

Body Performance in Gendered Language Deconstructing the Mandarin Term *Sajiao* in the Cultural Context of Taiwan

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Abstract

Language not only constitutes but also restricts communicative actions. Words, phrases, and terms routinely used by native speakers to refer to communication practices reveal profound meanings about the culture under study. These terms are defined as cultural terms, which are meta-language used by native speakers to characterize communication practices that are significant to them. This paper explores the meaning and the social practice of a Mandarin cultural term, *sajiao*, a babyish form of persuasion. The framework derived from the tradition of ethnography of communication examines how *sajiao* is understood as a gender indicator and how femininity is talked and performed in the Mandarin-speaking community, Taiwan. The study discusses the importance of language in understanding gender, and the necessity to include the analyses of everyday language in gender education.

Il linguaggio costituisce ma, al tempo stesso, vincola le azioni comunicative. Le parole, le frasi, i termini che i parlanti nativi utilizzano normalmente per riferirsi alle loro pratiche comunicative sono indicatori di significato rispetto alla cultura oggetto di studio. Questi termini di riferimento sono “termini culturali”, espressioni metalinguistiche utilizzate per riferirsi a, e connotare le pratiche comunicative rilevanti per i parlanti. Questo articolo esplora il significato del termine culturale *sajiao* che in mandarino indica una forma infantilizzata di persuasione, ossia una specifica pratica sociale. Il quadro teoretico di riferimento si iscrive all'interno della tradizione dell'etnografia della comunicazione. All'interno di questo quadro, l'articolo esamina i modi con cui *sajiao* viene interpretato (i.e. come un indicatore di genere) e come la femminilità viene detta e agita in una comunità di parlanti mandarino a Taiwan. L'articolo evidenzia l'importanza dello studio del linguaggio nella comprensione del genere e la necessità di includere una analisi del linguaggio di tutti i giorni nell'educazione al genere.

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Keywords: gender and language, ethnography of communication, gender education, cultural terms, femininity, performativity.

Parole chiave: genere e linguaggio, etnografia della comunicazione, educazione al genere, termini culturali, femminilità, performatività.

Introduction: What is *Sajiao*?

In the hallway of his grandparents' apartment, the five-year-old boy, Yang, was making a scene. After dinner, Yang was accompanied with his grandfather, kicking a plastic ball in the living room. He was so engaged in the activity that he did not respond to his father several times, "It's late at night, and the grandpa needs to take a rest." "We will come next time." "You play half an hour more, and then we go home."¹ When Yang's father finally interrupted by taking away the ball and urged the boy to take leave, Yang refused.

Father: 走了 (ASP) 走了 (ASP)
zǒu le (ASP) zǒu le (ASP)
Go (ASP) Go (ASP)
Yang: 不要嘛 (MPT) 我還要玩
bú yào ma (MPT) wǒ hái yào wán
No (MPT) I still want to play²

Besides uttering the verbal message, the child crawled on the floor, rolling and yelling. He expressed the thought that he did not want to leave. This little drama was understood by his grandparents, his parents, and the onlookers (other guests, including the researcher) as 撒嬌 *sajiao*, in which case, the actor performed to refuse an order.

As the target audience, Yang's parents did not cast a look at him. They quietly put on their shoes, walked out of the door, and closed the door. Meanwhile, no one else attempted to console or approach Yang on the floor. After a hushful ten seconds, Yang jumped up and rushed to the door to catch his parents. In Yang's hidden script, his parents were supposed to yield to his *sajiao* and agree that he could stay longer at his grandparents' home. However, since the parents pretended not to see the child's imploring, this *sajiao* form of rejection did not produce the persuasive effect as Yang expected.

The following case shows another function of *sajiao*, that is, to ask for help or a favor. In a park, a young man in his early twenties was talking to a woman of a similar age. The man was arranging a gadget in his hands, saying,

我不會 你來幫我啦::

wǒ bú huì nǐ lái bāng wǒ la::

I can't do it. Come to help me::³

The woman took a look, grabbed the toy, and worked on it. While doing it, she said, “Can’t you?” expressing her doubt, but she still did him the favor. The man looked at the woman while she was arranging the small toy. They were observed as stood near each other, shoulder to shoulder, so they were assumed close friends.

The man’s utterance was qualified as a *sajiao* form because the man admitted his incapability and the sentence was spoken in a loud and high-pitched voice. Instead of posing the request in a more polite way, such as “Can you help me?” the man asked for help by a direct order, “Come to help me.” Yet, with the assistance of the childish tone, the direct statement sounded like begging, rather than commanding. The use of the sentence-final particle, “*la*,” strengthened the sense of childishness to a native speaker’s ear. The man did not order the woman from the perspective of an authoritative position, but took a lower position to elicit the woman’s help.

Based on the field notes collected by the author during two summers in Taipei, Taiwan, *sajiao* can be categorized into nine major functions. The above examples demonstrate two functions of *sajiao* in communication—refusing and asking for help. Furthermore, *sajiao* serves to greet, to apologize, to complain, to give an order, to negotiate, to agree, and to inform. Several verbal and nonverbal features are frequently observed in a *sajiao* performance: 1) the use of sentence-final particles *la*, *ba*, *ou*, *ya*, *yo*, *a*, *ye*, and *ma*; 2) the replication of monosyllabic words or the repetition of a short phrase, such as “安安 *ānān*” (hello), “好啦 好啦 *hǎo la hǎo la*” (All right, all right); 3) the “I” portrayed as a helpless, childish, incapable, dependent, or powerless subject; 4) the directness in expressing an opinion or giving an order, such as “I want more,” and “I don’t like it”; 5) tag questions; 6) the combination of two words into one (“*zhèyàng*” into “*jiàng*”); 7) the transliteration of foreign vocabulary (“baby” as *bēibēi*); 8) the use of adverb *hǎo* or the modal particle *jiù*, and 9) the use of intimate address forms.

These examples and features show that the use of *sajiao* in everyday life has practical communication functions, and the style expresses emotions, avoids conflicts, and persuades others in a less threatening way. The examples also suggest that the

Mandarin term *sajiao* is commonly used by native speakers in all kinds of occasions—in a household, in a public place (a park, a restaurant, the department store, a hair salon, the street corner, etc.). While identifying a scene like the above as *sajiao* can be gender-neutral to native speakers, *sajiao* is talked, and portrayed differently in the dominant media or in conversation. The display of one's feminine charm or the skills women of this culture should acquire is frequently mentioned in the *sajiao* discourse. Previous research (Chan, 1998; Chuang, 2005; Farris, 1995; Shih, 1984) views *sajiao* as a gender marker, a woman's speech act, and a woman's manipulative weapon, which supports the dominant discourse about *sajiao*. The two examples chosen above, though not unusual, are actually seldom discussed or easily passed among native speakers. The contradiction between the *sajiao* performance identified by native speakers and the *sajiao* discourse talked by native speakers brings to light a particular kind of question: How do people in Taiwan talk about *sajiao*? What preferences are woven into femininity in the speech community? What, in turn, is excluded from femininity? This paper responds to those questions by exploring cultural conceptions of femininity. By juxtaposing conflicting data, this paper uses the cultural term "*sajiao*" to demonstrate how to re-examine the taken-for-granted gender assumption and question the existing gender categories.

1. Theoretical Framework: Ethnographic Perspective on Gender and Language

Whatever may be said about our understanding of sex and its more or less obvious grounding in biology, students in a Gender 101 course know well the punch line—gender, different from sex, is culturally constructed. While we continue to learn how to distinguish what is biological from what is cultural, students often feel puzzled about the necessity of learning the distinction because the culturally constructed categories, masculinity and femininity, seems not to be so different from the contrast between male and female bodies. West and Zimmerman described a similar classroom scene in 1987, and it is still a challenge to deconstruct the claim that male are supposed to be masculine and female are to be feminine. In other words, gender differences in most cases are assigned to the different sexes, and the dualistic categorization of male/masculinity and female/femininity is often an unquestioned taken-for-granted assumption in much research. One of such dualisms prevails in the studies of the ways men and women talk.

The division of men's language and women's language reflects the early Western feminist concerns of women's subordinate position. In response to the overall neglect of women as the subject with a concrete identity, the emphasis of gender differences serves to address women's relatively powerless and weak position in a male-dominated society. Lakoff's (1975) *Language and Women's Place* is the pioneer-

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ing text in discussing gender and language, and her more recent published essay (2003) still firmly supports the position that gender and power are closely related to each other so “women” as a category of inquiry reveals and addresses the power inequality. Lakoff’s works generated numerous studies on the existence and characteristics of gendered language and this gender division is prevalent in current research on gender and language in the Western scholarship (Erickson, Lind, Johnson & O’Barr, 1978, Gilligan, 1982). Beyond the academic world, Tannen’s (1990) *You Just Don’t Understand* is an influential best-seller that represents the popular view of gender in the United States and guides much ongoing research. Moreover, heavily influenced by Western academic scholarship, the majority of research on gender and Mandarin language adopts this essentialist approach (Chan, 1998; Farris, 1988; Tan, 1990).

Throughout the 1980s, researchers began to challenge the focus on difference in the language and gender literature. The performance theory of gender (Butler, 1990; Connell, 1995; Herdt, 1996; West & Zimmerman, 1987) contributes the concepts of construction and performativity into the examination of gendered behavior. The central idea of the performance theory views gender as something we do, instead of something we have. Before Butler published *Gender Trouble* (1990), in which she characterized gender in terms of performativity, Goffman had coined the term “gender display” in *Gender Advertisements* (1979) in a similar fashion. Gender display conceptualizes the ways in which individuals act in a gender appropriate manner and view them as “natural” expressions. However, these performances are optional and vulnerable to disturbance, as inappropriate gender displays might occur. Given the fact that Goffman’s examples of “natural” expressions are all performed in “social” situations, his usage of the word “natural” should not be considered the opposite to the “cultural.” Gender as one of the natural signs in Goffman’s term, thus, is aligned with post-structuralist view of gender.

Gender as a culturally constructed category refers to a man-made feature. This perspective emphasizes rules, premises, codes, and other restraints in a culture that people consciously or unconsciously follow, obey, transgress and challenge. The shift from the “essentialist” view to the “social constructionist” analysis of gender and language is seen in the change of research themes. The latter research focuses on the process of gendering, the ongoing accomplishment of gender, and the dynamism and fluidity of the process (Cameron, 2007; Crawford, 1995; Goodwin, 2006; Hoffman, 2008; Inoue, 2006; Stokoe, 2005). This shift raises three issues for gender and language researchers. First, gender should not be treated as a presupposed factor. Rather than the genesis of all the other social and cultural factors, gender is one of them. Second, research questions should shift away from correcting linguistic variables with demographic variables. The questions based upon this view focus on how people construct and use gender identities in talk; what the re-

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relationship is between gender, discourse and sexuality; and in what ways are gendered speech communities constructed within the contexts of their social engagement. Third, even if scholars claim to be constructionist, or to be looking at gender as performance, it is difficult for them to make a conclusion apart from the “gender difference” claim that women perform femininities and men perform masculinities. So how one may represent an alternative understanding other than the traditional categorization is an issue discussed in this paper.

The view proposed here applies an ethnographic perspective aiming to defamiliarize a common gender category so as to further understand the relationship between gender and language. Ethnography aims to collect naturally-occurring behaviors, to analyze data, and to compare data (Leeds-Hurwitz, 2005). To make the naturally-occurring behaviors salient, ethnographers are usually accustomed to taking an in-between position. They participate in activities like a native to experience the first-hand information; meanwhile, they manage to keep themselves from going too native, avoiding losing the sharpness to a cultural practice. This positioning is crucial for them for they require both a critical outsider’s eye and sufficient knowledge about the specific culture they are studying. In this sense, the ethnographic framework is critical and possesses the potential to deconstruct and reconstruct interpretation of social roles, norms, myths, and dominant ideology in a culture.

As a Mandarin Chinese native speaker growing up in Taiwan, the researcher is familiar with the implications of *sajiao* and the related discourse about womanhood. In fact, when the researcher first introduced the cultural term, *sajiao*, as a form of persuasion to her advisor in graduate school, she labeled it as a feminine persuasion, describing a scene involving a female subject. In other words, the researcher’s initial report on *sajiao* shows that she had not realized the influence of the dominant ideology on her in viewing *sajiao* as a woman’s communicative act, and that she had not scrutinized the nuances between the “female” and the “feminine.” When the researcher started to conduct fieldwork in Taiwan, playing a role of an outsider, and analyzing the *sajiao* scenes based on its communication functions, she came up with a different picture of *sajiao*. With the ethnographic training, the researcher can now analyze what kind of femininity is associated with *sajiao* and how native speakers of Mandarin in Taiwan understand gender in a particular way.

A theoretical framework developed by Carbaugh (2006) used to examine cultural terms has been applied in many ethnographic studies of specific terms, practices, and language. This framework is useful in identifying and analyzing the correlations between cultural terms and the referred communicative action. The goals of these studies (Fitch, 1998; Garrett, 1993, Hall & Noguchi, 1995; Katriel, 2004) are to describe and interpret the social life of communication through the cultural

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frames using a cluster of terms that associate with each other that would be identified as presenting the native view of the communication practice. Drawing attention to conflicting discourses in identifying the cultural terms makes the ethnographic framework critical and links the scholarship to the post-structuralist perspective. For researchers aiming to find communicative patterns and interpret these patterns in everyday life, the comparison of differences is cross-cultural. The symbolic system within a culture is full of conflicts, contradictions, and competitions, and should not be viewed as a unifying, neatly-woven organism (Bakhtin, 1981; Baxter, 2011). Looking at cultural terms in different discourses unveils the inconsistency in language use and the various responses to the dominant myths when native speakers make sense of communicative actions. Such an approach gives us much greater scope for enriching our understanding of gender roles, inclusive of other gender minorities.

2. Method

Fieldwork for the ethnographic study introduced in this paper was conducted in two summers during 2010 and 2011. The sequence of *sajiao* performance, the actual conversations, and the context of various *sajiao* scenes in everyday life were observed in the fieldwork. Most of the fieldwork occurred in Taipei, the capital of Taiwan, in the north of the island. Taipei is the political, economic, and cultural center of Taiwan, and most of the population speaks mainly Mandarin in their everyday life compared with people in other regions of Taiwan. Participant observation was the major data collecting method. As *sajiao* was a commonly performed communicative act, the researcher determined an observing route that covered a public park, a traditional outdoor marketplace, an academic institute, and a commercial complex (including eight department stores, a cinema, restaurants, a bookstore, several bank branches, independent shops, etc.). In a routinely eight-hour schedule, the researcher visited the above sites, looking for *sajiao* scenes to happen and recording the conversations and contexts in the notebook. *Sajiao* scenes happening in the researcher's private schedule were also recorded. At the end of the day, daily notes were organized into different categories and keywords and frequent patterns were highlighted. The research was based on 214 entries in total, 87 of which the *sajiao* actors were not adult females.⁴

In addition to participant observation, the researcher collected video documents and entries of a newspaper database, which included activities identified by native speakers as *sajiao*. The researcher recorded and watched prime-time television shows that included *sajiao* scenes or discussions about *sajiao*, both fictional and actual, in order to determine what representations of *sajiao* were available from popular culture in Taiwan. The newspaper database allowed keyword search, and over 1,700 entries from 2004 to the present contained the term *sajiao*.⁵ These en-

tries were categorized based on settings, participants, outcomes, sequences, and contexts. Analyses proceeded in three aspects: Transcribing segments in which *sajiao* is being used, verbal accounts of the term being used, and observations of activities so identified. Meanwhile, initial interpretation was developed to create several coding categories, focusing on how the term is performed, how the term is used in conversations to refer to the communicative act, and how the gender implication is expressed in the data. Contradictions are found among the three initial categories. The dominant *sajiao* discourse emphasizes an ideal female image as the *sajiao* subject and such an image is said to strengthen the power of *sajiao*, while the actual action of *sajiao* does not always support this account. The following summarizes the major codes used in the dominant *sajiao* discourse and compares them with the unnoticed *sajiao* practices.

3. Findings

3.1 Innate Babyish Voice

There is a special kind of vocal feature identified in Mandarin Chinese as “娃娃音 *wawa yin*,” the phrases are translated as “babyish voice.” The phrase is used below (on line 3) by a Taiwanese young girl, Shih-Shih, in a newspaper interview for the regular column, “人間事 *renjian shi* (People’s Stories)” (2008). This column encourages readers to share their personal life experiences either through an interview or by online submission. The phrase is an effort by Shih-Shih to characterize something about *sajiao* and womanhood.

- 1) 在兩人世界裡
When being with my honey
- 2) 我努力做個百分之兩百的好情人
I work extremely hard to be a perfect lover
- 3) 會用天生的娃娃音向心愛的人撒嬌
I will use my innate babyish voice to *sajiao* to my love
- 4) 逗得他好開心
Making him happy
- 5) 喜歡親手做卡片
I love to make cards on my own to thank him
- 6) 幫他買襯衫買皮夾
I help him pick up shirts and wallet
- 7) 讓他感受我的貼心和關心

I want him to feel my consideration and care⁶

In these lines, Shih-Shih portrays an image of herself as a successful relationship keeper by playing *sajiao* (line 3), providing daily care (line 7), and expressing her appreciation (line 5). Shih-Shih emphasizes that her voice is “innate” so as to talk like a baby, and makes *sajiao* effectively. The verbal line here, like hundreds of other Mandarin expressions seen in newspapers, television shows, and daily conversations, links “baby-like features” to “womanhood.” The mentioning of the word “innate” shows that a desired *sajiao* should be as “natural” as possible, and performed by a female body.

Despite one’s gender, *sajiao* is practiced and performed very commonly in Taiwan. The majority of the *sajiao* performers are female, but Yang and the man in the park are not the only exceptions. The researcher has identified that a male bus driver used the *sajiao* tone complaining to a passenger, a fish vendor attempted to bargain with a middle-aged female customer by uttering *sajiao* words to her, a gay couple flirted in the *sajiao* tone in a restaurant, to name a few.⁷ What interests the author is the fact that these two and other cases in which women are not the actors are neglected, or negatively portrayed in native speakers’ talk about *sajiao*. When the man in the park said the line, “Come to help me,” with a begging, unnaturally baby-imitating voice, it worked effectively to persuade the woman to help him. This contradicts to Shih-Shih’s belief that the innate babyish voice is necessary to a successful *sajiao*, which also privileges women with certain desired feminine features. Shih-Shih’s belief about her innate femininity is part of the result of gender construction, or in Goffman’s term, the function of “expressive behavior” (1979, p. 3). The repeating messages about womanhood are conveyed and received as if they were somehow natural. The cultural infantilization of women and their ritualized subordination thus internalized Shih-Shih’s own voice. Goffman (1979) says,

[Natural expressions affirm] the place that persons of the female sex-class have in the social structure, in other words, holding them to it. . . ; for that doctrine teaches us that expressions occur simply because it is only natural for them to do so—no other reason being required. (p. 8)

Goffman’s research on gender display focuses on the effect of images and body displays that highlight the portrayal of gender to make believe the essence of gender. This framework is useful to examine the speech act, *sajiao*, and the discourse related to the speech act. This “babyish voice” is linked with a range of related terms, such as “可愛 *ke-ai* (cuteness)” and “無辜 *wugu* (innocence).” These three terms are frequently used by native speakers in the media to create what an ideal female would be—a woman who knows how to *sajiao* or play cute. They work to

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create a tiny, childish, and controllable image for women, provide the correspondent script to perform, and identify the main symbolic territory of womanhood in this culture.

3.2 Cute like a Doll

A young Taiwanese female, Li, was invited, with other six models, celebrities, and actresses, to a television talk show. She was specifically picked by the mediators, Tsai and Hsu, because of her apparent cute performance. Hsu, the female mediator of the show, was critical about Li's every movement.

- 1) Hsu: 你有沒看到(.) 你有沒有看到|她
nǐ yǒuméiyǒu kàndào(.) nǐ yǒuméiyǒu kàndào [tā
Did you see(.) Did you see that [she
- 2) Tsai: [什麼事情 (Qtg)
[shéme shìqíng (Qtg)
[What (Qtg)
- 3) Hsu: 她每個動作都精緻的算過耶:: (SFP)
tā měige dòngzuò dōu jīngzhì de suàn guò ye:: (SFP)
She calculates delicately her every movement (SFP)
- 4) Tsai: 因為她撩瀏海的時候 會好像站不穩這樣
yīngwèi tā liāo liúhǎi de shíhòu huì hǎoxàng zhàn bù wěn zhèyàng
Because she seems to be staggering when she tries to push her bangs aside
- 5) Hsu: 對:: (?)=
duì:: (?)=
Yes:: (?)=
- 6) Tsai: =就她的瀏海很重 所以洋娃娃被風吹到這樣
=jiù tā liúhǎi hěn zhòng suǒyǐ yángwáwa bèi fēng chuī dào zhèyàng
=Like, her bangs are too heavy, like a doll is resisting to the wind
- 7) Li: (.) 就這樣
(.) jiù zhèyàng
(.) That's it
- 8) Hsu imitates Li's gesture
- 9) Hsu: 妳真的好厲害喔 (FSP) 妳
nǐ zhēnde hǎo lìhà ou (FSP) nǐ
You are really good (FSP) you
- 10) Tsai: 可是我覺得男生會很喜歡啦 (FSP)
kěshì wǒ juéde nánsheng huì hěn xǐhuan la (FSP)
But I think men will love it (FSP)
- 11) Hsu: 趙哥你有看出來嗎 (Qtg)

zhào-gē nǐ yǒu kàn chūlái ma (Qtg)
Brother Chao did you see that (Qtg)

- 12) Chao: 應該不是設計的(.) 如果設計的(.) 也設計的太精準了 (ASP)

yīnggāi búshì shèjì de (.) rúguǒ shèjì de (.) yě shèjì de tài jīngzhǔn le (ASP)
It seems not a calculation (.) If it were (.) she's too sharp (ASP)

- 13) 我覺得她是天生自然散發出來的

wǒ juéde tā shì tiānshēng zìrán sànfā chūlái de
I feel that she has this innate ability, naturally expressed

In this exchange, interlocutors are commenting on a kind of action, in a Mandarin term, as *yangwawa* (a doll). The mediators and the male guest have conflicting opinions about Li's doll-like cuteness. The gay mediator Tsai brings the doll metaphor to identify Li's action on the spot (lines 4, 6). Without judging whether Li's action is fake or genuine, Tsai agrees that Li's effort to act like a doll would attract men within the heterosexual relationship (line 10). His comment also implies that he, as a gay man, is immune from Li's cute attack. The female mediator Hsu rushes to reveal Li's pretentious cuteness by saying, "She calculates delicately her every movement!" (line 3). For many women in this culture, playing cute is a skill they acquire in the process of socialization. In her study of cute power, Chuang (2005) argues that women in Taiwan know the power of playing cute and they will strategically use *sajiao* to fulfill certain goals. Thus, Hsu's praise of Li's cuteness, "you are really good" (line 9), implicitly denies the existence of Li's "genuine" cuteness; all is learned and performed.

Hsu's revelation of the artificial effort of Li's cuteness also highlights the tension between the two. Later in the show, Hsu develops a lengthy criticism on Li's *sajiao* performance, and demonstrates how well she is able to *sajiao*, too. In the present conversation, Hsu triggers the attack by inviting the male guest to discover Li's tricks (lines 1, 3, 11). However, the heterosexual male guest, Chao, is unable to tell the delicate affectation. He rejects to the idea that Li's cuteness is a fake, and comments that she has the "innate ability, naturally expressed" (line 13). Although *sajiao* is not directly mentioned in these lines, native speakers usually associate *sajiao* as an essential element of being cute. What this case teaches us is the marketability of the discourse of innate cuteness to define womanhood to a heterosexual relationship.

Cuteness, instead of sexiness, composes the ideal female image in this culture. Contrary to a traditional submissive woman image, the cuteness displayed in these two decades in Taiwan employs an active temperament. A cute doll portrayed in this discourse is not in a quiet and static state, but involves a dynamic interaction with others. The imitation of a doll is a preparation of *sajiao* to show feminine attractiveness. Immaturity and cuteness are related to babyish behaviors in contrast

to responsibility, confidence, ability, and adulthood. Infantilizing oneself in need of love and attention has been portrayed as a powerful weapon to women. For example, Fan-Fan's (2008) words indicate the significance of this cute feature and action.

雖然我的外表看起來很大女人, 但喜歡一個人時, 也超愛撒嬌,
在男友面前像隻小貓般乖順, 喜歡用頭磨蹭對方。

Although I look like a strong woman, I am super fond of *sajiao* when I fall in love with someone. I behave obediently like a kitten in front of my boyfriend, and I like to rub my head against him.

The contrast between a strong woman and a little kitten parallels to the division of a workplace manner (the front stage) and a private interaction (the back stage). The code-switching is presumably quite smooth, as Fan-Fan has no problem in playing both roles in front of different audience members. This kind of narrative reinforces that the doll-like cuteness is skin deep. The innocent appearance requires an adult's mature calculation. This deliberate display of one's inability and one's need of others' help is what de Certeau (1984) names "the absence of power" (p. 38). The absence of power disguises the ruse and tricks the weak can practice to turn the rules of the dominant system to their advantage. Viewing *sajiao* with this perspective, we see that childish cuteness is the portrayal of the standard of femininity and further illuminate the hidden cultural rules.

While women are encouraged to be cute, the qualification to do *sajiao* is strict in the media representations. If those who practice *sajiao* are young, pretty, and adorable, they will not be criticized or viewed negatively. On the other hand, if *sajiao* performers do not possess such characteristics, the criticism might be harsh. For example,

Kelly 建議她繼續維持瘦身後的身材, 這樣配上撒嬌的聲音才夠正點, 不然聽到
<小肥桃> 發嗲, 應該任何人都會很不蘇胡吧!?

Kelly suggests that she [a female celebrity] keep her body fit so as to match her *sajiao* voice. Otherwise, if we hear a "fat peach" speak in a babyish voice, anyone will be very uncomfortable! (Apple Daily, April 15, 2011)

This comment from a newspaper column jokes on the celebrity with a sarcastic tone. The message about *sajiao* is that a *sajiaoer's* physical condition matters. The female celebrity is advised not to perform or claim that she does *sajiao* often if she gains weight. According to Austin (1962), certain utterances in conversation function not based on the fact that it is a true or false statement, but are grounded on

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the qualification of speakers or performers. For example, a constative utterance such as “I name this ship the ‘Queen Elizabeth’” makes sense only when the speaker has the rights or the power to perform the act of “naming the ship.” If the utterer is not entitled to do the act, an “unhappy” consequence will occur. Similarly, a “fat peach” speaking in a babyish voice described in the mainstream media renders an “unhappy” outcome or an unaccomplished *sajiao* act.

Here the commenter mentions another related verb to *sajiao*; “發嗲 *fadia*” is a verb referring to speak in a babyish voice. Another example, from the popular Taiwanese author, Wu (2009), addresses the desired body figure for a *sajiao* performer,

有的女孩天生柔弱無骨，不用故意發嗲，只要輕聲說話，就能夠贏得男人注意。
但若她本來就是虎背熊腰，嗓門粗大，忽然發嗲，誰也不習慣。

Some girls are born delicate. They do not need to deliberately imitate a baby’s talk, but speak in a soft voice, and men will be attracted. However, if she has a robust body and loud voice, no one will feel comfortable when she speaks in a babyish voice. (Apple Daily, February 4, 2009)

This paragraph again reveals a preference for small, thin female forms in doing *sajiao*. These features are closer to a Lolita girl’s physical image, small, tiny, immature, and seemingly controllable. On the contrary, given a masculine body and a coarse voice, it is more difficult to generate a sense of babyish helplessness. Through hundreds of similar narratives, accounts, and comments, the preferred image of an infantile female *sajiaoer* circulates widely in Taiwanese society.

Thus, the dominant *sajiao* discourse contains three major principles for us to understand the relationship between *sajiao* action and gender in the cultural context: 1) *Sajiao* must look natural, or like an inborn characteristic. 2) The actor must look young, pretty, and cuddly. 3) *Sajiao* creates an arena for women to compete in physical beauty and attractiveness. These three principles reflect the dualistic heterosexual male-centered gender thoughts: *Sajiao* as a weapon for women aims to win a contest in pleasing men. Categorizing *sajiao* as a woman’s speech without scrutinizing the nuances reported above will miss the significant aspect of this communicative action. *Sajiao* shapes the content of femininity in the cultural context, and in return the dominant female image constitutes native speakers’ understanding of *sajiao*. Moreover, the implication derived from the *sajiao* discourse that only a certain type of women is privileged to effectively *sajiao* challenges the premise that *sajiao* is a woman’s speech feature. This premise is not the fact, but a constructed belief about gender.

3.3 Unnoticed *Sajiao* Practices

As the two cases introduced in the beginning of this paper show, *sajiao* is commonly practiced by native speakers in Taiwan's everyday life. It should be understood as a speech act involving power relations, instead of a practice limited to women in a heterosexual relationship. To make sense of the contradictory *sajiao* data collected in the fieldwork, the following analysis reconstructs the taken-for-granted assumption about *sajiao*. Goffman (1959) views communication as a cooperative performance by a group of individuals. He emphasizes that the cooperation is useful in understanding the intertwined roles of actors, their audience members, and participants. What is important in understanding *sajiao* actors is the relationship among the teammates, not their given gender roles, such as men and women. The power imbalance in a relationship makes *sajiao* happen. We will see how the "teammates" in a *sajiao* performance play out the power imbalance and their mutual identities.

The benefit of considering the power issue is that we recognize that everyone might be put in a position where she or he is able to *sajiao*. And we also recognize that *sajiao* is a performance based on one's relative identity and one's specific audience. Thus, the identities of children, sales persons, employees, and students are the analytical roles paired with parents, clients, employers, and teachers, respectively, in a *sajiao* duet.

Children's *sajiao* is left in the dominant *sajiao* discourse. It is usually viewed as a natural physical response to the environment. Here, the researcher puts the cases of children's *sajiao* in the context of power relations in contrast to the common notion that it is a "natural" behavior of children. Like Yang's case, when children start interacting with adults, they learn how to get things they want in a conscious fashion. Although they might not understand the meaning of *sajiao* as a vocabulary, they learn quickly how to do it and how to use their weak position in the family relationship. Adults' reactions to children's *sajiao* vary. Yang's *sajiao* is not encouraged, and even inhibited when the audience just looked at him without attempting to respond to him. On the other hand, some parents succumb to their child's *sajiao* if the crying or calling disturbs others. For example, a family of three was eating in a restaurant. The girl, around three years old, kept bothering her parents for at least five minutes. She cried loudly and said, "I want to eat with hands!" while her father ordered her, "Sit here! Sit well! Eat!" In response to her father's order, the girl yelled, "I DON'T WANT THIS! I DON'T WANT THIS!" and burst into more tears. The parents exchanged words in low voices, looking at the girl for a minute. Then, the mother decided to hold the girl, stood up, and left the room. While she walked out, she talked to the girl with a soft voice, "Ok, ok, don't cry. It's ok."

This is a more aggressive *sajiao* form played by children, and it can be observed in many public and private occasions. The mother in the restaurant succumbed to the girl's *sajiao* because she did not voice a threat or reply to her in a loud voice. Instead, she spoke to the girl gently, and did not force the girl to eat her meal with chopsticks. Compared with Yang's failure to persuade his parents to allow a longer playtime, this girl made her mother follow her will. However, children's gender does not affect parents' responses. The contexts and parents' tolerance of children's *sajiao* were more crucial in determining whether they refuse or succumb to the *sajiao* attack.

The following example introduces another teammate pair in practicing *sajiao*. "Sales Persons" in the cultural context practice *sajiao* quite often. "Customers" is the correspondent subject to "Sales Persons" in this power relation. The *sajiao* form of greeting is often heard when one walks into a shop in Taipei. The clerks will greet the patrons with the conformed phrase:

歡迎光臨:: 看看喔(?) (SFP)
huānyíng guānglín:: kànkān ou (?) (SFP)
 Welcome:: Take a look (?) (SFP)

The sentence is considered a *sajiao* form because of the sentence-final particle "ou." It helps to create a rising intonation at the end of the sentence. With other non-verbal cues, such as nasal sounds, and a high-pitched voice, the *sajiao* form will be intensified. Once a customer enters a shop, the clerk will use the *sajiao* form to suggest and agree with the customer. For example, when the researcher walked into the bag and wallet section of a department store in Taipei, browsing the exhibition counter, a female clerk came to her.

- | | | |
|----|---|--|
| 1) | Clerk: 要挑皮夾嗎:: (Qtg)
<i>yào tiāo píjiǎ ma::</i> (Qtg)
Are you looking at a wallet:: (Qtg) | She approaches the customer, greeting the customer with a big smile. |
| 2) | Customer: 這種款式的只有這種顏色嗎 (Qtg)
<i>zhèzhǒng kuǎnshì de zhǐyǒu zhèzhǒng yánsè ma</i> (Qtg)
Is this the only color of this style (Qtg) | The customer nods, and picks up one wallet. |
| 3) | Clerk: 對啊 (SFP)
<i>duì ya</i> (SFP)
Yes (SFP) | The customer is ready to leave the counter. |
| 4) | Clerk: 如果你要這種尺寸的 可以看看這款的呀 (?)
(SFP)
<i>rúguǒ nǐ yào zhèzhǒng chíchùn de kěyǐ kànkān zhèkuǎn de ya</i> (?)
(SFP) | The customer stops. |

- If you want this size, you can take a look at this (?) (SFP)
- 5) Customer: 喔 (SFP) 我不太喜歡麂皮的 (SFP) The customer touches the wallet.
ou (SFP) wǒ bù tài xǐhuān jǐpí de
Oh (SFP) I don't like suede.
- 6) Clerk: 喔 (SFP) 沒關係呀 (SFP) 妳再看看 (SFP)
ou (SFP) méi guānxi ya (SFP) nǐ zài kànkàn
Oh (SFP) It's ok (SFP) Take your time

The clerk spoke to the researcher in a high-pitched voice. At the end of each sentence, she either elongated the sound or added sentence-final particles to create a sense of cuteness. When she saw the customer put the wallet back and appear ready to leave (line 3), she rushed to pick up another wallet to draw the customer's attention (line 4). In this specific sentence, she raised her intonation and put the sentence-final particle “*ya*,” *sajiao*ing to ask the customer to stay longer. After the customer rejected her proposal, she worked to maintain a friendly atmosphere by saying, “It's ok.” Her training was professional because she did not react rudely after the customer showed that she did not want to buy the wallet.

These sweet greetings and friendly conversations are the front stage performance. The author collected several instances of clerks' code-switching moments in the department stores. Code switching refers to the changes both in language and paralinguistic, such as word choice, pitch, volume, rhythm, intonation, etc. This is also coined as “footing” in Goffman's (1981) term. For example, the researcher heard a male clerk talk differently to his peers and to the customers. After a customer left and while new customers had not yet arrived, the male clerk asked his colleague about an unfolded blouse on the counter,

這件是她剛剛試穿的嗎 (Q_{tg}) 快擺好
zhèjiàn shì tā gāngāng shìchuān de ma (Q_{tg}) kuài bǎi hǎo
Is this the blouse she just tried on (Q_{tg}) Put it back quickly

According to this sentence, the author assume that the male clerk had a higher position than the other clerks because he gave an order in an authoritative way, “Put it back quickly.” His voice was plain, without much emotional expression. Then, suddenly, when he glanced at a young woman as she stepped into the shop, he turned to her and greeted her in a high-pitched, slightly elongated tone, saying, “歡迎光臨” (Welcome!). Compared with the way he talked to his colleagues, this greeting expressed his emotion, which is evident in the rising intonation and the rising pitch. With this greeting, the man presented himself from the back stage to the front stage.

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Similarly, the researcher heard two clerks complain about the previous customer when she stood at the entrance of the shop looking at the clothes on a mannequin. They talked to each other without using the sweet voice. One clerk uttered,

剛剛那個人 一件都沒買

gānggāng nàge rén yíjiàn duō méi mǎi

That person who just left didn't buy anything

And the other clerk consoled her, saying,

算了啦 (SFP) 就是有這種人

suàn le la jiùshì yǒu zhèzhǒng rén

That's fine (SFP) This type of person exists

Although the sentence-final particle “*la*” was used, both of them talked in a low and plain voice. They criticized the previous customer as if the researcher were not there, although she was not far away from them. It was possible that they did not see her when they started this complaint. This conversation was a back stage conversation because they lowered their voices and criticized someone who was not present. After the short exchange, one of the clerks walked toward the researcher, while the researcher was looking at the clothes on the hanger. She greeted the customer with a sweet voice, saying,

慢慢看喔 (SFP) 喜歡可以試穿::

mànmàn kàn ou (SFP) xǐhuān kěyǐ shìchuān::

Take your time (SFP) You can try on whatever you like::

She raised her voice, added sentence-final particle “*ou*,” and elongated the word at the end of the sentence. She switched to a *sajiao* form in greeting the researcher. It shows that people do code switching often in business settings. While the *sajiao* actors often claim that their voices are “natural,” these examples tell us that the claim is also part of image construction, part of *sajiao* performance.

The man's change in footing and the two female clerks' tone-change are not different from the example mentioned in the section “Cute like a Doll”: Fan-Fan's self-description of switching from a private *sajiao* tone toward intimate lover to a formal talk style at work. Fan-Fan interprets her style shifting as the display of femininity, with the strong support of the dominant discourse about the ideal female image in Taiwan. However, this explanation is not sufficient to analyze the exceptional cases listed in this paper. According to Goffman (1981), footing change is common over the course of people's conversation as “a persistent feature of natural talk” (p. 128). In other words, communication participants switch styles to align their stance, posture, or projected self with a “social occasion.” The

switch from a *sajiao* tone to a non-*sajiao* tone functions to match the given social situation, which is, in the researcher's analysis, related to the participants' power differences.

Conclusion: Body Performance in Gendered Language

Getting interested in the speech act, known as *sajiao*, the researcher started noticing everyday interactions that involve or can be defined as *sajiao*. Although the main site of the fieldwork was in Taiwan, the researcher found many friends in the Midwestern college town in the United States also practice *sajiao*. When she explained what *sajiao* is to her American friends, and asked them how they would describe it in English, they paused, looked perplexed, uttered several words, and finally gave up and admitted that there might not be an exactly matching word for this Mandarin term. However, some of them would eagerly share a *sajiao* behavior happening in their relationships or would describe a scene of *sajiao* in the U.S. context and ask the researcher if this was what she meant. The answer was usually "yes." Then, the American informants looked satisfied, for what she was describing was not a totally foreign experience to them. These anecdotes tell us that *sajiao* is not a communication experience exclusively found in East Asia, but can be observed in the U.S. as well.

Sajiao is not only frequently performed by native speakers, but also talked of among native speakers. The term *sajiao* is similar to "amae" in Japanese, or "aekyu purida" in Korean. Yet, like "amae" and "aekyu purida," "sajiao" has its cultural implications. On the other hand, there is a rather full Western literature on infantilization of women. Since the 1970s, childish images of femininity and its consequences in terms of power relations and tribute to hegemonic and powerful masculinity have been explored. Nevertheless, the researcher was unable to find an English term that is equivalent to *sajiao*, a collective phrase to include all the verbal and nonverbal features that have been elaborated above. By reflecting on similar practices of *sajiao* in their own lives and the lack of a vocabulary to describe the behavior, non-native Mandarin speakers are able to see how language influences their perception of a common speech act in their own culture, and how language plays a role in regulating cultural norms, especially gender norms.

The above analysis shows that the action of *sajiao* is not an innate feature of women's speech. The daily language, the media representations, and the display of gender compose a discourse that makes people in Taiwan believe that this is the "natural" way women talk and do things. Meanwhile, the *sajiao* discourse also contains the value judgment, screening out those bodies that are not qualified to the standard female image. This is an example in which language constitutes and limits native speakers' understanding of communication and womanhood. Actions beyond the dominant *sajiao* discourse, such as men's *sajiao* performance, are neglected or

negatively criticized in everyday talk. However, *sajiao* as women's weapon is also a myth. The three principles in the dominant *sajiao* discourse do not guarantee that women with these qualified babyish features always get what they want in the practice of *sajiao*. In other words, even though the speakers are entitled to do the act, they may still fail to persuade. For example, a short, cute girl, wearing make-up, with T-shirt and mini-skirt, was observed to do *sajiao* to her boyfriend while waiting for the traffic light on a weekend afternoon. She held the boy's arm with her two hands, and moved her body back and forth. Meanwhile, she frowned, stared at the boy, and uttered several *sajiao* sounds. The boy eventually shook her hands off, and said, "Enough."

The problem of viewing *sajiao* as a female communicative act, or furthermore, a woman's weapon to control men, is that women as a group have to bear the responsibility in maintaining a relationship. The couple described above was assumed as intimate partners based on their body language and the context; the female touched the male's arm in public and walked toward to the cinema on the weekend. Theoretically, this young girl fulfilled all the physical requirements to do *sajiao*, but in this specific scene, she failed to persuade her boyfriend to do something as she wished. What was wrong with her? Or should we blame her? Women in Taiwan are given a variety of advice in terms of how to perform *sajiao* well. The do's and don'ts form a complicated and contradictory database for women to figure out a way to perform the ideal woman's role in the given society. Consequently, why the boy uttered the word, "enough," in this context is not a relevant question to ask. "She does not do it right" is an easy excuse to blame the failure on the girl, either physically or behaviorally.

This paper aims to explore the meaning of "*sajiao*" in the cultural context and problematize the conventional categorization in the study of gender and language to view *sajiao* as a woman's speech act. In addition to viewing *sajiao* as a team play to reveal the power differences in the speech act, the author proposes to differentiate the "female" from the "feminine." When researchers define *sajiao* by using the gender binary to the performer's body, we will surely see the gendered performance as a female's speaking style without considering other possibilities. As Butler explains, "within speech act theory, a performative is that discursive practice that enacts or produces that which it names" (1993, p.13). It constructs femininity as powerless subjectivity in the very moment it describes powerlessness as feminine. It also excludes certain realities that pass the discursive production.

Educators and researchers must be aware of the discursive power of language and be critical to examine the conventional gender categories. *Sajiao* as a particular communication style is noticed in many linguistic reports. Farris (1995) describes *sajiao* as "the adorable petulance of a spoiled child or young woman who seeks material or immaterial benefit from an unwilling listener" (p. 16) to mark it for the

feminine gender for the first time. Her report becomes the foundation for many scholars to define *sajiao* as a standard woman's communication style. While the relationship between women and *sajiao* has been explored in various perspectives in gender and language study, not many address the fact that children plays *sajiao*, which has been also observed in Farris' report. Moreover, scholars agree that *sajiao* is almost exclusively employed by female speakers, which implies the existence of minority groups that perform *sajiao*, but not many pay attention to the "exceptions" and make sense of the meanings of the exceptional *sajiao* performance.

The author's ethnographic study on the gendered performance "*sajiao*" defined in the field of gender and language discovers that the exceptional cases of *sajiao* are quite commonly performed in everyday life in the Mandarin speaking community, Taiwan. However, native speakers view *sajiao* as meaningless or odd if they are not performed by women, or women without certain physical "cute" features. Thus, this paper juxtaposes the dominant discourse about *sajiao* and *sajiao* scenes collected in the fieldwork to show that gender is not the only "social condition" that renders a *sajiao* performance. The power imbalance and the participants' duet play makes *sajiao* happen. *Sajiao* as a feminine performance is linked to the metaphor as the weak's weapon. This analysis thus detaches the "feminine" from a "female" body, reveals the gendered implication in Mandarin language, and challenges the conventional gender division to categorize *sajiao* as a woman's feature.

The belief of the close connection between women and femininity or men and masculinity is discursive constructions so they are constantly open to redefinition. In other words, any meaning of femininity and masculinity is constantly deferred in an ongoing process. The usefulness of the post-structuralist view is in the recognition of a discursive production of gender that surrounds the specific type of self-presentation of gender. That is, our behavior is intertwined in the web of cultural scripts. One limitation of the project is the lack of the *sajiao* performance in homosexual relationships. The researcher did not identify enough cases to elaborate this aspect. Further studies on the use of *sajiao* in homosexual relationships will strengthen the researcher's perspective—gender is culturally constructed, and one of the tools that assist the construction is our everyday language.

Notes

¹ All the utterances collected in the fieldwork were spoken in Mandarin Chinese. Except for those used in detailed analysis, the author has translated the utterances into English for the readers' convenience.

² The transcription contains three lines. The first line is the Mandarin Chinese characters to mark what people say. The second line is the *pinyin* transliteration, a Romanized alphabet for

Mandarin Chinese. The third line is a translation into idiomatic English. In the second line, the *pinyin* transliteration, the author marks the four-pitched tones and the neutral tone. For example, the sound “ma” has the following five variations.

Tone	Mark	Description
1	Mā	High and level.
2	Má	Starts medium in tone, then rises to the top.
3	Mǎ	Starts low, dips to the bottom, and then rises toward the top.
4	Mà	Starts at the top, falls sharp and strong to the bottom.
Neutral	Ma	Flat, with no emphasis.

Another common sentence structure in Mandarin Chinese is the use of sentence-final particles. Particles in Mandarin have various functions, and in most of the cases they are necessary to make the meaning complete (Li & Thompson, 1981). In the *sajiao* expression, however, people intend to use a great amount of unnecessary sentence-final particles. It is hard to translate particles, so the author uses the following symbols to indicate various particles in the sentences.

ASP aspect particle
 ITJ interjection
 MPT mood particle
 Qtg question tag
 SFP sentence-final particle

³ The researcher uses Jeffersonian (2004) transcription convention with modifications to mark the nonverbal cues.

[simultaneous talk
 // overlapped talk
 = latch: no apparent pause between two utterances
 :: stretched sound
 (?) rising intonation
 (.) pause
word underlining to indicate contrastive vocal stress or emphasis
 WORD higher volume
 °word° quiet or soft

⁴ The statistics of field notes of *sajiao* scenes based on participant relationships:

Adult-Child	45
Intimate Partner (Heterosexual)	30
Intimate Partner (Homosexual)	4
Social Relationship	155

A child who does *sajiao* to an adult was categorized into the adult-child relationship. *Sajiao* scenes included in the category of Intimate Partner (Heterosexual) were those participants who displayed salient body touches in their interactions, such as sitting on one’s lap, kissing, holding hands, etc. or those who used definite address forms, such as “honey,” “baby,” in their conversations. In this category, couples tended to *sajiao* to each other. When one started *sajiaoing* to the other, they would use the *sajiao* form to interact for a while as if acting in a play. The same

principles were applied to categorize homosexual couples. The category of Social Relationship included *sajiao* scenes other than the above three. Among them, 28 cases were performed by men. In this category, female *sajiaoers* did the *sajiao* form more to other females than to males, as most sales persons encountered more female customers in their daily basis.

⁵ The researcher chooses to use Taiwan's *Apple Daily Newspaper* online database to search the term *sajiao*. *Apple Daily* was established in 2003 and soon becomes the highest rating newspaper in Taiwan due to its tabloid style. The language in the newspaper is colloquial, so it is helpful to understand how the term *sajiao* is used in various contexts.

⁶ The author skips the *pinyin* line for the written text.

⁷ The homosexual experience in Taiwan is limited in this research. Of all the ethnographic observing records, the researcher can confirm only four cases that involve homosexual couples. Gay couples were spotted in the area the researcher conducted fieldwork, and intimate behavior, such as holding hands, were sometimes observed in public, but not so many *sajiao* scenes were observed.

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