

The metapragmatics of “teasing” in Taiwanese Chinese conversational humour

Wei-Lin Melody Chang

The University of Queensland
melody.chang@uq.edu.au

Michael Haugh

The University of Queensland
michael.haugh@uq.edu.au

Abstract

One of the challenges faced by researchers working on conversational humour across languages is that the particular scientific metalanguage we use to talk about the phenomenon in question influences and shapes our understanding of it. The aim of this paper is to explore the import of such issues for research on conversational humour through an examination of the labels used by Taiwanese speakers of Mandarin Chinese when talking about what is broadly termed “teasing” in English. Our aim is to better understand the connotations of these various native terms, how they relate to each other, and how they are deployed by speakers when referring to “teasing” events. The study draws on interviews with native Taiwanese informants and an analysis of large web-based corpus of Mandarin Chinese, the zhTenTen17 Traditional Corpus, to show that “teasing” is conceptualised in complex ways by Taiwanese speakers of Chinese, and because of that the same “teasing” event is open to construal in different ways by those speakers. We conclude that metapragmatic studies of conversational humour in different languages are important if we are to avoid bleaching out important cultural properties of teasing and thereby distorting our objects of analysis.

Keywords: teasing, mockery, conversational humour, metalanguage, metapragmatics, Chinese, Taiwan.

1. Introduction

There has been growing interest in humour studies over the past two decades in the different forms of humour that arise in conversational interactions (e.g. Norrick 1993; Norrick & Chiaro 2009). While early work on conversational humour tended to focus on different varieties of English, in recent years there has been increasingly a move to extend the study of conversational humour to other linguistic and cultural settings (e.g. Dynel & Sinkeviciute 2017;

Mullan & Béal 2018). Studying conversational humour across languages presents new challenges, however, including questions around the scientific language we use to identify and describe conversational humour (Béal & Mullan 2013). While studies of humour styles across cultures have been undertaken (Ku et al. 2016), one potential problem with such studies is that the terms used in different languages to identify and describe instances of conversational humour do not straightforwardly correlate with each other (Goddard 2018; Goddard & Mullan 2020). A second problem is that analysts use terms in ways that sometimes diverge from their ordinary senses to refer to different or overlapping phenomena (Sinkeviciute & Dynel 2017).

These issues are amply illustrated in the literature on teasing and its role in conversational humour. A survey of technical definitions of teasing indicates that it invariably involves a juxtaposition of seemingly contradictory “serious” (e.g. critical, derogatory, insulting, antagonistic, hostile), and “non-serious” (e.g. playful, joking, humorous, affectionate, bonding) stances (Haugh 2017a: 207).¹ However, it is less clear whether such definitions refer to teasing as a culturally-bound concept (or set of concepts), or as a socially situated practice (or set of practices), or even both. There has also been only passing consideration given to the question of whether teasing is understood and practised in the same way(s) across languages and cultures. Indeed, comparative studies of teasing are few and far between.

One of the challenges faced by researchers working on conversational humour across languages that has perhaps hindered such cross-linguistic studies is that the particular scientific metalanguage we use to talk about the phenomenon in question influences and shapes our understanding of it (Haugh 2016).² As this metalanguage is invariably bound to one particular language, frequently English, this makes it difficult to know whether we are indeed talking about the same thing when analysing forms of conversational humour across languages and cultures (Béal & Mullan 2013; 2017; Goddard 2018; Goddard & Mullan 2020; Mullan & Béal 2018).

Consider the case of teasing. There are a number of related terms used by speakers of English, not only the term *teasing* itself, but other words such as *kidding*, *mocking*, *taunting*, and *ribbing* (Goddard 2018; Haugh 2017a), as well as idiomatic phrases that are used to differentiate between potentially different forms of teasing, including, for instance, *taking the piss/mickey*, *pulling someone’s leg*, *having someone on*, *messing with someone*, and so on (Haugh & Weinglass 2020). There are also a diverse range of “teasing” practices that are referred to by terms (originally) native to other cultures, such as *vitsivitsi* (lit. ‘joke-joke’) in Finnish (Haddington 2011), *razzing* amongst North American Indians (Pratt 1996), and *enteab* (‘tease to make angry’) and *kegab* (‘tease in mock anger’) amongst the Kaluli of Papua New Guinea (Schiefflin 1986). While we are not suggesting that such terms can necessarily be used in any systematic way to categorise different forms of teasing, it is clear that ordinary speakers have recourse to a range of different labels to refer to and comment on putative instances of the phenomenon in question. These labels can be used to represent and evaluate teasing events in different ways, and so it is important to understand the underlying conceptual structures of such terms across languages and how they are used by speakers of those languages. The general question this raises, then, is when analysing “teasing” across different languages are we

¹ Teasing is not, of course, always a form of conversational humour, as it is multilayered and heterogeneous in nature (Haugh 2017a). In this paper, we are primarily concerned with that subset of teasing where the tease in question is open to evaluation as jocular or playful.

² Metalanguage refers to language about language (Jakobson 1971).

studying how *teasing* as it is defined in English is practised in those various languages, or are we studying (ostensibly) analogous concepts and behaviours across those different languages?

One approach to addressing such questions is to employ a metapragmatic perspective on conversational humour (Haugh 2017b; Haugh & Weinglass 2020; Sinkeviciute 2017; 2019; Dynel 2017). Metapragmatics encompasses the study of reflexive awareness on the part of users and observers about the use of language, which is displayed through the various ways in which they use language to refer to and comment on their use of language (Culpeper & Haugh 2014; Hübler & Bublitz 2007; Verschueren 1985; 2000; cf. Silverstein 1993). Metapragmatic awareness is thus premised on metalinguistic awareness, that is, our capacity to treat language itself as an object of reflection through recourse to metalanguage. A metapragmatic label is a particular subset of metalanguage that is specifically concerned with our use of language (Culpeper & Haugh 2014).

The aim of this paper is to explore metalinguistic issues in research on conversational humour through an examination of the metapragmatic labels used by Taiwanese speakers of Mandarin Chinese when talking about what is broadly termed “teasing” in English. Our aim is to better understand the connotations of these various native terms, how they relate to each other, and how they are deployed by speakers when referring to “teasing” events. The paper begins, in section two, by first briefly outlining the data and methods we use in our study. We next undertake, in section three, a metalinguistic analysis of a set of “teasing”-relevant terms used in Chinese, before discussing, in section four, how these different terms are used to label particular “teasing” events. We conclude by considering the broader implications of our study for cross-linguistic studies of teasing in humour research.

2. Data and method

There are a large number of different metapragmatic labels associated with “teasing” in Mandarin Chinese. In order to make our analysis tractable we concentrated our analysis on labels that were used in interviews by our informants in describing and talking about “teasing” events, and cross-referenced these with definitions from widely used dictionaries (Manser 2010; MOE 2015), as well as usage of these terms in a large web-based corpus of Mandarin Chinese. We settled on six key metapragmatic labels relevant to conversational “teasing” in informal, everyday spoken interaction (as opposed to institutional or written genres): *cháoxiào* (嘲笑), *cháofèng* (嘲諷), *fēngcì* (諷刺), *tǔcáo* (吐槽), *tiáokǎn* (調侃), and *kāiwánxiào* (開玩笑).

In this section, we first briefly describe these two main data sources in more detail, before going on to outline our approach to analysing the usage of these metapragmatic labels in Chinese.

2.1. Data

Our analysis draws from two types of data: interviews with native Taiwanese informants and a large web-based corpus of Mandarin Chinese, the zhTenTen17 Traditional Corpus.

Interviews were carried out by the first author with 15 Taiwanese speakers of Mandarin Chinese who were prompted by recordings of two examples of “teasing” in Chinese to talk about their understanding of different “teasing” terms in Chinese (the transcripts of those two

“teasing” events are included in the Appendix to this paper).³ Participants were asked which term(s) they would pick to label two different examples of conversational “teasing” in Chinese, and to explain why they would use that term (or set of terms). The interviewees ranged in age from their early twenties to late sixties (20-39: 6; 40-59: 5; 60+: 4); and four were male, while eleven were female. The professional background of the interviewees also varied. Included in the group were six homemakers, three university tutors, one medical doctor, one IT specialist, one university lecturer, one photographer, one retired businessman, and one general administrative officer. All the interviewees were Taiwanese currently resident in Australia for two or more years, although their degree of proficiency in English varied from highly limited (i.e. only able to speak a few phrases) through to comfortably fluent.⁴ The interviews themselves varied in length from 5 minutes to 8 minutes.

The zhTenTen17 Traditional Corpus consists of 2.4 billion tokens of Mandarin Chinese in traditional script, which was scraped from the World Wide Web in August and November 2017 using specialist software that is designed to collect linguistically valuable web content (Jakubíček et al. 2013). Although the zhTenTen17 Traditional Corpus is not as systematically structured as other corpora, it has the significant advantage of being the largest corpus of Mandarin Chinese in traditional script that is currently readily available for researchers.⁵ As it includes only traditional script, this web-based corpus data represents usage of Mandarin Chinese in Taiwan (in contrast to Mainland China, for instance). There are likely to be differences in the usage of such terms in different regions in Mainland China, and across the Chinese-speaking diaspora in other countries (e.g. Malaysia, Singapore, and so on). However, exploring potential regional variation in the usage of terms in Mandarin Chinese lies outside of the scope of this study.

2.2. Analytical approach

Our analysis consisted of two inter-related strands. We undertook a metalinguistic analysis of the six “teasing” labels to better understand the connotations of those terms and how they relate to one another. We also undertook a metapragmatic analysis of the use of these labels by native informants to refer to and talk about recordings of two “teasing” events (see Appendix). The latter informed the former, as the six labels we analysed were those used by the native informants in talking about the “teasing” events.

The metalinguistic analysis involved an analysis of the dictionary definitions of those six terms and the meaning of individual characters of which they are composed (MOE 2015), a corpus-based analysis of the collocational profile of the different terms based on statistical analysis of their usage (Lin 1998) in the zhTenTen17 Traditional Corpus⁶, alongside definitions of the terms offered by the interviewees in describing the two different “teasing” events. Our analysis thus tapped into two different ontological bases of meaning (Haugh 2016; 2019): (1) abstracted, aggregated, additive understandings of different “teasing” terms (i.e. the meaning of concept_x for population_y at time_z) as represented through a statistically-based analysis of the zhTenTen17 corpus data; and (2) situated, distributed, non-additive understandings of different

³ The two excerpts we used as prompts were deliberately chosen from the two different ends of the “biting” through to “bonding” continuum as it applies to “teasing” (Boxer and Cortés-Conde 1997).

⁴ It remains an open question whether there was any influence of the Australian cultural context on the Taiwanese informants’ conceptualisation of “teasing” in Chinese in these interviews.

⁵ See the Sketch Engine website for further details: <https://www.sketchengine.eu/zhtenten-chinese-corpus/>.

⁶ This type of analysis is available through the thesaurus function in Sketch Engine (Kilgarriff et al. 2004).

“teasing” terms (i.e. the meaning of concept_x for person_y at time_z) as represented through qualitative analyses of the interviewees’ responses.⁷

The metapragmatic analysis consisted of showing the interviewees the two “teasing” events”, and asking them how they would describe the “teasing” and why. We then tallied which terms were used by the interviewees to categorise the two “teasing” events, and identified the rationales they provided for their choice of term(s) (Davis 2018; Haugh and Chang 2019). These rationales were examined through content analysis (Krippendorff 2013), specifically, a constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz 2000). The aim of the latter part of the metapragmatic analysis was to identify what might account for variability amongst our informants in labelling these two “teasing” events.

3. The metalinguistics of “teasing” in Chinese

In this section we report on our analysis of each of the six key metapragmatic labels which our Taiwanese informants identified as relevant to conversational “teasing” in Mandarin Chinese in turn, and then discuss the key conceptual dimensions that appear to underpin these terms. For each label we provide: (1) a brief gloss from a monolingual dictionary and a breakdown of the meaning of its characters; (2) a summary of the corpus-based collocational analysis of that label; and (3) excerpts from the interviews that further flesh out their specific connotations. Following Boxer and Cortés-Conde (1997), we initially arranged these labels on a continuum, starting with those terms that have most “biting” connotations (*cháoxiào*, *cháofèng*, *fèngcǐ*), then moving to discuss those with connotations that might be construed as “nipping” (*tǔcáo*, *tiáokǎn*), before considering those with connotations that can be interpreted as primarily “bonding” in nature (*kāiwánxiào*).

Cháoxiào (嘲笑) is composed of two characters: *cháo* (‘explicit ridicule’, ‘sneer’) and *xiào* (‘laugh’). The meaning of the term *cháoxiào* combines the meanings of these two morphemes (e.g. ‘sneeringly laugh’). According to the Ministry of Education Dictionary (MOE 2015), *cháoxiào* is interchangeable with either *jīxiào* (譏笑), which can be translated as ‘to sneeringly ridicule’, or *cháonùè* (嘲謔), meaning ‘playful ridicule’. The rather negative, biting connotations of *cháoxiào* are evident from the collocational profile that emerges from an analysis of the 15,661 occurrences of it in the zhTenTen17 Traditional Corpus. The results of that analysis are summarised in Table 1.⁸

⁷ The existence of these two different bases of meanings and the evident need to examine these terms with respect to their place in a complex semantic field is the reason why we have not elected to develop semantic scripts using natural semantic metalanguage (NSM) in this paper (cf. Goddard 2018; Goddard & Mullan 2020). It remains an open question the extent to which NSM admits the latter type of meaning and whether it can be readily used in describing complex semantic fields.

⁸ For the sake of simplicity, we report on only the top three clusters for each term, and up to the first three terms in each cluster. The figures in square brackets represent the degree of similarity of the collocational profile of that term with the “teasing” term in question (in this case, *cháoxiào*).

Table 1. Collocation profile of *cháoxiào*

	Cluster label	Words constituting the cluster
1	<i>qǔxiào</i>	<i>qǔxiào</i> (取笑) ('make fun of') [0.278] <i>qīfù</i> (欺負) ('bully') [0.198]
2	<i>mányuàn</i>	<i>mányuàn</i> (埋怨) ('blame') [0.232] <i>ānwèi</i> (安慰) ('comfort') [0.180] <i>cuīcù</i> (催促) ('urge') [0.167]
3	<i>bàoyuàn</i>	<i>bàoyuàn</i> (抱怨) ('complain') [0.214] <i>mà</i> (罵) ('scold') [0.177] <i>chǎojià</i> (吵架) ('quarrel') [0.159]

What becomes clear from these results is that the connotations of this form of “teasing” are decidedly negative. It is associated with “making fun of” and even “bullying” others (cluster 1), as well as “blaming” (cluster 2) and “complaining” (cluster 3). Notably, the terms in cluster 2 appear to capture actions both synonymous with “teasing” (e.g. “blaming”) and antonymic patterns (e.g. “comforting”, “urging”).

These negative connotations were also attested in the interview data. In the following excerpt, for instance, the participant emphasises that *cháoxiào* involves directly ridiculing others and thus causes a high degree of discomfort for the target.⁹

(1) [191010__I]

Cháoxiào is that [I am] not hiding and directly and blatantly picking up your faults. The degree of discomfort is definitely very high. I am not afraid to let you know that. You might conceal a little with *cháofèng*, but more or less the counterpart can sense that.

(嘲笑就是也沒有掩飾就是直接很明目張膽的，挑著你的毛病缺點講，不舒服的程度肯定是非常高的，我也不怕讓你知道。嘲諷你還會帶有一點掩飾，但是對方還是多少能夠感受出來)

In the excerpt above, the interviewee also contrasts *cháoxiào* with *cháofèng* in suggesting the latter is less direct or blunt than the former.

Cháofèng (嘲諷) is composed of the characters *cháo* ('explicit ridicule') and *fèng* ('implicit ridicule'). According to the Ministry of Education Dictionary (MOE 2015) it is interchangeable with either *jīxiào* (譏笑), which can be translated as ‘to sneeringly ridicule’, or *fèngcì* (諷刺), meaning ‘to implicitly ridicule’, but is also associated with the idiom *lěngcháorèfèng* (冷嘲熱諷), which literally means ‘[simultaneously] frigid and scorching ridicule’. The somewhat negative connotations of *cháofèng* are evident from the collocational

⁹ We provide a translation of all the excerpts we report from the interviews along with the original text in Mandarin Chinese.

profile that emerges from an analysis of the 4,521 occurrences of it in the zhTenTen17 Traditional Corpus. The results of that analysis are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2. Collocation profile of *cháofèng*

	Cluster label	Words constituting the cluster
1	<i>fèngcì</i>	<i>fèngcì</i> (諷刺) (‘[implicitly] ridicule’) [0.247]
2	<i>tiáokǎn</i>	<i>tiáokǎn</i> (調侃) (‘[playfully] provoke’) [0.225] <i>tǔcáo</i> (吐槽) (‘expose faults’) [0.125]
3	<i>jīfèng</i>	<i>jīfèng</i> (譏諷) (‘ridicule’) [0.218] <i>wākǔ</i> (挖苦) (‘sarcasm’) [0.184] <i>yéyú</i> (揶揄) (‘play/fool/mess with’) [0.112]

It appears from these results that *cháofèng* is closely associated with three of the other “teasing” labels we are examining (clusters 1 and 2), but takes on a somewhat more biting edge in also being associated with “ridicule” and “sarcasm” (cluster 3).

These negative connotations were attested even more so in the interview data. In the following excerpt, for instance, the participant emphasises that *cháofèng* is used to show one despises someone, especially when arguing with others or pointing out contradictions between what they say and do.

(2) [191914_M]

Cháofèng happens when (people) are relatively close and when they talk to each other. [It refers to] using words to despise others...When quarrelling with others or when their speech doesn’t match their actions, [they] will use *cháofèng*.

(嘲諷是比較近距離，人跟人的言談之間，用言詞來輕視...跟別人吵架的時候，覺得對方表裡不一的時候，會用嘲諷)

Notably, that participant also claims *cháofèng* is more serious than *fèngcì* (嘲諷比較嚴重). *Fèngcì* (諷刺) is composed of two characters: *fèng* (‘ridicule’) and *cì* (meaning to ‘sting, prick, pierce or stab’). It is defined in the Ministry of Education Dictionary (MOE 2015) as “using an implicit way to *cháofèng* [blunt ridicule] and *jīcì* [mock]” (以隱微的方式嘲諷譏刺). While the meaning of *fèngcì* is clearly closely related to *cháofèng*, the “ridicule” involved appears to be delivered more “indirectly” or “implicitly” than in the latter case, and the collocational profile that emerges from an analysis of the 10,789 occurrences of it in the zhTenTen17 Traditional Corpus is thus slightly different. The results of that analysis are summarised in Table 3.

Table 3. Collocation profile of *fèngcì*

	Cluster label	Words constituting the cluster
1	<i>cháofèng</i>	<i>cháofèng</i> (嘲諷) ('[explicitly] ridicule') [0.247] <i>tiáokǎn</i> (調侃) ('[playfully] provoke') [0.180]
2	<i>jīfèng</i>	<i>jīfèng</i> (譏諷) ('ridicule') [0.158] <i>xìnuè</i> (戲謔) ('ridicule') [0.123] <i>qīngmiè</i> (輕蔑) ('make light of') [0.092]
3	<i>wākǔ</i>	<i>wākǔ</i> (挖苦) ('sarcasm') [0.151]

There are clearly close similarities between the collocational profile of *cháofèng* and *fèngcì*, so the main difference appears to be that *fèngcì* is arguably a more implicit form of “teasing ridicule”.

In the following excerpt, for instance, the participant emphasises that *fèngcì* may seem like a form of “joking” (*kāiwánxiào*) due to its more implicit delivery, but it nevertheless causes “discomfort” (*bùshūfú*) for the target due to it being ultimately a form of “ridicule”.

(3) [191010_I]

It sounds like a joke, however, it actually has an uncomfortable element in which the other party can hear that it is joking (*kāiwánxiào*) on the surface, but actually it is *fèngcì* which contains elements of uncomfortableness.

(聽起來像玩笑，但實際上會帶有不舒服的成分在裡面，對方可以聽得出來表面上是開玩笑，但其實是諷刺，帶有不舒服的成分在裡面)

Tǔcáo (吐槽) is a transliteration of term originally from Hokkien (*thuh-tshàu*) via Taiwanese (*Minnanhua*) into Mandarin Chinese usage in Taiwan (and increasingly in Mainland China). The first character, *thuh*, means to ‘disclose, expose’, while the second character, *tshàu* literally means ‘smelly’, but metaphorically stands for ‘shortcomings’ or ‘weakness’ in Hokkien. Notably, it invariably involves making fun of someone in front of an audience of some sort or another, and so can be regarded as somewhat analogous to the (North American) notion of ‘roasting’ (Test 1980; see also Dynel and Poppi 2019). The more “nipping” connotations of *tǔcáo* are apparent from the collocational profile that emerges from an analysis of the 7,380 occurrences of it in the zhTenTen17 Traditional Corpus. The results of that analysis are summarised in Table 4.

Table 4. Collocation profile of *tǔcáo*

	Cluster label	Words constituting the cluster
1	<i>tiáokǎn</i>	<i>tiáokǎn</i> (調侃) (‘[playfully] provoke’) [0.184] <i>cháofèng</i> (嘲諷) (‘[explicitly] ridicule’) [0.125]
2	<i>gǎntàn</i>	<i>gǎntàn</i> (感嘆) (‘sigh’) [0.146] <i>gǎntàn</i> (感歎) (‘sigh’) [0.134] <i>gǎnkài</i> (感慨) (‘feeling’) [0.116]
3	<i>chēngzàn</i>	<i>chēngzàn</i> (稱讚) (‘praise’) [0.146] <i>zànshǎng</i> (讚賞) (‘appreciate’) [0.101]

Tǔcáo appears to fall between “biting” (i.e. *cháofèng*) and “nipping” (i.e. *tiáokǎn*) forms of “teasing” (cluster 1). In addition, apart from being associated with outpouring of emotion (cluster 2), there is also an interesting association with “praising” and “appreciating” (cluster 3), which in this case appears to reflect the way in which *tǔcáo* may constitute an ironic form of “teasing flattery”.

According to the interviewees, *tǔcáo* is common practice where one jokingly points out the shortcomings of others, and makes a “big deal” of something relatively trivial for “fun”.

(4) [191010_I]

It is half joking (*kāiwánxiào*), half picking out shortcomings. Maybe it’s just about picking out shortcomings, making a big deal of it, and turning it into a joke. This is a way of socialising with others. When people are just chatting, then you *tǔcáo* to make fun, to make a big deal and joke about it. This can be a cultural practice of socialising... To be able to *tǔcáo*, it requires a certain degree of familiarity. If [you are] not familiar [with each other], you wouldn’t see it as *tǔcáo* but like *fèngcì*. If [people are] not familiar with each other or there is no rapport [between them], the interpretation will be different.

(半開玩笑半挑毛病的方式，或許只是挑毛病把它放大，然後當成一個笑話，這算是一個 social 的方式。沒話找話題製造娛樂效果，放大你講的東西，然後加以開玩笑，是一種文化上可做為 social 的方式.....吐槽要有一定認識程度，認識不夠的話，就不叫吐槽。沒有很熟聽起來就像諷刺，彼此若是不熟沒有默契，解讀就會不一樣。)

Notably, in the above excerpt, the participant also emphasises that this kind of “teasing” only occurs when there is some degree of familiarity between the producer and target of the “tease”.

Tiáokǎn (調侃) is composed of the characters *tiáo* (‘provoke’) and *kǎn* (‘cheerful, idle’). According to the Ministry of Education Dictionary (MOE 2015) it is interchangeable with *cháofèng* (嘲諷), *yéyú* (揶揄) or *wākǔ* (挖苦), meaning to ‘explicitly ridicule’, ‘play/fool/mess with’ or ‘speak sarcastically’, respectively. While it is related to other more biting terms for “teasing”, such as *cháofèng* and *fèngcì*, the somewhat playful connotations of *tiáokǎn* are

evident from the collocational profile that emerges from an analysis of the 3,669 occurrences of it in the zhTenTen17 Traditional Corpus. The results of that analysis are summarised in Table 5.

Table 5. Collocation profile of *tiáokǎn*

	Cluster label	Words constituting the cluster
1	<i>cháofēng</i>	<i>cháofēng</i> (嘲諷) ('explicit ridicule') [0.225] <i>fēngcì</i> (諷刺) ('implicit ridicule') [0.180]
2	<i>tǔcáo</i>	<i>tǔcáo</i> (吐槽) ('expose faults') [0.184]
3	<i>dǎqù</i>	<i>dǎqù</i> (打趣) ('fun') [0.176] <i>zìcháo</i> (自嘲) ('self-ridicule') [0.125]

While we can see some similarities with the collocational profiles of *cháofēng* and *fēngcì* (cluster 1), *tiáokǎn* is also closely associated with having “fun” at the expense of both others and self (cluster 2 and 3). It thus lies somewhere between “ridiculing” and “joking”, as attested in the following excerpt from one of the interviewees.

(5) [191914_M]

M: *Tiáokǎn* is a little bit joking (*kāiwánxiào*), but is also a little bit *fēngcì*. *Tiáokǎn* happens between people who are closer.

I: If you don't know them, then it is less likely [for *tiáokǎn* to occur]?

M: [Yes], less likely.

I: Why?

M: Because [people] are afraid of being misunderstood [if they are not close].

(M: 調侃帶有一點開玩笑，又有一點諷刺，調侃會出現比較親近的人之間。

I: 不認識的就比較不會嗎？

M: 比較不會。

I: 為什麼。

M: 因為覺得好像怕人家誤會。)

Once again, it is notable that the participant emphasises that this kind of “teasing” only occurs when there is some degree of familiarity between the producer and target of the “tease”, and that if they are not close it may be misunderstood as a more serious form of “teasing” (such as *fēngcì*) and thus cause offense.

The final term associated with “teasing” by the participants was *kāiwánxiào* (開玩笑), which is composed of three characters: *kāi* ('open'), *wán* ('play(ful)') and *xiào* ('laugh, smile'). According to the Ministry of Education Dictionary (MOE 2015), it means to *xìnuè* ('playfully ridicule') or *zhuōnòng* ('playfully fool/mess/toy with') someone through verbal remarks or

non-verbal conduct (以言語、動作來戲謔或捉弄人). The light-hearted, bonding nature of *kāiwánxiào* is reflected in the collocational profile that emerges from an analysis of the 7,012 occurrences of it in the zhTenTen17 Traditional Corpus. The results of that analysis are summarised in Table 6.¹⁰

Table 6. Collocation profile of *kāiwánxiào*

	Cluster label	Words constituting the cluster
1	<i>wánxiào</i>	<i>wánxiào</i> (玩笑) ('fun') [0.113]
2	<i>shuōhuàshí</i>	<i>shuōhuàshí</i> (說話時) ('when speaking') [0.099] <i>shuōdehuà</i> (說的話) ('words said') [0.065]
3	<i>tiáokǎn</i>	<i>tiáokǎn</i> (調侃) ('[playfully] provoke') [0.096]

Kāiwánxiào, perhaps not surprisingly given its etymology, has a somewhat different collocational profile from the other terms for “teasing” we have examined in this section, as it associated with talk or speech through which “jokes” are made (cluster 2). While it appears to have some overlap in some of its connotations with *tiáokǎn* (cluster 3), a notable characteristic of its collocational profile is its association with “fun” (cluster 1).

The primarily bonding function of *kāiwánxiào* was also apparent from descriptions of it by interviewees. In the following excerpt, for instance, the interviewee makes reference to the positive atmosphere created through *kāiwánxiào*.

(6) [191914_M]

[It is used when a person] wants to make the atmosphere better and resolve a lot of unpleasantness. It carries a relatively relaxed atmosphere.

(想要讓氣氛變好，化解很多的不愉快，帶有一些比較輕鬆的氣氛。)

In addition to emphasising the way in which this form of “teasing” can bring about a more “pleasant” atmosphere, the interviewees also noted that it can be not only other-directed, but self-directed as well, as can be seen in the following excerpt.

(7) [190126_G]

Kāiwánxiào is not necessarily about personal attack. You can also *kāiwánxiào* about yourself, just like you can *tiáokǎn* yourself, but you can't *fèngcì* yourself.

(開玩笑不一定會是做人身攻擊，你也可以對自己開玩笑，就像調侃你也可以調侃自己，但是你沒有辦法諷刺自己。)

Notably, it was also claimed by this interviewee that *tiáokǎn* can be directed at self as well, while *fèngcì* cannot.

¹⁰ In the case of *kāiwánxiào* we analysed occurrences of it in noun phrases rather than verb phrases, unlike the other five terms for “teasing”, as the connotations of *kāiwánxiào* were more readily tractable from an analysis of collocational profile of it in the former case.

The overall picture that emerges from a metalinguistic analysis of these terms is that they constitute a much more complex semantic field than can be represented by the simple linear continuum we initially outlined (i.e. from “biting” to “nipping” through to “bonding”). A semantic field or *Wortfeld* (Trier 1931; Ullmann 1962) refers to a structured set of conceptually related terms. Various kinds of relationships can hold between terms within a semantic field, including varying degrees of semantic similarity (synonymy) and opposition (antonymy), as well as semantic superordination (holonymy) and subordination (meronymy). In our analysis we have focused primarily on synonymic relationships between these metapragmatic labels (that is, the degree to which the labels occur in syntactically similar types of co-text).

Figure 1 broadly sketches some of the key relationships that appear to hold between them. In order to keep this figure tractable for the readers, we have only included the top three cluster labels for each term found in Tables 1-6, as well as the relationships between each of the key “teasing” terms when they are not listed as one of these top three cluster labels.¹¹ The aim of this figure is to broadly sketch how the metapragmatic labels broadly relate to each other for heuristic purposes. The actual connotations of each are, of course, much more complex than this, as we have seen in this section.

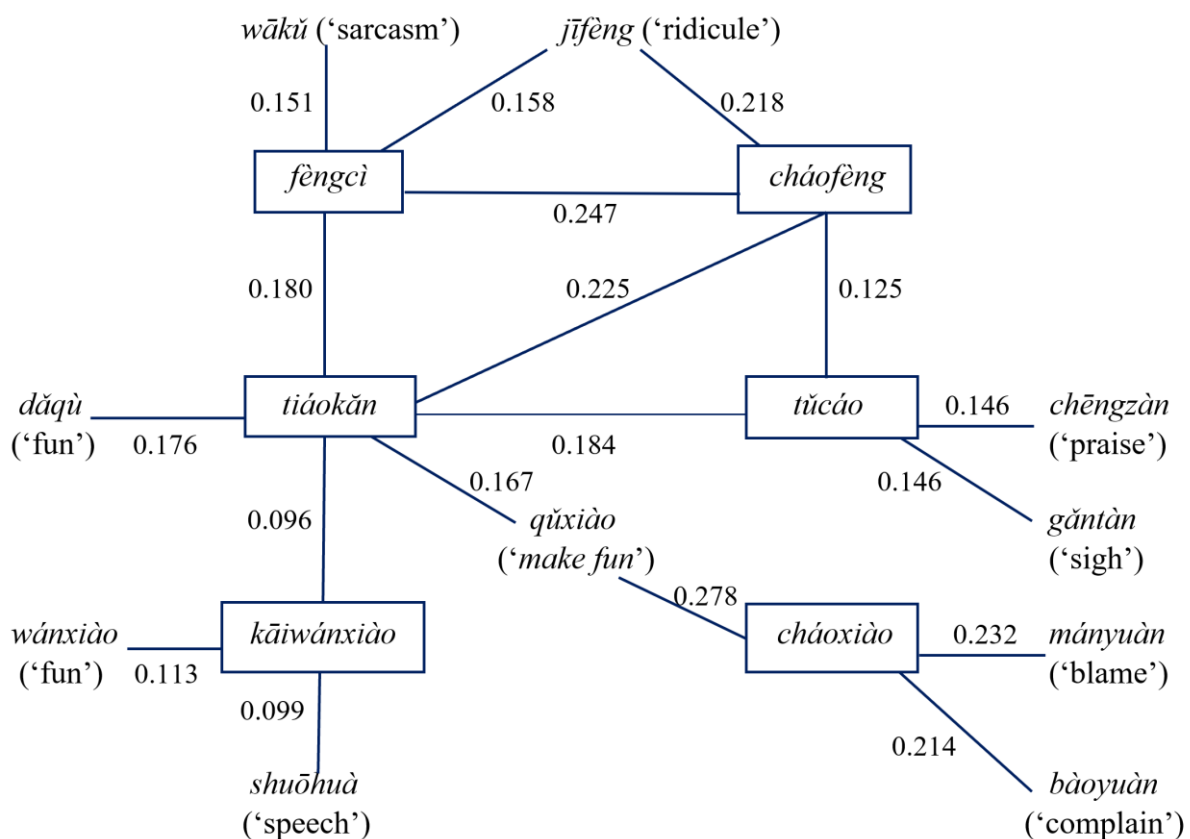


Figure 1. Collocational relationships between “teasing” terms in Mandarin Chinese.

One key finding that emerges from this analysis is that *tiáokǎn* appears to be an important anchor term within the semantic field for “teasing” terms in Mandarin Chinese. It is the only term that is conceptually linked with all of the other five key terms we have examined here. Plotting the position of individual terms within the semantic field for “teasing” is, of course, a

¹¹ The only exception to this is that we have added the fourth cluster label (*qǔxiào*, ‘make fun of’) in the case of *tiáokǎn* in order to show the putative link with *cháoxiào*.

much complex task than simply analysing the collocational profiles of terms, as it will become clear from our analysis of the interview data, in the following section, that we are dealing with a number of different underlying attributes of “teasing”. For that reason, there is no attempt to visually represent the strength of those relationships in Figure 1.

A second key finding is that there is considerable variation in the connotations of these six terms. The kinds of actions with which these different terms for “teasing” are associated varies. For instance, *cháoxiào* is associated with criticising, blaming, and complaining to others, *fèngcì* and *cháofèng* are associated with mocking others, especially through sarcasm, *tǔcáo* is associated with exposing the shortcomings of others (including through teasing flattery), and *kāiwánxiào* is associated with entertaining others. There are also different constraints on associated participation footings: while *tiáokǎn* and *kāiwánxiào* can be directed at both self and other, *cháoxiào*, *cháofèng*, and *fèngcì* can only be directed at others. There is also variation in the perceived affective responses of targets. For instance, *cháoxiào* and *fèngcì* are linked with feelings of discomfort, while *kāiwánxiào* is associated with generating good feelings in others. Finally, there is variation in the kinds of relationship associated with these different terms for “teasing”. It is claimed that *cháofèng*, *tiáokǎn*, and *tǔcáo* are only allowable in close relationships, for instance, while *cháoxiào* and *kāiwánxiào* may also arise in less intimate relationships (cf. Haugh 2017a).

A third key finding is that Boxer and Cortés-Conde (1997) continuum of “teasing from “biting” to “nipping” through to “bonding” appears to conflate two different, albeit inter-related dimensions: affective and relational. On the one hand, “teasing” can be perceived to lie on a valenced continuum with respect to affect, ranging from hostile or attacking through to non-hostile or friendly. On the other hand, “teasing” can be perceived to index different degrees of relational intimacy, ranging from close, long-term relationships through to non-intimate, passing relationships. One important consequence of this is that the use of a particular metapragmatic label (as opposed to another in that semantic field) to refer to or discuss a “teasing” event foregrounds different assumptions about the perceived affective and relational implications of that instance of “teasing”.

In the following section, we examine in more detail how different metapragmatic labels for “teasing” can be used by Taiwanese speakers of Mandarin Chinese to construe and evaluate the same “teasing” event in markedly different ways.

4. Metapragmatic labelling of “teasing” events

It is well established that the way in which we describe events shapes our perceptions of social reality, including aspects of social interaction. However, it is also clear that different languages offer different sets of metalinguistic resources that both afford and constrain ways of describing and evaluating interactional events. In the previous section, we saw that there are a variety of different labels for “teasing” available to speakers of Mandarin Chinese, which vary both in their individual connotations and in how they relate to each other. When talking about a “teasing” event, then, people have choices with respect to the metapragmatic labels they use to refer to that event, and by implication, the terms they have chosen not to use. In this section, we explore how two different “teasing” events were referred to by our group of 15 interviewees and the rationales they provided for their choice of label(s).

The first “teasing” event we asked the interviewees to discuss was taken from a recording between two female friends, Lin and Chen, who in the excerpt concerned are talking about a

recent shopping trip to a department store. Chen “teases” Lin over a series of turns that she buys more than she needs, and even suggests she can introduce her to a hospital for psychiatric treatment for her addiction to shopping. Lin responds with laughter and aligns with it as “teasing banter” through self-directed “mockery” and “counter-teases”.¹²

When asked what they thought of the interaction, 8 of the informants used a single metapragmatic label, 5 used two different labels, and 2 used three different labels to describe the “teasing” event. Amongst the informants who categorised the “teasing” event using a single metapragmatic label, 5 referred to it as *tiáokǎn*, 2 referred to it as *kāiwánxiào*, and 1 referred to it as *cháoxiào*. There were five different combinations of metapragmatic labels used by the remaining 7 informants: *tǔcáo/cháofèng* (1), *tiáokǎn/cháoxiào* (1), *tiáokǎn/tǔcáo* (1), *tiáokǎn/kāiwánxiào* (2), and *tiáokǎn/tǔcáo/kāiwánxiào* (2). Overall, then, the most frequently used label was *tiáokǎn* (7.66) followed by *kāiwánxiào* (3.66), then *tǔcáo* (1.66), *cháoxiào* (1.5), and *cháofèng* (0.5), as summarized in Figure 2.¹³

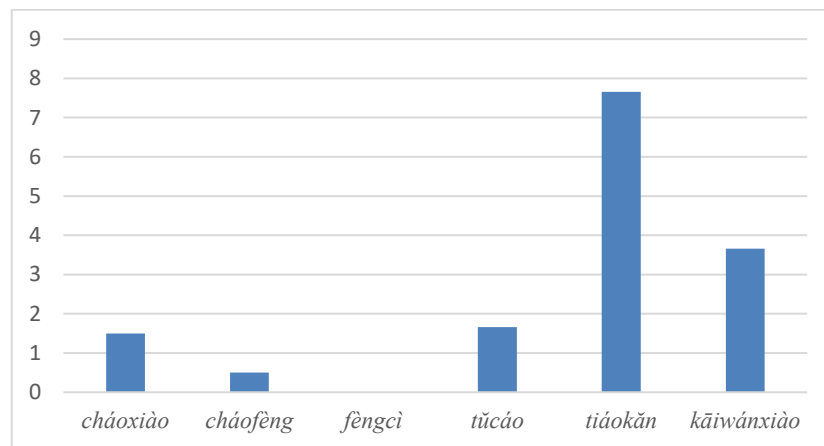


Figure 2. Use of metapragmatic labels with reference to “teasing” event 1.

An important point to note here, then, is that a wide range of different metapragmatic labels were used to talk about the same “teasing” event. A common theme that emerged, however, is that in providing rationales for their choice of metapragmatic label(s), the informants frequently made reference to their presumption that the two interactants are close.

In the following excerpt, for instance, the informant suggests that the use of relatively “intimidating” expressions is allowable when participants have known each other for a long period of time.

(8) [190501_T]

Tiáokǎn, it seems they know each other for a long time. [They are] allowed to use relatively intimidating expressions without getting angry.

(調侃，因為他們好像認識對方很久了，可以用一些比較 intimidating 的形容詞，他們也不會很生氣)

¹² See Haugh and Chang (2015: 403-405) for a more in-depth analysis of this excerpt.

¹³ To calculate these summative figures, we assigned 1.0 when a single label was used, 0.5 to each when two labels were used, and 0.33 to each when three labels were used.

A common theme amongst the informants was thus that the way in which this “teasing” event should be construed depends on the perceived relationship between those participants.

In the following excerpt, the informant claims it could be construed as either *tiáokǎn* or *cháofèng*, depending on how close the participants are. If the participants are close, she claims it would be a case of *tiáokǎn*, but if they are less close then it is a case of *cháofèng*. She concludes that they are probably close, and so it is an instance of *tiáokǎn* in this case.

(9) [190430_S]

Depending on their relationship, it could be *tiáokǎn* or *cháofèng*. If [they] *fèngcì* [each other], that means they don't value their relationship and it is fine to *sīpòliǎn* [reckless disregard each other's face]...I think *tiáokǎn* is not that “serious” and also [the people] can still maintain an amicable relationship. Looking at this conversation, I think they seem to be quite close. I think *tiáokǎn* is relatively less serious and hurtful. Sometimes moderate *tiáokǎn* makes people feel humorous.

(要看他們的關係，程度輕一點就是調侃，要不然就是嘲諷。如果用諷刺，就是好像不在乎他們朋友的關係，撕破臉都沒關係；諷刺有點尖酸刻薄...我覺得調侃的感覺就好像不那麼 serious，還可以保持原來的友好關係。看這個對話感覺他們很親密，我覺得調侃比較不那麼嚴重，比較不傷人，有時候適當的調侃，會讓人覺得有幽默感。)

The informant also mentions that it could only be construed as *fèngcì* if the participants were not invested in maintaining a relationship with each other, in which case the “teasing” would be regarded as a form of *sīpòliǎn* (lit. ‘tear face’), that is, attacking the “face” of the other. The informant also makes reference to affective dimensions of this “teasing” event in suggesting that the “teasing” here is “less serious and hurtful” and potentially “humorous”.

In other cases, the informants suggested that two or more labels could be legitimately applied to describe this “teasing” event. In the following excerpt, for instance, the informant suggests it could be construed as either *tiáokǎn* or *tǔcáo*. The rationale for choosing these two metapragmatic labels over *kāiwánxiào* is that it involves an attempt to “persuade” her friend (i.e. to shop less), and so is “slightly harsh”.

(10) [191914_M]

[It's] either *tiáokǎn* or *tǔcáo* because it sounds like she is persuading her friend but trying not to be direct. This is not *kāiwánxiào*. *Kāiwánxiào* is simply light-hearted which is not harsh. This is rather slightly harsh. *Tiáokǎn* sits between *kāiwánxiào* and *fèngcì*.

(調侃或是吐槽。因為好像他要勸他朋友，但又不敢真正得去勸。這不是開玩笑，開玩笑是純粹很輕鬆的，讓人家聽起來不會刺耳的，這個有一點刺耳...調侃是介於開玩笑跟諷刺之間。)

The claim that the “teasing” is not an instance of *kāiwánxiào* was, however, contradicted by other participants who claimed it was, at least in part, an instance of *kāiwánxiào*.

In the following excerpt, the informant claims it could be construed as either *tiáokǎn*, *tǔcáo* or *kāiwánxiào*. Notably a similar rationale is provided for this choice of labels to that of the

informant in excerpt (10), namely, this “blunt” (*zhǐjiē*) talk is allowable because they are very close friends.

(11) [190824_Y]

Tiáokǎn, *tǔcáo* and *kāiwánxiào*. It sounds like the relationship between them is very intimate. [They] sound like they are very good friends. Normally if I am a very close friend to you, I can talk bluntly, *tǔcáo* you on purpose or *tiáokǎn* you. If they are not familiar, they wouldn't talk like this. There would be more distance between. It sounds like they were quite happy without making others feel uncomfortable or hostile.

(調侃,開玩笑和吐槽,因為我覺得他們的關係看起來是很親密的,很好的朋友。通常我跟你是很親密的朋友,我講話就比較直接,會去故意吐槽你,會去調侃你,但是如果是比較不熟的,我們是不會這樣講話的,會比較有點距離...從他們的對話之間感覺到他們還蠻開心的,沒有讓人家覺得不舒服有敵意的感覺)

Once again, reference is also made to the affective dimensions of this “teasing” event, as the informant suggests it sounded like the participants are “quite happy” (*hái mán kāixīn*) and were not “uncomfortable” (*búshūfú*) or “hostile” (*dīyì*) with each other.

The second “teasing” event we asked the interviewees to discuss was taken from a recording between two male friends, Wang and Guo, who in the excerpt concerned are talking about what Wang said he overheard another friend, Huang, saying to a mutual female friend. Huang is reported as “teasing” the girl that her face looks swollen as if someone has beaten her up. After a brief digression Wang then reports that Huang compared her to a “floating corpse”, which generates considerable laughter on their part, as well as laughing comments that perhaps that friend had gone “too far” (Chang, Haugh & Su forthcoming).

When asked what they thought of the interaction, 9 of the informants used a single metapragmatic label and 5 used two different labels to describe the “teasing” event, while one informant opted out of categorising it. Amongst the informants who categorised the “teasing” event using a single metapragmatic label, 6 referred to it as *cháoxiào*, 2 referred to it as *cháofèng*, and 1 referred to it as *fèngcì*. There were five different combinations of metapragmatic labels used by the remaining informants: *cháoxiào/tǔcáo*, *cháoxiào/kāiwánxiào*, *cháofèng/kāiwánxiào*, *cháoxiào/cháofèng*, and *cháoxiào/fèngcì*. Overall, then, the most frequently used label was *cháoxiào* (8) followed by *cháofèng* (3), then *fèngcì* (1.5), *kāiwánxiào* (1), and *tǔcáo* (0.5), as summarized in Figure 3.

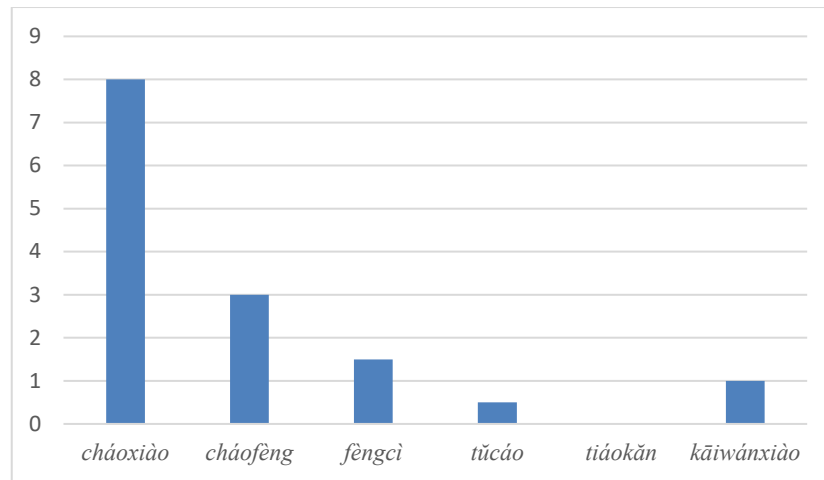


Figure 3. Use of metapragmatic labels with reference to “teasing” event 2.

An important point to note here is that once again a wide range of different metapragmatic labels were used to talk about the same “teasing” event. In providing rationales for their choice of metapragmatic label(s), the informants frequently claimed that “teasing” about someone’s appearance like that is inappropriate or unacceptable, and would upset or offend the target.¹⁴ In the following excerpt, for instance, the informant claims the “teasing” here is an instance of *cháoxiào* because it involves putting down or devaluing the target.

(12) [191501_Y]

Cháoxiào, because *xiào* means looking down on others. “How did you become so fat” has the meaning of putting down, devaluing others. Generally speaking, it could be considered *kāiwánxiào* but this has bad intention, even if this is not spoken in front of the target. It is just *kaiwanxiao* if it is not spoken to target’s face. When it is spoken in front of the target, it is quite hurtful because the description is too strong.

(嘲笑，因為笑有看輕別人的樣子，怎麼變得這麼胖，有貶抑，貶低人家的感覺，基本上也是開玩笑；但是帶有惡意的，可是這個沒有當著那個人的面講，所以不是當面的話是開玩笑。如果是當面就比較傷人，因為用詞太重。)

She notes that it might be construed as *kāiwánxiào*, but only if it were not directed at a co-present target (i.e. in joking about an absent third party). However, in this case it is *cháoxiào* because the description is “hurtful” (*shāng rén*) for the target and “too strong” (*tài zhòng*). Another informant claimed the “teasing” is *cháofèng* because it makes reference to a “floating corpse”, and would make the target “feel bad” (*bù hǎo de gǎnshòu*).

(13) [190430_S]

Cháofèng. It is not appropriate to describe another using [the term] “floating corpse”. There is a limit to *kāiwánxiào* even between good friends. This description makes people feel uncomfortable.

¹⁴ It is worthwhile noting that none of the informants raised the rather concerning gender dynamics at play in this “teasing” event.

(嘲諷，講人家是浮屍這個語詞不太恰當，就是好朋友開玩笑也要有個限度，這個詞讓人家不好的感受。)

She also claims there is “limit” (*xiàndù*) to what one can “joke about” (*kāiwánxiào*) even among good friends, and this instance “teasing” goes beyond that limit. One informant even described the “teasing” as “unbearable” (*shòu bùliǎo*) because it associates the target with death.

(14) [190901_C]

He is *fèngcì*. This is an unbearable joke. This description cannot be accepted in general. Generally speaking, [people] wouldn't associate death with others...How can [that person] use such an unbearable description.

(他是在諷刺，這是一個讓人受不了的玩笑。普遍來說不能接受他們這一個講法，一般來說不會去講人家跟過世的...怎麼可以用那麼讓人受不了的語句。)

However, while most of the informants construed the “teasing” as inappropriate and going too far, a small number of them claimed that it could also be construed as *tūcáo* or *kāiwánxiào*. In the following excerpt, for instance, the informant claims that while it seems closer to *cháoxiào* because it targets the girl's appearance, it might also be regarded as *kāiwánxiào*.

(15) [190126_G]

I think it's more about *cháoxiào* when [you] target someone's appearance...Although it might sound like *kāiwánxiào*, the person might get upset.

(我覺得講人家外表嘲笑比較多吧，雖然可能是開玩笑，可是對人家來講人家可能會不開心吧)

The informant notes that even if it were treated as *kāiwánxiào*, the target would likely be “upset” (*bù kāixīn*) by the “teasing”.

In sum, then, we have seen that the same “teasing” event can be referred to using a range of different metapragmatic labels that have quite different connotations. In talking about these “teasing” events the interviewees repeatedly invoked the affective response of the target and the presumed relationship between the producer and target of the “tease” as critical elements of the rationales for their choice of label(s). The variability we have seen in the ways in which native informants refer to and talk about the same “teasing” event makes clear that these different labels constitute an important metapragmatic resource. As these labels invoke different assumptions about the perceived affective and relational impact of particular “teasing” events, it means the seeds for discursive dispute about “teasing” events are built into the very metalanguage we use to describe them.

5. Implications for cross-linguistic studies of conversational humour

While the findings of this analysis are necessarily tentative, “teasing” appears to be conceptualised in complex ways by Taiwanese speakers of Chinese. Rather than defining

“teasing” in terms of the putative intentions of speakers (e.g. to wound or bond with the other), speakers of Chinese make situated distinctions based on the anticipated affective response(s) from targets of the “teasing”, as well as the relationship that is presumed to hold between the producer and target of the “teasing”. A second key finding was that different metapragmatic labels for “teasing” may be used to refer to the same “teasing” event. This variability in labelling situated instances of “teasing” is, in part, a function of how the target’s affective response and relationship with the producer is construed by the speaker doing the labelling. A theory of teasing should not, of course, elevate such lay terms to the status of theory as they are inherently discursive and so cannot be used in a scientifically rigorous manner to identify and analyse instances of teasing. However, a cross-linguistically valid theory of teasing must account for the way in which such terms constitute a resource for participants in conceptualizing and evaluating instances of teasing.

The aim of this paper has been to show how an analysis of the semantic field that underpins the conceptualisation and use of “teasing” terms amongst Taiwanese speakers of Mandarin Chinese amongst enables us to move beyond simple “working definitions” to a much more nuanced analysis of the kind of phenomena we are interested in. While straightforward working definitions in English may seem at first glance to make our object of analysis more tractable, it is clear from our analysis that such definitions also bleach out potentially important culturally salient meanings. Thus, although working definitions allow us a way to roughly identify potential phenomena for analysis or broadly identify analogous phenomena in the literature, they are not sufficiently precise for the purposes of analysis itself as they are invariably based on the conceptual toolkit of one language (usually English), which thereby distorts the object of analysis itself through (inadvertently) neglecting those indexical meanings that are culturally relevant to participants themselves. Such definitions also vastly underestimate the extent to which labelling a behaviour or practice is itself an action that is very often open to discursive dispute by participants. It is important to acknowledge in research about conversational humour that disputes about what to call things often lies at the very core of what it is we are studying. It is also apparent that studying and defining terms in isolation may neglect potentially important situationally relevant meanings. Metapragmatic studies of “teasing” in different languages are thus important for two key reasons. First, they allow us to identify phenomena without bleaching out their cultural properties. Second, they enable us to calibrate empirical studies and to undertake truly like-with-like comparisons of conversational humour across languages.

In sum, then, it is clear that we need to consider more carefully the terms we use in analysing “teasing” across different languages. There is further work to be done, however, in comparing the semantic fields of such ‘teasing’-related terms in different languages, as well as in examining potential regional variation in the use of related terms in the same language. More generally, in conversational humour studies we need to appreciate that our objects of analysis – behaviour or practices that are open to evaluation as humorous – are inevitably located within broader conceptual fields that confer meaning on that behaviour or practice. In undertaking research about conversational humour across languages and cultures we need to compare both our specific objects of research, along with the culturally salient conceptual fields within which they lie. In this way, then, we can push back against the constraints that the use of English as a scientific metalanguage places on our study of conversational humour across languages and cultures.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank both the reviewers for their very insightful comments on an earlier version of this paper. The research reported here was undertaken with support by a grant from the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation (RG029-P-25).

Appendix

Excerpt 1:

MSC of Taiwanese Mandarin: Shopping: 1:30¹⁵

- 1 L: 阿, 還蠻想逛街的, 雖然昨天才花了, 大失血, 呵呵呵
(ah, [I] really want to go shopping although [I] just spent a lot yesterday. Hehehe)
- 2 C: 哈哈, 可以不要, 不要再亂買了嗎?
(hahaha, can you not buy [any] unnecessary [things] again?)
- 3 L: 我也想啊!
(I want to [do so])
- 4 C: 真是的
(oh)
- 5 L: 對不起我爸。呵呵呵
(I feel sorry for my father. hehehe)
- 6 C: 對阿, 真覺得是那個耶, 敗家女。
(yeah, [I] really think that [you] are a shopaholic)
- 7 L: 屁啦, 你們還不是一樣。呵呵呵
(nonsense, you guys are the same. hehehe)
- 8 C: 唉, 我最近都沒有買東西耶, 省錢。
(I haven't shopped at all recently. [I'm] saving money)
- 9 L: 後火車站怎麼說?
(how do [you] explain the shopping in the Hou Train station?)
- 10 C: 後火車站誰買的比較多?
(who did the most shopping in the Hou Train Station?)
- 11 L: 哈哈
(hahaha)
- 12 C: 想到這個就很厲害。
(when [I] think of this, [I think you] are amazing)
- 13 L: 我也是逼不得已的。
(I'm compelled [to do it])
- 14 C: 你應該要看醫生吧?
(you should see a doctor)
- 15 L: 哈哈
(haha)
- 16 C: 幫你介紹精神病院。
([I can] help introduce you to a psychiatric hospital)
- 17 L: 要不然我們下次去士林, 士林感覺, 便宜, 然後
(otherwise we can go to Shilin next time, things are cheaper there and-)
- 18 C: 我覺得我要在你們身邊, 你們才不會亂買,
- 19 我昨天才離開你們半小時, 你們就買了快一萬, 呵呵呵
(I think I need to be [there] with you guys, so you won't buy unnecessary [stuff]. Yesterday I was only away for just thirty minutes and you guys almost spent \$10,000 NT dollars on

¹⁵ This excerpt is taken from the Multilingual Spoken Corpus (MSC) of Taiwanese Mandarin. The full recording and transcript is accessible at: http://www.coelang.tufts.ac.jp/multilingual_corpus/zt/.

- shopping, hahaha)
- 20 L: 呵呵呵，那下次去士林夜市好了。
(hehehe, then [let's] go to Shilin night market next time)
- 21 C: 哇靠，你們都不帶錢，你們差不多都跟我借。
(wow, you guys never bring [any] money, you guys almost always borrow [money] from me)
- 22 L: 你是我們的金主啊！
(you are our financial sponsor!)

Excerpt 2:

NCCU Taiwan Mandarin Corpus: m011: 14:30¹⁶

- 1 M2: 他那個時候我在路上就(..)于書婷(..)是誰把你打成這個樣子
(I was on the street- [and he asked her], "Yushuting who beat you up like this?")
- 2 M1: 哈哈
(hahaha)
- 3 M2: 快告訴我(..)然後
(quickly tell me- then)
((section omitted))
- 4 W: 就是泡在水裡面泡久了然後腫腫的那樣
(it's [like] soaking in the water for a long time)
- 5 G: 浮屍(..)哈哈，我剛以為你要講那種福(..)大大福神那種福師(..)福師
(floating corpse, hahaha, I thought you were going to say the big Lucky God¹⁷)
- 6 W: 不是啦
(no)
- 7 G: 結果是那個(..)浮屍
([and] it turns out [that you meant] floating corpse)
- 8 W: 剛剛那些話都是黃跟我講的
(it was said by Huang)
- 9 G: 哈哈
(hahaha)
- 10 W: 我覺得他真的很過分(..)黃
(I think Huang went too far)
- 11 G: 哈哈
(hahaha)
- 12 W: 說人家[是浮屍]
(describing her as a floating corpse)
- 13 G: 哈哈，真的是他講的嗎
(hahaha, was it really said by him?)
- 14 W: 對啊，真是要不得
(yes, it went too far)
- 15 G: 哈哈
(hahaha)
- 16 W: 哈哈
(hahaha)

¹⁶ This excerpt is taken from the NCCU Taiwan Mandarin Corpus. The full recording and transcript is publicly available at: <https://ca.talkbank.org/access/TaiwanMandarin.html>.

¹⁷ This is a reference to the Seven Lucky Gods where a full figure represents good fortune.

References

- Béal, C., & Mullan, K. (2013). 'Issues in conversational humour from a cross-cultural perspective: comparing French and Australian corpora', in C. Béal, K. Mullan, & B. Peeters (eds.), *Cross-culturally Speaking, Speaking Cross-culturally*, Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Press, pp. 107-140.
- Béal, C., & Mullan, K. (2017). 'The pragmatics of conversational humour in social visits: French and Australian English'. *Language and Communication* 55, pp. 25-42.
- Boxer, D., & Cortés-Conde, F. (1997). 'From bonding to biting: conversational joking and identity display'. *Journal of Pragmatics* 27, pp. 275-294.
- Chang, W., Haugh, M. & Su, H. (forthcoming). 'Taking it too far: the role of ideological discourses in contesting the limits of teasing and offence'. *Pragmatics*.
- Charmaz, K. (2000). 'Grounded theory: objectivist and constructivist methods', in N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, pp. 509-535.
- Culpeper, J., & Haugh, M. (2014). *Pragmatics and the English Language*. Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Davies, B. (2018). 'Evaluating evaluations: what different types of metapragmatic behaviour can tell us about participants' understandings of the moral order'. *Journal of Politeness Research* 14 (1), pp. 121-151.
- Dynel, M. (2017). 'Academics vs. American scriptwriters vs. academics: A battle over the etic and emic 'sarcasm' and 'irony' labels'. *Language and Communication* 55, pp. 69-87.
- Dynel, M., & Poppi, F. I. M. (2019). 'Risum teneatis, amici?: The sociopragmatics of RoastMe'. *Journal of Pragmatics* 139, pp. 1-21.
- Goddard, C. (2018). "'Joking, kidding, teasing': Slippery categories for cross-cultural comparison but key words for understanding Anglo conversational humour'. *Intercultural Pragmatics* 15 (4), pp. 487-514.
- Goddard, C., & Mullan, K. (2020). 'Explicating verbs for 'laughing with other people' in French and English (and why it matters for humour studies)'. *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research* 33, pp. 55-77.
- Haddington, P. (2011). 'Serious or non-serious? Sequential ambiguity and disavowing a prior stance'. *Functions of Language* 18 (2), pp. 149-182.
- Haugh, M. (2016). 'The role of English as a scientific metalanguage for research in pragmatics: Reflections on the metapragmatics of 'politeness' in Japanese'. *East Asian Pragmatics* 1 (1), pp. 39-71.
- Haugh, M. (2017a). 'Teasing', in S. Attardo (ed.), *Handbook of Language and Humour*, London: Routledge, pp. 204-218.
- Haugh, M. (2017b). 'Mocking and (non-)seriousness in initial interactions amongst American and Australian speakers of English', in D. Carbaugh (ed.), *Handbook of Communication in Cross-Cultural Perspective*, London: Routledge, pp. 104-117.
- Haugh, M. (2019). 'The metapragmatics of *consideration* in (Australian and New Zealand) English', in E. Ogiermann & P. G. Blitvich (eds.), *From Speech Acts to Lay Understandings of Politeness*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 201-225.
- Haugh, M., & Chang, W.-L. M. (2015). 'Understanding im/politeness across cultures: an interactional approach to raising sociopragmatic awareness'. *IRAL: International Review of Applied Linguistics* 53(4), pp. 389-414.
- Haugh, M., & Chang, W.-L. M. (2019). "'The apology seemed (in)sincere": variability in perceptions of (im)politeness'. *Journal of Pragmatics* 142, pp. 207-222.
- Haugh, M., & Pillet-Shore, D. (2018). 'Getting to know you: Teasing as an invitation to intimacy'. *Discourse Studies* 20 (2), pp. 246-269.

- Haugh, M., & Weinglass, L. (2020). “‘The great Australian pastime’”: pragmatic and semantic perspectives on *taking the piss*’, in K. Mullan, B. Peeters, & L. Sadow (eds.), *Studies in Ethnopragmatics, Cultural Semantics, and Intercultural Communication*, Singapore: Springer, pp. 95-117.
- Hubler, A., & Bublitz, W. (2007). ‘Introducing metapragmatics in use’, in W. Bublitz & A. Hubler (eds.), *Metapragmatics in Use*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins, pp. 1-26.
- Jakobson, R. (1971). *Word and Language*. The Hague: Mouton.
- Jakubiček, M., Kilgarriff, A., Kovář, V., Rychly, P. & Suchomel V. (2013). ‘The TenTen corpus family’. *7th International Corpus Linguistics Conference (UCREL)*, Lancaster University, 22-26 July.
- Kilgarriff, A., Rychly, P., Smrz, P., & Tugwell, D. (2004). ‘The Sketch Engine’. *EURALEX Conference*, Lorient, France.
- Krippendorff, K. (2013). *Content Analysis: An Introduction to its Methodology* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Ku, K., Ho, S., Chan, E., Chik, M., & Chan, D. (2016). ‘Chinese translation and psychometric testing of the humour styles questionnaire children version (C-HSQC) among Hong Kong Chinese primary-school students’. *The European Journal of Humour Research*, 4 (3), pp. 61-75.
- Lin, D. (2008). ‘Automatic retrieval and clustering of similar words’. *International Conference on Computational Linguistics and the Association for Computational Linguistics (COLING-ACL)*, Montreal, Canada.
- Manser, Martin H. (2010). *Oxford Chinese Dictionary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- MOE (2015). *Ministry of Education Dictionary*. Taipei: Ministry of Education.
- Mullan, K., & Béal, C. (2018). ‘Conversational humor: forms, functions and practices across cultures’. *Intercultural Pragmatics* 15 (4), pp. 451-456.
- Norrick, N. (1993). *Conversational Joking. Humour in Everyday Talk*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Norrick, N., & Chiaro, D. (eds.). (2009). *Humour in Interaction*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Pratt, S. B. (1996). ‘Razzing: ritualised uses of humour as a form of identification among American Indians’, in H. B. Mokros (ed.), *Interaction and Identity*, New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, pp. 237-255.
- Schiefflin, B. B. (1986). ‘Teasing and shaming in Kaluli children’s interactions’, in B. B. Schiefflin & E. Ochs (eds.), *Language Socialization Across Cultures*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 165-181.
- Silverstein, M. (1993). ‘Metapragmatic discourse and metapragmatic function’, in J. A. Lucy (ed.), *Reflexive Language: Reported Speech and Metapragmatics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 33-58.
- Sinkeviciute, V. (2017). ‘‘It’s just a bit of cultural [. . .] lost in translation’: Australian and British intracultural and intercultural metapragmatic evaluations of jocularity.’ *Lingua* 197, pp. 50-67.
- Sinkeviciute, V., & Dynel, M. (2017). ‘Approaching conversational humour culturally: a survey of the emerging area of investigation’. *Language and Communication* 55, pp. 1-9.
- Test, G. (1980). ‘The roast: American ritual satire and humour’, in R. Browne (ed.), *Rituals and Ceremonies in Popular Culture*, Bowling Green Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, pp. 160-177.
- Trier, J. (1931). *Der deutsche Wortschatz im Sinnbezirk des Verstandes: Die Geschichte eines sprachlichen Feldes: Vol. 1. Von den Anfängen bis zum Beginn des 13. Jahrhunderts*. Heidelberg: Winter.

- Ullman, S. (1962). *Semantics: An Introduction to the Science of Meaning*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Verschueren, J. (1985). *What People Say They Do With Words: Prolegomena to an Empirical-Conceptual Approach to Linguistic Action*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Verschueren, J. (2000). 'Notes on the role of metapragmatic awareness in language use'. *Pragmatics* 10 (4), pp. 439-456.