

Mandarin Sentence-Ending Modal Particles and Their Relationship with Teenage Hobby Groups

Anqi Wu^{1*}, Xinyi Fu², Daiqi Jiang³

¹*China University of Petroleum (Beijing) at Karamay, Karamay, China*

²*Chongqing No.1 Middle School, Chongqing, China*

³*University of California SD, USA*

**Corresponding Author. Email: 438156668@qq.com*

Abstract: This paper investigates the disparities in the usage of modal expressions with different group chats that target separate hobbies. Although previous studies have characterized the role modal particles play within language barriers and semantic studies, none have presented any relation between the syntactic distinctions of sentence-ending expressions and the interests of a young adult. These distinctions play a large portion of determining a speaker's attitude and tone, often dictating the flow of the conversation. Small indications by the usage of Chinese modal expressions are crucial for cross-linguistic exchanges and maintain an essential understanding of the context of a certain situation. Modal particles are unique such that the particles can rarely be grammatically categorized, ranging from adverbs to auxiliaries. Its dynamic nature has wondrous properties in reflecting dimensions of tone. Scrutinizing the nature of semantic organization and the source to utilizing modal particles within diverse interest groups implicates new beginnings to comprehend the degree that these tiny, vital expressions are subject-oriented.

Keywords: modality, particle, categorization, hobby

1. Introduction

Modal particles are unique such that the particles can rarely be grammatically categorized, ranging from adverbs to auxiliaries. Its dynamic nature has wondrous properties in reflecting dimensions of tone, especially in Mandarin Chinese [1]. Because of China's ancient history of linguistic miracles and prodigies such as the great poets Lǐ Bái (*pronounced "Li Bye"*) and Dù Fǔ (*pronounced "Tu foo"*), modal particles have become a large chunk of evocative sentences. Many thoughtful insights are integrated into merely two or three modal particles. Poets, through small particles can transmit essays of meaning by throwing up their enquires for interpretation. Different modal expressions could alter the entire sentiment of the piece, which separated the good from the great [2]. By combining heavy rhythm with a correct usage of modal particles, ancient Chinese literature sparked new phonetic forms that yielded Chinese poems to be one of the most sacred and studied. sections of early artistic literature. Now, modal particles serve to dictate our tone within conversations [3]. Thus, it becomes natural to wonder the depths of modal particles and its ways to diversify dialogues under different interest-centered contexts. Many Chinese modal particles have been researched about the factors that influence the usage of it which includes different gender, different groups of age and different jobs [4].

This paper investigates the disparities in the usage of modal expressions with different group chats that target separate hobbies. We want to see whether there is a kind of connection existing that people with different hobbies will use modal particles in different ways. In this work, teenagers are chosen to be in the different research group with different hobbies which are group of anime-lovers, group of idol fans and the control group from WeChat, which is a new way we decided to try to use to collect data. We choose three common modal particles- “NA” “HA” and “NIE”, which are all used in the end of the sentences with no specific meanings. We collected the times of using the three modal particles and made diagrams to compare the difference. Additionally, a questionnaire is made to supplement our data. So, this paper will supplement and provide a new direction to the research about using modal particles.

2. Literature review

Modal Particles already had a varying definition between modern researchers. Lyons described particles as are elements of speech within a grammatical structure that can indicate meaning and add emotion. Some also defined modal particles as the "grammaticalization of speakers' attitudes and opinions". Thus, the construction of their definition ultimately decided their research composition, most of them either focusing on interpretation or distribution aspects of data.

For instance, XuHui, a student researcher contributing to the *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research* at the IIESASM conference accumulated teaching methods along with Chinese modal particles. Her prediction centered on the flaw in the teachings of modal particles with Chinese as a foreign language because modal expressions were difficult to absorb but crucial to lingual dexterity. Therefore, teachers often utilized inefficient loopholes to bypass modal particles. XuHui solidified her results using surveys and the special analysis in the design of student exercises.

Many other researchers wanted interpretation to be their main chord of enquiry such as Lin and Ko. A prime example of this is investigating how the order of matter within either a finite or a non-finite context. Some scholars also utilize descriptive analysis to produce systematic reviews of data to reach more accurate conclusions. Others employ questionnaires and surveys to examine the semantic properties of particles depending on age.

There always exists diverse approaches to tackling modality that led to unique comprehensions. The tip of the scale lies on which road to take, and which connections between experience, usage, and linguistic backgrounds to string together [5].

3. Materials and methods

3.1. Data collected from WeChat groups

3.1.1. Process of collecting the data

Teenagers between 16-22 come from three kinds of groups including group of anime-loves, group of idol fans and the control group which are active like each other. Also, every group has around 500 people. The times of using the three modal particles come from the recording of the messages in the group with the limitation that the messages are all from the recent two months. And the total information is limited through calculating the data memory. Usually, 1mb is equal to 200-300 pieces of information so we limit the data memory of every group to 800mb. Finally, several diagrams are made to show our data [6].

3.1.2. Advantages of the method

Through this kind of method, it could be seen that people use modal particles in a natural environment without any external influencing factors which will make the data collected more objective. And the total amount of information is a large number for researchers to choose if there is enough technological support. In the same time, it allows researchers to be part of the group to deeper the understanding of our research.

3.1.3. Limitations

There are several limitations of technology: the total pieces of information cannot be calculated directly so it is turned into data memory to control. Next research could use new technology to calculate it again.

There are also several subjective factors which are difficult to control: It is necessary to make sure that the amount of group members, the period of information and the motivation of group member to speak on a daily basis remain a similar level.

3.2. Questionnaire

3.2.1. To supplement our research data

Because there are several factors which are difficult to control in our group data collection, a questionnaire is supplemented to support our data. The questionnaire could help us to collect specific data that the research needed, however, there may be some subjective factors that influence the final answer.

3.2.2. Questions and answers

We set several questions to make others choose the answer they prefer. It could be divided into three parts including choosing the group you belong to, choosing the answer you prefer to use in the specific context and choosing the emotions that the modal particles carried.

3.2.3. The distribution and collection

The questionnaire is sent to the three kind of group that we selected, which are group of anime-lovers, group of idol fans and the control group. All the limitations of the groups are the same to our group data collection. There was total 221 members participated in the questionnaire survey. And the final data was collected and analyzed in several diagrams.

3.2.4. Questionnaire survey

a) Question 1: Which group do you belong to?

In the analysis of different interest groups, it was found that the proportion of respondents of idol fans was the highest, accounting for 41.63%, which was slightly higher than that of the anime-lovers group (40.72%). The ratio of the two is similar, showing that in the distribution of young people's interests, idol fans and anime-lovers also have a relatively wide range of appeal. The proportion of those who chose not to belong to these two groups was significantly lower, accounting for only 29.86%, indicating that idol fans and anime-lovers constituted the main part of young people's interests, and the influence of other interests was relatively weak.

b) Question 2: Please choose an answer you prefer to use: Xiao Wang went to donate blood again

According to the data table, the option "He's such a helpful person NA." The number of people who chose was 34, accounting for 51.52%, and "He was such a helpful person." The number of respondents was 32, accounting for 48.48%. The ratio of the number of people choosing the two options is relatively close, but there is still a slight difference.

c) Question 3: Please choose the answer you prefer to use: Remember to eat fruits everyday which is helpful to your health

According to the data table, there is no obvious bias in the selection of options, and the proportion of choices for both options is the same, which is 50%. The number of people who answered "Ok, I know it HA " and "Ok, I know it" were the same.

d) Question 4: Please choose the answer you prefer to use: Shall we leave now?

According to the data table, in response to the question "Shall we go now?" Choose, "Wait a minute. There is still someone missing NIE " And " Wait a minute. There is still someone missing." "Both options were selected an equal number of times, 50 percent each.

e) Question 5: Please choose the answer you prefer to use: Please give some opinions about my new doll

According to the data table, most people chose "The doll is lovely NIE.", accounting for 93.33%, while a few people chose " The doll is lovely.", accounting for only 6.67%.

f) Question 6: Please choose the answer you prefer to use: I want to buy this kind of medal, is there someone who want to sale it?

According to the data table, 65.56% of people chose "I do, who want it could add me NA.", while 34.44% chose " I do, who want it could add me."

g) Question 7: Please choose the answer you prefer to use: Do I need to buy a new ticket for the day after tomorrow 's Comic-Con if I lost my paper ticket

According to the data table, most people chose "You needn't HA, it's okay for you to use E-ticket.", accounting for 76.67%, while the number of people who chose " You needn't, for you to use E-ticket." accounted for 23.33%

h) Question 8: Please choose the answer you prefer to use: I want to collect the beautiful photos of the idol; is there someone could share it with me?

According to the data table, 77.17% of them chose "I can send to you HA.", and 22.83% chose " I can send to you."

i) Question 8: Please choose the answer you prefer to use: There is a new member joined your group, you want to say something to welcome her

According to the data table, most people chose the option of "Welcome to join us, in this group we have been a family NA.", accounting for 76.09%, while the proportion of people who chose " Welcome to join us, in this group we have been a family." was 23.91%

j) Question 9: Please choose the answer you prefer to use: Has everyone seen the new stage that our idol joined recently?

According to the data table, most people chose the option of "I have seen it, she is beautiful NIE.", accounting for 82.61%, while the number of people who chose "I have seen it, she is beautiful." is small, accounting for only 17.39%.

k) Question 10: How often do you use the modal particle in the social media?

According to the data table, most people (60.18%) often use modal particles on social media, while 31.67% use modal particles sometimes. Relatively speaking, the proportion of people who rarely use modal particles and never use modal particles is relatively low, at 7.69% and 0.45% respectively.

l) Question 11: Which modal word do you like to use the most?

According to the data table, the most popular modal particle used by the respondents is "HA", accounting for 67.42%, followed by "NIE" accounting for 20.36%, and the least popular is "NA" accounting for 12.22%.

m) Question 12: Which feelings are carried by NA, what do you think of it?

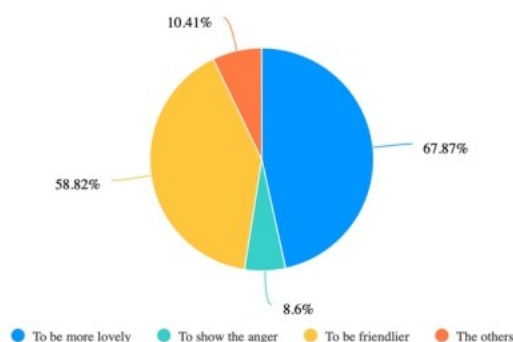


Figure 1: Statistical chart of the proportion of feelings that respondents think the modal particle "NA" expresses

According to figure 1, we obtained, 67.87% of the respondents thought it was a cute expression, 58.82% thought that using "NA" would make the conversation more friendly, 8.6% of the respondents thought that "NA" conveyed angry feelings, and 10.41% thought that there were other emotions.

n) Question 13: Which feelings are carried by HA, what do you think of it?

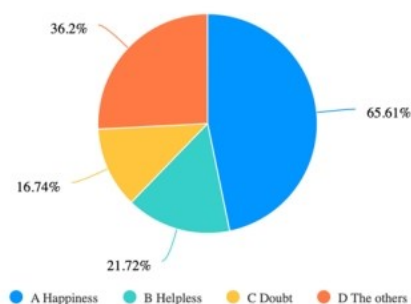


Figure 2: Statistical chart of the proportion of feelings that respondents think the modal particle "HA" expresses

According to figure 2, 65.61% of the respondents believed that the emotion expressed by "Ha" was happy, 21.72% of the respondents thought that it was a tone of helplessness, 16.74% of the respondents believed that "Ha" expressed the emotion of doubt, and 36.2% of the respondents believed that "Ha" had other meanings.

o) Question 14: Which feelings are carried by NIE in the end of sentences, what do you think of it?

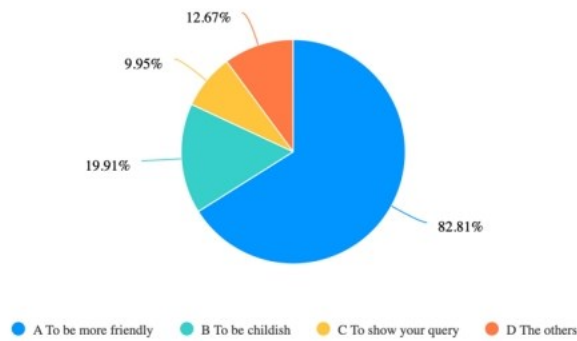


Figure 3: Statistical chart of the proportion of feelings that respondents think the modal particle "NIE" expresses

According to figure 3, 82.81% of the respondents believe that the use of "NIE" at the end of the sentence can increase the friendliness of the tone, accounting for the largest proportion. 19.91% of the respondents thought that this was a childish expression, 9.95% of the respondents believed that the use of "NIE" was expressing doubt, and 12.67% of the respondents believed that "NIE" conveyed other emotions.

p) Question 15: What kind of situation will you use modal particles?

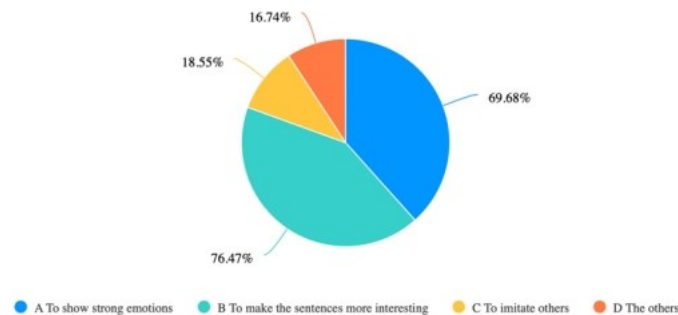


Figure 4: Statistical graph of the situation in which the respondent uses modal particles

Figure 4 shows that 76.47% of the respondents use modal particles in daily chats to increase the interest of chatting, 69.68% think that this is a way to express strong emotions, and 18.55% of the respondents are influenced by others to imitate, and 16.74% of the respondents think that there are other situations where they will use modal words.

3.2.5. Observational method of chat-group

a) Group of Anime-lovers and Control Group Without Specific Hobbies

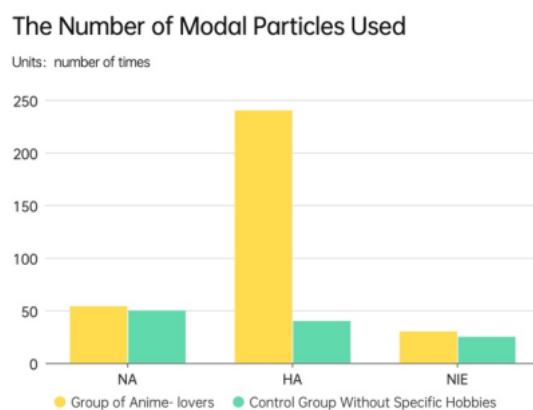


Figure 5: Comparison chart of the use of modal particles by group of anime-lovers and group without specific hobbies

In figure 5, the yellow part, which represents anime-lovers, is higher than the green part in terms of the total. Among them, the use of the modal word "HA" reached 240 times, which is significantly higher than the use of "HA" in group chats without special hobbies. In addition, there is little difference in the frequency of the use of the modal particles "NIE" and "NA" in the two group chats.

b) Group of Idol Fans and Control Group Without Specific Hobbies

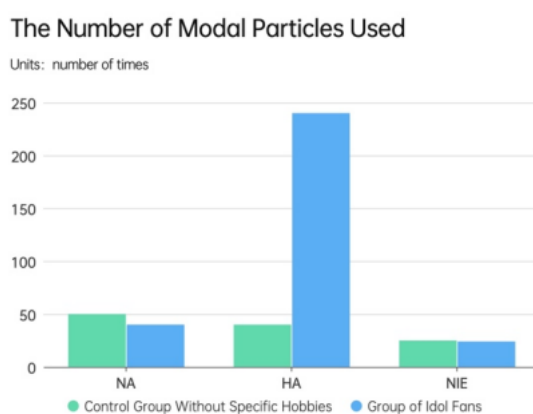


Figure 6: Comparison chart of the use of modal particles by group of idol-fans and group without specific hobbies

Figure 6 is a comparison chart of the number of times idol-fans and people without specific hobbies use the modal particles in a group chat. Looking at the image as in the first chart, idol fans are more inclined to use "HA" at the end of the sentence as modal particles. The other two modal particles, "NIE" and "NA", are also not used very frequently.

c) Group of Anime-lovers and Group of Idol Fans

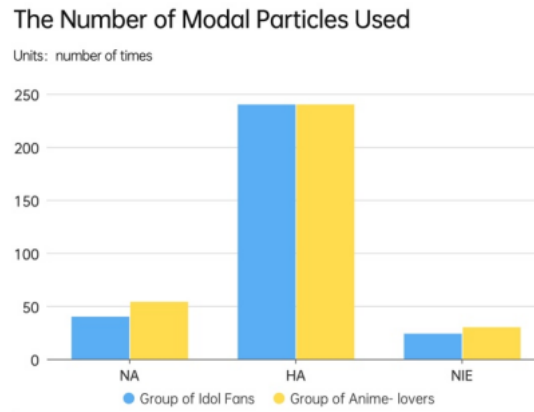


Figure 7: Comparison chart of the use of modal particles by group of idol-fans and group of anime-lovers

Figure 7 compares the use of modal particles in group chats between anime-lovers and idol fans. Looking at the blue and yellow sections, it can conclude that the people in the two group chats use the same frequency of modal particles "HA" and in much higher numbers than the other two modal particles. Similarly, there is not much difference in the frequency of use of "NIE" and "NA".

d) Group of Anime-lover, Group of Idol Fans and Control Group Without Specific Hobbies

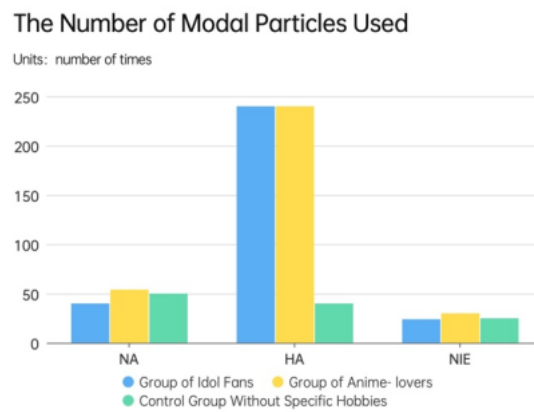


Figure 8: Comparison chart of modal particles used by groups of anime-lovers, idol fans, and groups without specific hobbies

Figure 8 is a statistical chart of group chat data for idol fans, anime-lovers, and people without specific hobbies. Judging from the total number, "HA" is still the most frequently used modal particle, especially in the two groups of anime-lovers and idol fans.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Descriptive statistics results

- 1) Among the surveyed groups, idol fans are slightly predominant, accounting for 41.63%, closely followed by anime lovers at 40.72%.
- 2) Over 60% of respondents reported using modal particles frequently, underscoring the importance of these particles in informal communication.
- 3) "HA" is the most used modal particle with a significant 67.42% preference among respondents.

4.2. Proportion analysis results

- 1) Modal particles significantly influence preference for specific expressions, as evidenced by the majority selecting options with "HA", indicating its infectiousness and universality [7].
- 2) When asked about welcoming new members to a group, participants preferred more intimate and inclusive expressions, possibly reflecting a desire to establish close ties within the group.

4.3. Group comparison results

- 1) Idol fans exhibit a stronger preference for sentences with modal particles, especially in group activities and discussions related to supporting idols.
- 2) Anime lovers show a similar preference for modal particles, but with a focus more on personal interest and cultural exchange, possibly influenced by their communication contexts and content.

4.4. Discussion of the result

- 1) There is obvious difference existing in the times of using modal particle- “HA” between groups with hobby and group without hobby. Also, the number of using this modal particle is more than the other two.
 - Anime-lovers group share a kind of atmosphere of relaxation and happiness. People here use "HA" as a symbol of anime culture which could also be seen a specific language to enhance the sense of fun and intimacy when they communicate in specific anime context.
 - Idol fans groups usually share a kind of emotion --the love, admiration and support to their idol. They use “HA” to make the distance between idol and fans shorter and make the whole atmosphere of the group friendlier and more unity so that the fans could express their love to idol naturally [8].
 - The modal particle "HA" is a common Chinese character with flexible usages so that it is widely accepted by a large number of people with no limitation of hobbies and it has been given many new meanings especially through the internet [9].
 - Usually, people tend to keep some similarities in the communication in the same group on the internet so that they could express opinions or ideas toward the specific topics, which means people will try to keep and even protect the atmosphere of their communication especially when they have a same hobby [10].
- 2) There is not obvious difference existing in the comparison of "NA" and "NIE" among the three groups. The total times of using the two particles are relatively less.
 - The modal particle- “NIE” is usually used by specific regions like Nanning, China. Also, this modal particle is often used in very specific context so, it has a relatively small number of audiences.
 - The modal particle-"NA" is often be seen as a kind of symbol of girls with meanings of loveliness which also make it not a frequent modal particle for everyone to use in this stage. (16-22)

Limited to time and number of people, the total amount of information and groups are not plentiful enough.

5. Conclusion

This research found that different contexts under different habits will influence the frequency of using the three modal particles. Generally, groups of anime-lovers and idol fans use “HA” and “NA” more than the control group while there are no obvious differences of “NIE”. And among the three modal

particles, “HA” is used the most and “NIE” is the least. Being in different groups of hobbies does have influence on how to use modal particles according to the data.

The research chooses about total 200 people to collect information from the questionnaire on the internet, which has the influence from the specific contexts given by research. If conditions permit, the researchers could organize more people to communicate with them which will help collect information in more natural condition to make the result more accurately.

The result is basically based on our questionnaire. It tried to collect the using times of modal particles and the specific contexts from WeChat directly but did not finish because of the limitations of technology, however, with high skills of technology, the first method could be tried again. There is necessary to control and calculate the accurate total amount of all the information. With so many subjective factors existing in different groups, target groups with different hobbies could be formed by researchers to control if time and condition permitting. Next stage the research could expand the amount of target people to enlarge the practice of this research. At the same time, new research could target more different hobbies like sports or painting or music to see whether there are any differences in using modal particles. Also, this research is mainly about “NA” “HA” “NIE”, more other modal particles could be pay attention to in the future.

References

- [1] Chomsky, Noam. 2001. *Derivation by Phase*. In Kenstowicz, Michael J. (ed.), *Ken Hale: A life in language*, 1–52. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. Google Scholar
- [2] Hsieh, I.-T. Chris. 2004. *Genericity and adverbial quantification: From a Chinese perspective*. Masters thesis, National Tsing Hua University. Google Scholar
- [3] Hacquard, Valentine. 2006. *Aspects of modality*. Ph.D. dissertation, MIT. Google Scholar
- [4] Hui Feng. *The Research of Gender Differences in Using Modal Particles At the End of Sentences* [D]. Ocean University .2015.
- [5] Landau, Idan. 2000. *Elements of control*. Dordrecht: Kluwer. CrossRefGoogle Scholar
- [6] Lin, T.-H. Jonah. 2006. *Complement-to-specifier movement in Mandarin Chinese*. Ms., National Tsing Hua University. Google Scholar
- [7] Barker, T.H., Migliavaca, C.B., Stein, C. et al. *Conducting proportional meta-analysis in different types of systematic reviews: a guide for synthesisers of evidence*. *BMC Med Res Methodol* 21, 189 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12874-021-01381-z>
- [8] Shiqiu Zhao. *Study on Common Words of Fan Group Network*[D]. Hubei University Of Technology.2020.
- [9] Runfeng Cheng. *Unity and Variation: Form, Meaning and Function of Modal Particle “HA” —and Discussi on About the Use of Modal Particles on the Internet*[J]. *Central State University Newspaper*,2023,40(03):98 105.10.13783/j.cnki.cn411275/g4.2023.03.015.
- [10] Lei Zhu. *Research on Topic Discovery of Internet Group Information Based on Interactive Behavior*[D]. Nanjing University of Science and Technology,2020.DOI: 10.27241/d.cnki.gnjgu.2019.000174