [1]. What is more, in linguistics and sociology, identity is constructed in social practice and social behaviors [4]. In general, there are altogether two attitudes toward the definition of identity, one holds that one's identity can not be Bed and is given and invariable, and the other believes that one's identity is constructed in the process of social interaction and social practice, that is , identity is dynamic and selective. In everyday conversations, identity might be in hibernation or irrelevant to the communication at a particular moment, unless interactants demonstrate the consequentiality of an identity within their talk-in-

interaction [20,21,22]. There are also two kinds of resources of identity construction, one is explicit identity construction resources and the other is latent identity construction resources, the former refers to the resources that an interactant employ to make one of his identity salient that is explicit, the later refers to social cations that one interactant perform in his turns in conversation. This paper is about a case study of conversation between two strangers who communicate with each other in a Chinese internet forum called Hupu (www.hupu.com), and the identity of expert and the identity of novice are made relevant by them through the social actions that they execute in their turns-at-talk.

There are already some researches on identity construction in Mandarin conversations, but there remain relatively few researches on identity construction from the perspective of conversation analysis, even less researches focusing on identity construction of users of internet forum.

1.2. Research Significance

There is both theoretical and practical significance in this research.

First, there is theoretical significance in the research. It expanded the research on the discourse construction of identity in the context of Chinese discourse and enriched the scope and methods of research on identity construction in Chinese discourse, such as identity characteristics of specific groups, research perspectives, discourse strategies, and so on. It also enriched the scope and methods of research on identity construction in Chinese discourse, such as the identity characteristics of specific groups, research perspectives, discourse strategies, etc., so as to further supplement and perfect the identity construction in Chinese discourse. Finally, the research system of identity construction in Chinese discourse will be further supplemented and perfected.

On the other hand, there is also practical significance. It is known that the world is in a information era and people communicate on the Internet, all kinds of online forums emerged and people talk and discuss with different topics in different online forums. Such a study will further people's understanding of the identities of Internet users and in the deeper layer it will facilitate the maintaining and construction of online forums.

1.3. Research Object

The research is about a case study on interaction between two internet forum users who talk with each other about how to do a basketball action(stop-jump shot) accurately and properly under a post initiated by another forum user, and the research will be conducted together with the involvement of identity construction theory. And some of examples of conversation texts between the two interactants are collected to be analyzed.

1.4. Research Objective

The research aims to investigate how the identity of users a certain internet forum, Hupu, are constructed and how their identity of novice and identity of expert are exBed with each other during the process where they execute social actions in their turns-at-talk.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Studies on Identities Construction

Approaches emerging over the last 50 years that in one way or another have contributed to identities studies was described and discussed, Three dimensions of identity construction are distinguished and highlighted as dilemmatic but deserving prominence in the discursive construction of identity: (a) the navigation of agency in terms of person-to-world versus a world-to-person directionality; (b) the differentiation between self and other as a way to navigate between uniqueness and a communal sense of belonging and being the same as others; and (c) the navigation of sameness and Be across one's biography or parts thereof. The navigation of these three identity dilemmas is exemplified in the analysis of a stretch of conversational data, in which different analytic lenses were brought together. So-called new Englishs, distinct forms of English which have emerged in postcolonial settings and countries around the globe, have typically been regarded individually, as unique varieties shaped by idiosyncratic historical conditions and contact settings, and no coherent theory to account for these process has been developed so far. This article argues that despite all obvious dissimilarities, a fundamentally uniform developmental process, shaped by consistent sociolinguistic and language-contact conditions, has operated in the individual instances of rerooting the English language in another territory. At the heart of the process there are characteristic stages of identity construction by the groups involved, with similar relationships between the parties in migration contact settings having resulted in analogous processes of mutual accommodation and, consequently, similar sociolinguistic and structural outcomes. A study takes issue with the uniform conceptualization of lifestyle entrepreneurs in previous research by drawing on identity theory and life-story interviews with lifestyle entrepreneurs in Norway. How lifestyle entrepreneurs create their entrepreneurial identity and how this identity informs both their entrepreneurial actions in different ways and how they manage the enterprise were showed. On the basis of a narrative understanding of identity two dimensions of identity construction were differentiated: (1) socially and culturally embedded versus independent, and (2) flexible versus stable [1]. In contrast to the prescribed anonymity of the research article, the bio which accompanies it is perhaps the most explicit assertion of self-representation in scholarly life. Here is a rhetorical space where, in 50–100 words, authors are able to craft a narrative of expertise for themselves. It is a key opening for academics, both novice and experienced, to manage a public image through the careful recounting of achievement. Yet despite the current interest in identity, the bio has largely escaped attention. This neglect through analysis of 600 bios across three disciplines was addressed, exploring the importance of discipline, status and gender in mediating the ways writers claim an identity. Despite its brevity, the bio is an important means of representing an academic self through the recognition of collective values and membership [2].

2.2. Studies on Conversation Analysis and Studies on Conversation Analysis in Internet Forum

While researchers have used conversation analysis (CA) methods to understand online talk since the 1990s, to date there has been no systematic review of these studies to better understand this methodological development. A comprehensive literature review of 89 peer-reviewed journal articles reporting findings of empirical studies using CA to understand social interaction online was presented. In this review,

who is conducting this type of research, the contexts in which CA has been used to make sense of text-based online talk, and where such studies are being published was explained. What is more, the “fundamental” conversational structures researchers are drawing upon in making sense of online talk as social interaction was identified. Findings show that studies are using CA to understand “mundane” conversational contexts, as well as institutional talk from educational, counseling and workplace settings. The number of such studies are increasing and are being conducted by an international network of researchers across a variety of disciplines. The data is most often described as synchronous or asynchronous, with a slow increase in attention to social media data. Publication outlets are mostly language-based and/methodological journals. Analysis revealed four main aims: (1) comparing online and face-to-face talk, (2) understanding how coherence is maintained, (3) understanding how participants deal with trouble, and (4) understanding how social actions are accomplished asynchronously [3]. How conversation analysis (CA) can be used as a method for analysing online interaction was explored. As the number and quantity of online communication platforms have proliferated, there has been a growing interest in social psychology about the impact and effectiveness of online, text-based communication. A number of theories have been used and developed to explain how online communication might impact upon relationships and effective communication. However, in order to explore the differences between online and offline interaction an analysis of online behaviour is needed. CA allows for an in-depth, sequential and discursive analysis of real-life online interactions. It can explore the ways in which the affordances of the interactional platforms are oriented to or made relevant in the interaction. The utility of CA is demonstrated through a number of examples, highlighting how this method can be used to broaden our understanding of how online communication works in practise [4]. The use of conversation analysis (CA) as a method for analysing the interactional practices of online communication has been growing in recent years [7]. A key challenge for analysing online communication is the varied platforms through which interaction can occur. How using CA and the concept of affordances [10] can provide a lens through which to analyse not only the interaction, but also the technological context of that interaction was demonstrated. A corpus of instant messaging chats, captured from Facebook chat using screen-capture software, is used as a case study to demonstrate how the concept of affordances can be used alongside CA analysis to address the role of technology in the interaction. Two key interactional practices – turn adjacency and openings – are analysed to show the insights that CA can offer for providing an in-depth analysis of online interaction. By using affordances as a lens through which CA analysis can be refracted, scholars using ‘digital CA’ can better develop an understanding of patterns of interaction across different interactional platforms. In the last decade, analyzing online interaction rapidly gained in popularity and especially Wikipedia with its collaborative nature is a favored research object in linguistic studies. In discourse (linguistic) studies, there are some studies focusing on Wikipedia's encyclopedic article pages and others concentrating on conversational-like data on Wikipedia's talk pages. While the former can be located in the paradigm of Foucauldian discourse analysis, the latter have a rather conversation analytic approach. An impulse to consider the convergence of data was given– namely the text-text convergence of article and talk pages on Wikipedia – by integrating digital conversation analysis [7] with Foucauldian discourse analysis [25]. This gap was addressed by conducting a detailed micro analysis on how discussions on talk pages impact on regimes of meaning on Wikipedia's article pages. The discourse fragment under investigation is

the controversially discussed entry Annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation. The considerations result in an analytic framework that integrates Foucauldian discourse analysis and digital conversation analysis. The micro analysis reveals communicative strategies and practices of interactivity on article pages and on corresponding talk pages. The peculiarities of Wikipedia's data was explained, modes of analysis discussed and the challenges of the suggested integration of methods were explored [5].

2.3. Summary

All in all, conversation analysis has long been the hot spot of the research in the field of pragmatics, and many scholars have conducted researches on the conversation analysis of internet platform. There are also lots of researches on identity construction. Nevertheless, there remain relatively few studies on identity construction from the perspective of conversation analysis, even less researches focusing on identity construction of users of internet forum.

3. Research Design

3.1. Research Questions

- (1) With what kinds of category-bound actions the interactants construct their identity as an expert or novice;
- (2) Taking turn design and sequence development into consideration, in what ways the interactants orient to the relevance of their identities.
- (3) How these identities are constructed, ascribed and negotiated.

3.2. Data Collection

The datum of this study is a series of texts typed by two users under a post shared by another user of an internet forum, Hupu. The texts are in mandarin, and the content is the two persons' conversation about how to do a basketball action (stop-jump shot) rightly and properly. The datum will be transcribed from Chinese to English in line with the three-line method [12], namely, the first line is Chinese pinyin, the second word-for-word translation and the third idiomatic translation.

The study adopts CA [18] as the research methodology, taking identities as constructed by participants in talk-in-interaction [24].

4. Data Analysis and Preliminary Findings

4.1. Data Analysis

The datum will be analyzed according to the research conducted by Guodong Yu and Yaxin, Yu in 2021. The one who possesses more knowledge is the expert while the one with less knowledge in certain field being novice and their identity of expert and identity of novice will be Bed with each other during the process of conversation. And different social actions executed by the two interactants helps in the process of exBing identities and the actions will be sorted into several kinds as the following.

- (1) Requesting for information vs. Offering unsolicited advice
- (2) Seeking and giving advice vs. Giving unsolicited advice and offer

(3) Telling trouble vs. Giving unsolicited advice

(4) Identity as outcome of negotiation

Here is part of the text of the conversation between the two Hupu forum users.

A: ni de tou lan chu shou yi ding yao kuai.

You must shoot fast.

B: ni shuo de dui, chu shou yao kuai, dan shi chu shou guang kuai bu xing a, ni dei neng tou jin qu a .

You are right, but it is not enough to just shoot fast, you still need to put the ball into the basket.

A: suo yi wo shuo hai you yi dian xu yao zhu yi.

So I say there is still another point to pay attention to.

B: o, shuo lai tng ting.

Well, what is that?

A: zai ni zhun bei ji ting bing qie he qiu de shi hou, yong shou qu gan shou lan qiu de wen lu, xuan zhuan lan qiu zhao dao he shi de jiao du.

When you are ready to stop, rotate the basketball and feel the grain of the basketball with your hand to find the right angle!

Talk-in-interaction opens a window for the participants (and also the analysts) to show and observe their respective access to different domains of knowledge. The one who possesses more knowledge in a certain field might construct him/herself as an expert while the other who has less knowledge as a novice. In the present datum, the identity of an expert is essentially invoked with the social action of giving solicited or unsolicited advice. Contrasted with the expert identity construction, the building-up of novice identity is achieved through the social actions of requesting for information, explicit advice-seeking and troubles-telling.

a. Requesting for information³ vs. offering unsolicited advice

Requesting for information in the present datum puts the requester at a somewhat disadvantageous position, since it reveals the requester's lack of certain knowledge or need for assistance. Thus, request is employed by the requester to build up his identity of novice. While offering an unsolicited advice helps the offerer to construct the identity of a volunteer advicegiver or even an expert, and it also puts the doer at an advantageous position with respect to the doer's possession of the relevant information or knowledge.

b. Seeking and giving advice vs. giving unsolicited advice and offer

Advice-giving [9,26] involves both epistemic and deontic claims (K_p and D_p) by the advice giver, though the extent to which the advice-giver claims to have the right to determine the advice-recipient's future actions is encoded in how the advice is formulated. The person who gives advice usually displays him/ herself to be more knowledgeable or more experienced than the one who seeks advice and displays his/her right to determine the seeker's future action. The acceptance of a sought-for advice enacts the advice giver's epistemic and deontic claims. And an unsolicited advice even claims a higher degree of epistemic primacy and deontic right. The

identity of an expert could be constructed when advice-giving is implemented in talk-in-interaction, no matter the advice is solicited or unsolicited.

c. Telling trouble vs. giving unsolicited advice

Between the above two excerpts, B volunteers to A his trouble in preparing for stop and shoot. Telling troubles roots in the teller's being unable to deal with some difficulty, and builds up the teller's identity of a novice. Though responses to troubles telling vary [11], offering a touched-off unsolicited advice as solution is a possible one. The unsolicited advice enables the advice giver to claim some kind of expertise and to put the troubles teller at a novice position. B's turn contains a type 2 "bushi" [30] which projects a daily trouble, that is, B has some difficulty in finding a place to stay in the host county, though the trouble is not specified yet. Since this is the first time for B to practice how to shoot fast after stop, he is a novice in such issues. But B does not explicitly seek any solution from A.

d. Identity as outcome of negotiation

So far, we have demonstrated how the novice/expert identities are constructed by B and A with category-bound social actions. However, what makes the novice/expert identities construction by B and A more complicated is that this moment-by-moment unfolding process is filled with contingencies and negotiations. When B and A display an agreeing understanding between their own and the other's identity status and stance through their turns-at-talk, the congruence between identity status and identity stance is achieved. While when one's identity construction is challenged or contradicted by the other, the resulting incongruence shows the contingent nature of identity construction and negotiation.

4.2. Preliminary Findings

As social animals, we have multiple identities related to our sex, education, age, etc. But these identities do not follow us all the time. Instead, identity is co-constructed by participants in social interaction with various social actions. And the social actions implemented by participants might display their respective identities, for instance, the doctor-patient relationship is co-constructed and invoked by the inquiry-answer sequence in the phase of history taking and the advice-giving and acceptance/resistance sequence in the phase of treatment recommendation [5]. Epistemics and deontics are the two key factors functioning in the construction and ascription of identities in talk-in-interaction [27]. In many cases, it is the asymmetrical epistemic and deontic authority relationships that endow the interactants with different identities, and the expert-novice relationship in this research is an example.

Just like everyday oral conversation, texts typed by internet users can also be analyzed by incorporating the method of traditional conversation analysis. What is more, this research is based on a series of texts typed by two users of a certain internet forum in Mandarin, as a single case study, the present study reveals the emergence of expert and novice identities by focusing on the social actions conducted by the participants in talk-in-interaction.

5. Conclusions

Identities are traditionally considered as stable social features of social members. While CA refuses to take identity as preexisting, rather, identities in CA are talked into being and are actively created, negotiated or rebutted in interaction. Identities are

not assumed but co-constructed in talks-in-interaction [24], in other words, identities emerge in the turn-by-turn organization of conversation. Theoretically, epistemics and deontics have provided the analysts with a possibility to integrate research on people's social roles and identities with detailed analysis of what people accomplish in and through their turns [28]. It is the building up of the epistemic and deontic authorities that enables the identify of expert and novice to surface in conversations. And the (in)congruence between identity status and stance disposes the local unfolding of participants' identity orientation, construction, and negotiation. This research is based on one Internet conversation conducted in Mandarin, and as a single case study, the present study reveals the emergence of expert and novice identities by focusing on the social actions conducted by the participants in talk-in-interaction. We hope that this analyses have not only manifested how identity is managed with social actions, but also contributed to the analysis of Mandarin conversations from the conversation analytic perspective. In addition, taking the fact that the datum for the present research is in Mandarin, it is assumed that the overall interaction and the identity negotiation in particular might in some sense be related to the Chinese culture and even Chinese politeness. This might be explored in future researches.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

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