

Research Article

A Meta-Representational Analysis of Echo Utterances in Chinese Complaint Hotline Interactions

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Abstract

Based on the notion of meta-representation proposed by Sperber & Wilson, this study analyzes echo utterances in Chinese complaint hotline interactions, categorizing them into quotative and reconstructive echoes. Quotative echoes, relying on metalinguistic resemblance, involve the literal reproduction of prior speech and are used predominantly by customers to voice moderate, within-framework resistance. In contrast, reconstructive echoes, based on interpretive resemblance, fundamentally reset the cognitive framework of the talk and serve as a deep intervention strategy. The choice and function of these echo strategies are fundamentally shaped by the power dynamics inherent in the institutional setting. Customers, typically in low-power positions, employ quotative echoes to tentatively resist proposed solutions and highlight procedural-personal disconnects, while strategically using reconstructive echoes to overturn the epistemic framework of the talk into a deontic one, thereby moralizing their complaint. Conversely, agents, positioned within the institutional authority, overwhelmingly use reconstructive echoes to systematically convert customers' personalized, emotional narratives into neutral, technical, and solution-oriented terms. This discursive process institutionalizes the complainable and functions to naturalize existing power relations. Ultimately, this meta-representation perspective elucidates how the very nature of the complainable is not pre-formed but negotiated through a continuous struggle between personal experience and institutional procedure. The study concludes that effective complaint resolution hinges on this dynamic interplay, achieving a balance between procedural justice and the acknowledgment of humane needs.

Keywords

Complaint Hotline Interactions, Echo Utterances, Meta-representation, Quotative Echoes, Reconstructive Echoes, Institutional Discourse

1. Introduction

“Utterances which repeat as a whole or in part what has been said by another speaker” [1], is referred to as an echo

utterance, as illustrated in Excerpt (1), where the lexical item “疑问”(doubts) in Line 1 is repeated in Line 2:

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Table 1. Excerpt (1).

1	Agent:	但是就是说您可能关于这一块还是有一些疑问，就是说我 But it seems that you still have some doubts regarding this matter, so I
2	Customer:	不是疑问，疑问，我有什么疑问？ Not about doubts. Doubts, what doubts do I have?

Complaint hotline interactions are *in situ* practices where the customers and the customer service agents (hereafter referred as agents) negotiate to make complainables explicit in a certain form [2]. Complaints are of constitutive and negotiated nature and are shaped by interactional contingencies, such as how the trouble is described, how the agents respond to or affiliate to the customers [3]. For instance, a “well”-prefaced answer acknowledges the complainability in advance and can forestall overt complaints by showing awareness of the problem before the customer voices [4]. Echo utterances contribute little to the propositional content. But its repetitive features make it natural linguistic resources for negotiation, as to repair, register receipts or manage the topics of the interactions [5]. Then how do echo utterances inform the shaping of the complaints? How do the strategies of using echo utterances differ between customer service agents and complainants? How do these differences reflect power dynamics in institutional discourse? These questions are central to this study. Based on the authentic complaint hotline data, this research examines echo utterances from the perspective of meta-representation, aiming to identify the specific grammatical forms of echo utterances in the complaint hotline interactions, and gain insight into the cognitive mechanisms and power dynamics underlying the patterns of echo usage. Consequently, this study employs the theoretical lens of meta-representation to investigate how these repetitive acts function as strategic tools in the negotiation of complaints and power.

2. Echo Utterances: Features and Functions

Echo utterances, defined as repetitions of prior utterances [1], are generally categorized into two types. The first is a narrow “formal repetition,” involving the exact or partial replication of a prior turn’s grammatical and lexical structure [6, 7]. The second is a broader “independent repetition,” which permits modifications to the original form while retaining its core logical and semantic meaning [8, 9]. A key characteristic of both types is the recurrence of linguistic elements from a previous speaker’s turn.

Within the sequential organization of conversation, echo utterances operate as core components of Turn Construction Units [2]. They typically occur at Turn Relevance Places [2],

functioning as a key resource for turn management. Recent research on Chinese interactional data highlights their role in facilitating smooth turn transitions, and in sequential extension [8, 10, 11].

Echo utterances deal with the non-truth-conditional elements of the prior utterances, including presuppositions, implicatures, stylistic choices, morphological form, pronunciation, and emotional connotations [12]. So, they are independent of the truth value of the echoed proposition. In Chinese echo utterances, this meta-representational function is frequently marked with quotatives such as “所谓” (so-called), which allow speakers to project their subjectivity without interference with the truth value the prior utterances [11, 13].

The subjectivity expressed by echo utterances—from alignment to resistance—depends decisively on their sequential placement [9, 14]. Those in the third and fourth position of the sequence usually express affiliation [9]. When an echo utterance conveys a negative stance, it typically signals a divergence from the original viewpoint and target the appropriacy of the prior utterance rather than its truth conditions [15]. On a spectrum of subjectivity, the strength of this evaluative force increases with the degree of divergence from the original utterance [16]. At the interactional level, expression of subjectivity helps achieve intersubjectivity, enabling participants to negotiate and align understanding [13, 17].

Taken together, prior research suggests that echo utterances can be characterized by three defining features: linguistic repetition, independence from the truth value, and expression of subjectivity. These properties underscore their fundamentally metalinguistic nature, setting them apart from utterances that directly represent a state of affairs. By reprocessing and re-representing prior speech, echo utterances reveal speakers’ metacognitive capacities and stance-taking practices. Building on this foundation, the present study examines echo utterances in complaint interactions, analyzing how selective repetition is deployed as a meta-representational strategy for cognitive monitoring, stance negotiation, and the management of power relations within interaction.

3. Theoretical Framework: Meta-representation and Echo Utterances

Meta-representation is “a representation of a representa-

tion,” where a higher-order representation embeds a lower-order such as an utterance, thought, or proposition [18]. The concept connects directly to the distinction between the descriptive and interpretive uses of language. Descriptive use involves language describing a state of affairs in the world, while interpretive use involves language representing another representation (e.g., a thought or utterance) that it resembles. Interpretive use, which is the basis of meta-representation, relies on resemblances of various types, including “perceptual, linguistic, logical, mathematical, conceptual, sociolinguistic, stylistic, typographical” [19]. Formal or linguistic resemblance, as in direct quotation, is called metalinguistic resemblances while the semantic or logical resemblances, as in indirect quotation, is called interpretive resemblances [18]. An utterance can exploit both simultaneously, as in the following case

of a mixed quotation cited by Sperber and Wilson “according to Mary, I am ‘neglecting’ my work” [19]. Here, the phrase ‘neglecting my work’ metalinguistically resembles Mary’s exact wording, while the overall clause interpretively represents the proposition she expressed. Meta-representations of thoughts rely typically on interpretive resemblances [19].

Informed by the typology of resemblances mentioned above, this study analyzes echo utterances by categorizing them into either quotative echoes or reconstructive echoes, as is shown in Figure 1. Echo utterances are a specific type of interpretive use where a speaker meta-represents another’s utterance or thought to express their own attitude towards it. The discussion is limited to the parts within the dashed box, with detailed criteria and Excerpts provided in Section 4.

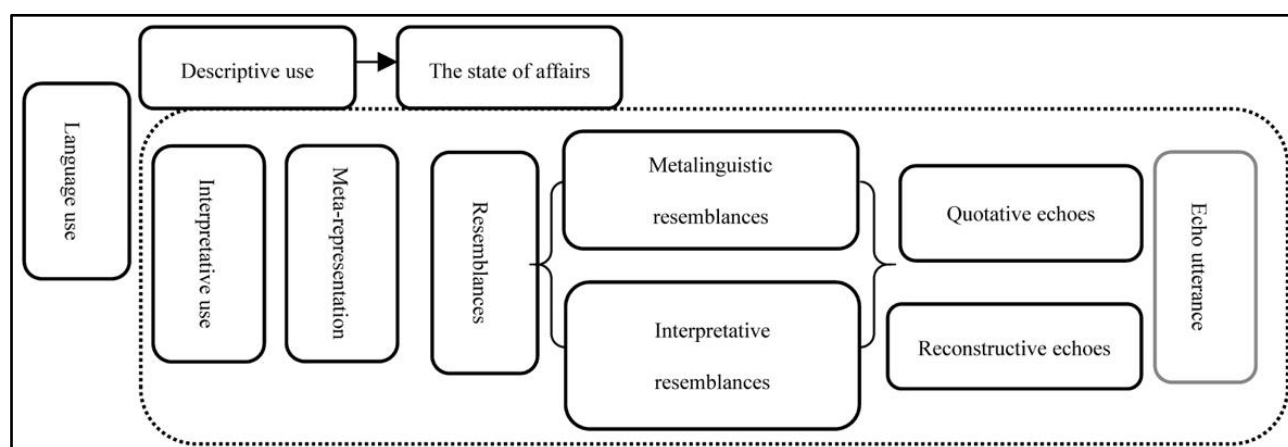


Figure 1. Conceptualization of echo utterances informed by the Meta-representation theory.

4. Data

The data for this study are derived from 10 authentic complaint recordings uploaded by complainants to their personal accounts on a Chinese social media platform: www.bilibili.comⁱ. These recordings involve complaints across various sectors, including bank services, telecommunication service, online game platform, online shopping platform, and social media content censorship, totaling 152 minutes and 06 seconds in duration and transcribed into 22,141 Chinese characters.

With the three key defining feature mentioned above as criteria—linguistic repetition, independence from the truth

value, and expression of subjectivity—88 cases of echo utterances are identified. They are categorized either as quotative echoes or reconstructive echoes. Quotative echoes contain, in whole or in part, the original linguistic forms of the prior utterance, mixing both metalinguistic and interpretive resemblance. In some instances, quotative echoes employ the linguistic constructions, such as “还 X” (still X), “你说 X” (you said X), “就 X” (just X). A particularly notable subtype of quotative echoes is the echo question, where reproduction is embedded in interrogative constructions such as “X, 是不是” (X, isn’t it?), “什么 X” (what X?), “怎么 X” (how X?), “为什么 X” (why X?), etc. Excerpt (2) is an instance of an echo question.

Table 2. Excerpt (2).

Agent: 先生这样的，维权的处理依据就是根据你买卖双方提供凭证，那如果说针对这个问题您不认可的情况下的话，您可前往高级专员了，还希望您后续的话保持在一个手机畅通的

Sir, in such cases, the handling of rights protection is based on the documentation provided by both the buyer and the seller. If you do not agree with this resolution, you may escalate the matter to a senior representative of customer. Please ensure your phone remains accessible for follow-up communication.

Customer: 凭证, 什么凭证? 高级专员依据的什么凭证? 有什么事实依据? 我的凭证都是有事实依据的, 国家发票, 国家税务发票。拍视频这么久, 卖家一直在胡搅蛮缠, 你们依据的什么凭证?

Documentation, what documentation? What documentation does a senior representative of customer base on? What factual basis is there for it? My documentation is all fact-based—official state invoices, national tax invoices. After all this time with video evidence, the seller has been persistently unreasonable. What documentation are you basing your decisions on?

In Excerpt (2), the customer's turn in line 2 contains four echo questions, which reproduce lexical items from the prior turn, including “凭证” (documentation), “高级专员” (a senior specialist), “依据”(is based on). The construction “什么 X” (what X) is used for reproduction. It is a typical case of quotative echoes, which draw on both metalinguistic and interpretative resemblances, though they lean more heavily

towards the former.

By contrast, reconstructive echoes involve reformulating the prior utterance through semantic mapping rather than direct repetition. They primarily exploit interpretative resemblances without reproducing the original wording. Excerpt (3) illustrates a case of reconstructive echoes.

Table 3. Excerpt (3).

1	Agent:	但其实您这个资金留滞的管控也是有办法的, 因为您是我在我们广州分行开的卡, 所以就是您这张储蓄卡的是在广州这边任何一个线下网点柜台, 其实只要有营业的网点都是可以受理的。
		But actually, for this fund retention control, there is a way. Since you opened the account at our Guangzhou branch, for this savings card, any offline branch counter in Guangzhou can actually handle it—any branch that is open can handle it.
2	Customer:	就几笔的转帐, 转帐进来你就冻结了, 然后你现在还认为没有问题, 你是不是还认为, 哎, 你, 我们没有问题, 都是你的问题, 你自己可以去柜台解锁, 你不刚才表达的不就是这个意思吗?
		Just a few transfers came in, and you froze it. And now you still think there's no problem. Don't you still think, 'hey, we have no problem, it's all your problem; you can go unlock it at the counter yourself'? Isn't that what you just meant?

Unlike the previous excerpts, Excerpt (3) does not reproduce the exact linguistic items of the prior turn. Instead it contains two expressions forming semantic mappings with the prior turn: “有办法” (there is a way) in Line 1 aligns with “没问题” (no problem) in Line 2; “网点受理” (branch counter can handle it) in Line 1 aligns with “柜台解锁” (go unlock it at the counter) in Line 2. It involves the secondary

processing of the original expressions and tends towards interpretative resemblance.

Based on the criteria, 49 cases of quotative echoes and 39 cases of reconstructive echoes are identified. The distribution of different types of echo utterances among the different initiators is presented in the following table:

Table 4. Frequency of Echo Utterances by Initiators and Types.

Types	Initiator		Row Total
	Customers	Agents	
Quotative Echoes	42 (85.7%)	7 (14.3%)	49 (100%)
Echo Questions	33	3	36
Others	9	4	13

Types	Initiator		Row Total
	Customers	Agents	
Reconstructive Echoes	23 (59.0%)	16 (41.0%)	39 (100%)
Column Total	65 (73.9%)	23 (26.1%)	88 (100%)

Note. Percentages for the main categories (Quotative and Reconstructive echoes) are calculated based on their row totals. Within the Quotative Echoes category, Echo Questions are the major sub-type, accounting for 73.4% (36/49) of the category. A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relation between echo type (Quotative vs. Reconstructive) and initiator role (customer vs. agent). The relation was significant, $\chi^2(1, N = 88) = 8.03$, $p = .005$. The effect size, Cramér's $V = .30$, indicates a moderate association according to conventional benchmarks. This result suggests that customers are significantly more likely to use quotative echoes, while agents show a greater propensity for reconstructive echoes.

5. Analysis

By using quotative echoes and reconstructive echoes differently, customers and agents express subjectivity, each seeking to manipulate the framework of the complaint interactions to their own advantage.

5.1. Quotative Echoes: Covert Resistance Within the Framework of the Prior Speech

In quotative echoes the linguistic forms of prior speech are reproduced either with or without the linguistic construction. The reproduction maximizes metalinguistic resemblance, thus

preserving the cognitive framework of the original speech. However, by selectively reusing the specific linguistic components for reproduction and secondary representation, quotative echoes function to express skepticism while not seeking to overturn the underlying framework of the prior speech. This constructs a stance of moderate resistance. In the dataset of 88 echo utterance cases of the present study, quotative echoes constitute 49 cases (55.7%). Of these, 42 were initiated by customers, which indicates that their primary function is to enact a covert resistance against the institutional discourse.

Excerpt (4) is a case of quotative echoes initiated by customers.

Table 5. Excerpt (4).

1	Agent:	如果没有异常状态，系统正常会在三天内帮您解除一个留滞的一个情况。朱先生，不知道您对解释是否满意，您看还有问题吗？
		Provided there are no abnormal statuses, the system will <i>normally</i> release the pending status for your account within three days. Mr. Zhu, I wonder if you <i>are satisfied with</i> this explanation? Do you have any other questions?
2	Customer:	还有 1 万多块钱，你就没有冻结，你就冻结了这 3 万块钱，而且没有任何提示，你提示我一下也好，我可以提前一天做准备。你们现在你还觉得很，这个很正常，你们招商银行是吗？你是不是脑子进水了？你解释了一下，你还正常，还满不满意。
		There's still over 10,000 yuan that you didn't freeze; you only froze these 30,000 yuan. And you did it without any alert. If you had just notified me, it would have been better—I could have prepared a day in advance. You now still think this is very... very normal? You are China Merchants Bank, right? Have you got water in your brain? ⁱⁱ You've given your explanation, and you think it's <i>still normal</i> , and ask if <i>I'm still satisfied</i> .

In Excerpt (4), the customer uses metalinguistic resemblance to enact a covert resistance. The original representation of the agent's turn in line 1—"系统正常会在三天内解除留滞" (the system will normally release the pending status for your account within three days)—frames the situation within a standardized, institutional procedure. The subsequent ques-

tion, "不知道您对解释是否满意" (I wonder if you are satisfied with this explanation?), further reflects a scripted, professional register. In Line 2, the customer strategically quotes the keywords *正常* (normal) and *满意* (satisfied) from the agent's turn, using the "还 X" (still X) construction to form two quotative echoes. This rhetorical maneuver semantically

alienates these terms, casting doubt on their validity. In the customer's turn, the abnormal and dissatisfying experience of fund freezing is recounted together with the bank's "normal" "satisfying" routine procedures, highlighting the gap between the disaffiliation in the agent's turn and the "satisfying" customer service acclaimed by the institution, as well as the disconnection between institutional discourse and the customer's lived experience. So, the strong skepticism of the customer is expressed toward the agent and is used to challenged his high power-position in the talk.

Metalinguistic resemblance in Excerpt (4) helps retain the original cognitive framework of institutional discourse, and express the speaker's subjectivity. Words like "正常"(normal) and "满意"(satisfied), which were originally used by the agent to represent institutional success, are transformed in the customer's echo into markers of institutional failure..

Quotative echoes allow customers to express subjectivity within the original institutional framework. This balance is essential for customers in a low-power position to effectively

advance their complaints toward a resolution. But the subjectivity expressed by quotative echoes discourage their use by the agents, whose neutrality is required by their institutional role. Any expression of subjectivity by agents may be mis-interpreted as the institution's stance, creating undue risk. This dilemma explains the agents' avoidance of quotative echoes in the data (only 7 cases).

5.2. Echo Questions: Overt Resistance Within the Framework of the Prior Speech

Echo questions constitute the largest type within quotative echoes, 36 out of 49 cases (73.5%). Echo questions not only reproduce the linguistic forms of the prior utterance, but also use interrogative operators, like "怎么"(how), "为什么"(why), and "什么"(what), to deconstruct the propositional basis. They deliver an overt resistance but still preserve the original cognitive framework of the prior utterance. Excerpt (5) is a case of echo question.

Table 6. Excerpt (5).

1	Agent:	我觉得和解商家如果说能够愿意给到您赔偿的金额, 这个和解的方案我觉得是没有问题的, 那
		In my opinion if the seller is willing to offer you a compensation amount, and in my opinion this settlement proposal has no problem, then
2	Customer:	为什么要你觉得? 为什么要你觉得? 你是谁? 你是谁? 为什么要你觉得?
		Why is it in your opinion? Why is it in your opinion? Who are you? Who are you? Why is it in your opinion?

In Excerpt (5), "我觉得" (in my opinion) from the agent's turn is reproduced in the echo question in line 2, being embedded in the interrogative construction "为什么"(why). The echo question focalizes the agent's subjectivity, as expressed in the reproduced phrases, and makes it problematized since in institutional discourse the agent's subjectivity should be downplayed because of their institutional identity.

By functioning as a type of metalinguistic negation, the interrogative operators in echo questions target the appropriateness—rather than the truth—of a prior utterance. Consequently, their primary discursive function is to challenge cognitive frameworks [20]. The customer's echo question in Excerpt (10) targets the phrase "我觉得" (in my opinion), contesting its appropriateness and highlighting its incongruity with the agent's institutional role. This use of an interrogative operator serves to make the customer's resistance to the proposed plan explicit.

Besides, interrogative operators in echo questions also function to initiate a new question-answer adjacency pair so as to redirect the original trajectory of the ongoing sequence. This is particularly effective in countering an agent's institutional strategy. For instance, in Excerpt (10), the agent uses "那"(then) in Line 1 to signal a turn closure and impose a solution. The customer's subsequent echo question, "为什么要你觉得" (Why is it in your opinion), pre-empts this closure and successfully steers the interaction in a new direction..

The echo questions by the customers in the complaint interaction express an overt resistance by negating the appropriateness of the prior utterance and redirecting the ongoing sequence of the talk. Echo questions by the agents are rare: 3 cases in the present data. All are used to confirm the information mentioned in the prior utterance, as is shown in Excerpt (6).

Table 7. Excerpt (6).

1	Customer:	其实是这样的, 这个我有一个原神的这个主线任务和这个活动冲突了, 然后导致我这个两, 我这个没有办法就
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正常把主游戏进行下去。

Well, that is the thing. My main story quest in Genshin Impactⁱⁱⁱ conflicts with the (promotion) activity. As a result, I can't progress normally in the main game.

2 Agent: 嗯, 好的, 您稍等, 这边客服查询一下, 您这边是说您是在您的主线任务和活动有冲突吗?

Okay, I see. Please wait a moment while I check on my end. Are you saying that your main story quest conflicts with the activity?

The agent's institutional role demands a posture of accommodation and problem-solving, making the overtly resistant and sequence-redirecting moves as echo question strategically counterproductive. Therefore, the agents' use of echo questions likely serves a different, more affiliative function, confirming understanding in the present study, whereas the customers' use remains a potent marker of disagreement and a direct challenge to the agent's authority or claims.

5.3. Reconstructive Echoes: Resetting the Framework

Reconstructive echoes reset the cognitive framework by

reformulating the linguistic forms while retaining the semantic core of the original representation. Agents use reconstructive echoes to target non-literal or formal aspects of a customer's utterance. By using interpretative resemblance, they translate the customer's speech into institutional talk without altering its core propositional content, thereby minimizing potential offense. Here, reconstructive echoes serve to align customer requirements with institutional procedures, and to place the problem within the institutional framework without negating the customer's experience, thereby achieving intersubjectivity and forging problem solution.

Excerpt (7) demonstrates how an agent uses reconstructive echoes to reset the framework of user needs.

Table 8. Excerpt (7).

- | | | |
|---|-----------|---|
| 1 | Customer: | 他会把游戏时间锁定在晚上, 不能调整。嗯, 对, 然后他活动的任务他要求这个 NPC 在白天出现, 所以我就没有办法再进行游戏, 也没有办法进行活动 |
| | | <i>He has locked the gaming time to the evening, and it cannot be adjusted. Then, the tasks in the promotion activity require this NPC to appear during the daytime. So, I simply cannot continue playing the game or participate in the activity at the same time.</i> |
| 2 | Agent: | 就是说这个时间冲突了 |
| | | <i>That is to say, there is a time conflict.</i> |

In line 1, the customer explains a bug in the game, which does not allow him to play the game and participate the promotion activity at the same time, the agent initiates a reconstructive echo, “就是说时间冲突了”(that is to say, there is a time conflict) (line 2). It recontextualizes the customer's

personal experience narrative, reformulating it into a clear technical issue through meta-representation, aligning both parties' cognition, and facilitating problem resolution.

Excerpt (8) is a case of the reconstructive echoes initiated by the customer, when his complaint was rejected bluntly.

Table 9. Excerpt (8).

- | | | |
|---|-----------|--|
| 1 | Agent: | 嗯, 我理解您的意思, 所以我们已经尽可能地帮您重新再申请 |
| | | <i>Understood. Accordingly, we have helped re-apply for you to the fullest extent we deem possible.</i> |
| 2 | Customer: | 不是你尽可能要帮助我, 是你要帮我解决这个问题 |
| | | <i>It's not about you trying to help to the fullest extent you deem possible; you must help fix this problem for me.</i> |
| 3 | Agent: | 跟您说, 礼品卡的部分也是归账户, 是同一个, 都是由我们这边来做负责的。那您的这个卡片它跟账户 |
| | | <i>Just to be clear, the gift card is tied to your account, and our team manages both. Regarding your specific card</i> |

- 4 Customer: 那你的意思就是你是礼品卡, 你是账户的主管, 你也解决不了这个问题, 是吗?
So, you're saying you are the gift's, you are the manager of the accounts, but you still can't resolve this issue? Is that what you're saying?"
- 5 Agent: 确实处理不了的, 真的很抱歉
We genuinely cannot *resolve* this, and for that, we are deeply sorry.
- 6 Customer: 那你找个能处理的人来跟我对接啊, 你不能, 就是你的意思就是你这就是要吃黑我账户的钱了, 就是
Then transfer me to someone who can *resolve*! If you won't, so you're basically *stealing my money*? Is that it?

Excerpt (8) contains three instances of customer reconstructive echoes. In the customer's turn in Line 2, “不是你尽可能要帮助我” (It's not about you trying to help me) first negates the agent's expression through a combination of negation operators and quotative echoes. The subsequent utterance “是你要帮我解决这个问题” (you must help fix this problem for me) in Line 2 forms syntactic and lexical mappings with the agent's promise “帮您重新再申请” (helped re-apply for you) in Line 1. Notably, the customer replaces the epistemic adverb “尽可能” (to the fullest extent we deem possible) in Line 1 with the deontic modal verb “要” (must) in Line 2, resetting the framework and altering the illocutionary force of the utterance. In Line 4, “你是账户主管, 你处理不了” (you are the manager of the accounts, but you still can't resolve this issue) make explicit a presupposition embedded in the prior turn—the presupposition that “managers should solve problems.” It shifts the framework of the talk to a deontic one, reconstructing the agent's professional identity as negligence of duty. In Line 6, “找个能处理的人” (then transfer me to someone who can resolve) reproduce the lexical item “resolve” in the prior turn but in imperative sentence, and expresses deontic responsibility. This builds up a deontic framework. The subsequent term “吃黑” (literally “eat black,” meaning to steal or swallow unlawfully) more explicitly reframes the technical limitation as a moral flaw.

In summary, agents use reconstructive echoes to convert personal experiences into institutional expressions and seek solutions. Customers use reconstructive echoes to deconstruct institutional expressions, reset the cognitive frameworks, and emphasize the deontic responsibility of agents' solving problems. Compared to quotative echoes, agents' reconstructive echoes demonstrate a more proactive attitude, while customers' use of reconstructive echoes involve moral-level intervention.

6. Conclusion

Echo utterances fundamentally shape complaints by serving as the primary discursive mechanism through which the very nature and framework of the complainable are negotiated and constituted. Complaints are not pre-formed entities

but are interactively shaped through the participants' meta-representational practices. Echo utterances, with their dual structure of original and meta-representation, allow both customers and agents to selectively re-process and re-contextualize prior speech. Through meta-representation, participants engage in a continuous struggle over the cognitive framework of the talk. The complaint is ultimately defined by the tension between two forces: the customer's use of echoes to pull the problem into the realm of personal, moral experience, and the agent's use of echoes to push it into the realm of impersonal, technical, and procedural resolution. The evolving definition of the complainable is a direct outcome of this meta-representational negotiation.

Quotative echoes, based on metalinguistic resemblance, rely on the literal or formal reproduction of the prior utterances, express a moderate resistance within the original cognitive framework. Customers predominantly use quotative echoes to voice a moderate, within-framework resistance, highlighting the disconnect between institutional procedures and their personal experience. Agents' rare use of quotative echoes is typically for confirmation, not resistance. Reconstructive echoes, based on interpretive resemblance, can reset the cognitive framework set by the prior utterances and serve as a deep intervention strategy. The customers use it to overturn the professional framework of the talk into a deontic framework when their framing of complainable is rejected. Agents overwhelmingly use this type to institutionalize the complainable. They systematically reformulate the customer's personalized, emotional narratives into neutral, technical, and solution-oriented terms that fit within the institutional framework.

The meta-representation perspective explains the power negotiation and reconstruction inherent in echo utterances. Power imbalance in the institutional talk is key to determining the participants' choice of echo utterance strategies. In the complaint interactions, customers, who are positioned in the low-power positions, often rely on quotative echoes to tentatively voice their resistance to the proposed solution. They also use reconstructive echoes to convert the epistemic framework into the deontic framework to make the talk to their advantages. Agents, who are in high-power positions in the complaint interactions, are required by their roles and identities to maintain the neutrality of the institutional talk,

so they often use reconstructive echoes to institutionalize the customers' individualized narratives into a technical narrative, providing solutions within the framework. This is a discursive procedure that "naturalizes" power relations [21].

The meta-representation perspective focuses on the dynamics between everyday frameworks and institutional frameworks. It provides a new analytical path for complaint disputes and even broader institutional interactions and conflict discourse. The practical significance of this study lies in prompting participants to reflect on institutional talk. For complainants, the key to achieving their demands is whether they can effectively transform their individual everyday experiences into institutional expressions. For agents, while maintaining "procedural justice" at the discourse level, they must not ignore customers' humane need. The power negotiation between individual demands and institutional authority constitutes the core value and significance of this linguistic research.

Author Contributions

Yukun Li: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal Analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Visualization, Writing – original draft

Heyu Wang: Conceptualization, Supervision, Validation, Writing – review & editing

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Data Availability Statement

The data is available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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Biography

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Research Field

Yukun Li: Sociolinguistics, Conversation analysis, Gender studies,

Heyu Wang: Syntax, Comparative study between English and Chinese, Minimalism

ⁱBilibili (www.bilibili.com) is a major Chinese video-sharing website focused on animation, comics, and gaming (ACG) culture.

ⁱⁱ This is a literal translation of the Chinese idiom “你是不是脑子进水了” an idiomatic expression equivalent to “Are you out of your mind?”

ⁱⁱⁱ Genshin Impact is a free-to-play, open-world action role-playing game developed and published by the Chinese company HoYoverse (formerly miHoYo). It was first released in September 2020.