

Conventionalized Expressions and Audience Perception
in Chinese Discourse

Thesis

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By

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Abstract

The present study explores whether the use of conventionalized expressions—proverbs, idioms, and other fixed sayings—makes a message more persuasive in Chinese discourse. Two surveys were designed to include substantively the same 10 statements in Chinese, but one survey conveyed the statements with the use of conventionalized expressions, while the other conveyed them in plain prose. The surveys were distributed to two separate groups of participants, consisting of more than 250 Chinese university students each. Participants were asked to rate their agreement with each statement on a scale of 1-10.

Although the inclusion of conventionalized expressions did not lead to uniformly higher agreement levels, it did lead to different ones. This study concludes that conventionalized expressions draw attention and weight to certain features of a situation over others, and that audience opinion of an overall message hinges on their reaction to its highlighted features. These findings have implications not only for Chinese language pedagogy, but also for diplomacy and other venues of cross-cultural communication. This study suggests that to win audience agreement in Chinese discourse, it is not enough simply to incorporate any relevant conventionalized expressions, but rather, the key is to find the *right* expressions that highlight those aspects of the message with which the audience likely already agrees.

Dedicated to...

Dad, Mom, & Lincoln

*Thank you for saying all the right things along the way.
Or close enough.*

Acknowledgements

The most important lesson I have learned at Ohio State is that *where* we are shapes *who* we are. This is true in the field of foreign language pedagogy, for which context indexes the possibilities of what can be said and done in a given situation, but it is also true in life. I am therefore deeply grateful for all that Ohio State has enabled me to be these last two years.

In particular, I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Xiaobin Jian, for fundamentally advancing the way I think about Chinese language, and for giving me room to discover and evolve my research interests. Thank you to Dr. Jianqi Wang, for honing the way I view current events in China, and for the many thought-provoking conversations. Thank you also to Dr. Qiaoping Nie. The scale of this study would not have been possible without her assistance distributing surveys to students in China.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The present study explores the following question: can the use of conventionalized expressions—proverbs, idioms, and other fixed sayings—influence the way the audience thinks about what has been said in Chinese discourse?

I hypothesized that the incorporation of conventionalized expressions would make the same communicative content more persuasive than it would otherwise be to native Chinese speakers. For the study, two surveys were designed to include substantively the same 10 statements in Chinese, but one survey conveyed the statements with the use of conventionalized expressions, while the other conveyed them in plain prose. The surveys were distributed to two separate groups of participants, consisting of more than 250 Chinese university students each. Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement with each statement on a scale of 1-10.

Although inclusion of conventionalized expressions did not correlate with higher levels of agreement, it did result in *different* levels in almost every case. This suggests that framing an opinion with a conventionalized expression changes the way the audience thinks about that concept. Further research is required to determine the nature of this influence, and how these expressions might be utilized as a strategy for more effective communication, for which certain hypotheses are posited in Chapter 6.

The relationship of conventionalized expressions and perceptions will be examined primarily from the perspective of “highlighting” and “hiding,” notions raised by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in their seminal work, *Metaphors We Live By*.¹ They suggest that metaphor,

¹ Lakoff, George, and Mark Johnson. *Metaphors We Live By*. University of Chicago Press, 2017. Page 163.

often thought of as a decorative device, actually structures our conceptualizations and behaviors. For example, consider the metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR, apparent in expressions like, “Your claims are *indefensible*” and “He *attacked every weak point* in my argument.”² As they explain,

we don’t just *talk* about arguments in terms of war. We can actually win or lose arguments. We see the person we are arguing with as an opponent. We attack his positions and defend our own... We talk about arguments that way because we conceive of them that way—and we act according to the way we conceive of things.³

They ask us to imagine a culture with a different metaphor, one which *hides* this combative perspective, and instead *highlights* a balanced give-and-take of opinions, resembling a dance: “in such a culture, people would view arguments differently, experience them differently, carry them out differently, and talk about them differently.”⁴ In this vein, the comparative analysis in Chapter 3 focuses heavily on what each expression highlights, and the conclusions presented in Chapter 5 suggest that these highlights guide audience perception of the overall message.

Interestingly, previous studies suggest there really is no such thing as one-to-one prose equivalents for conventionalized expressions. Far from invalidating this line of comparative inquiry, I view their findings as encouragement for further investigation. Oliviero Stock, Jon Slack, and Andrew Ortony have shown, for instance, that people do not consider idiomatic phrases like “to kick the bucket” to be interchangeable with “to die” in every situation.⁵ Rather,

the idiom seems to require death by (more or less) natural causes, and relatively suddenly too. But this means that the idiom carves out a certain piece of our knowledge about dying. It is as though it imposed constraints on the values of some of the parameters (e.g. method, cause, etc.) associated with dying. Such an account at least would explain why we have such idioms—they serve to specialize an existing concept in a way not specialized by an existing lexical item.⁶

² Lakoff and Johnson 4.

³ Lakoff and Johnson 5.

⁴ Lakoff and Johnson 5.

⁵ Cacciari, C., and Patrizia Tabossi. *Idioms: Processing, Structure, and Interpretation*. Psychology Press, 2009. Page 72.

⁶ Cacciari 233.

Similarly, “to spill the beans” seems to specify a quick and involuntary divulgence of information, aspects not delimited by its literal paraphrase, “to tell the secrets.” It seems, then, that conventionalized expressions draw attention to specific features of a situation, which may in turn change the way that situation is perceived.

Actually, a speaker always chooses words to create a specific effect. Some linguists refer to this as “focusing.” Barbara Grosz contends that, “in choosing a particular set of words with which to describe an entity, a speaker indicates a perspective on that entity. The hearer is led, then, to see the entity more as one kind of thing than as another.”⁷ This study supposes that conventionalized expressions are one such “particular set of words” that influence the listener differently than their prose paraphrases. The findings indicate that, indeed, using conventionalized expressions instead of plain prose does not merely change how a topic *sounds* to a reader, but actually changes how a reader *thinks* about that topic.

In terms of pedagogical applications, conventionalized expressions fit into the “script” component of the performance-based pedagogy laid out in *The Pedagogy of Performing Another Culture* (ed. Galal Walker), which contends that language learning is about learning to speak and act in particular but typical scenarios that arise in the target culture. The specificity of conventionalized expressions makes them highly context-dependent, and therefore ideally suited to this pedagogical approach.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines convention as “accepted artificial standards of conduct or taste.” Social situations always prescribe appropriate behaviors and speech, according to the conventions of a culture. For “expressions” to be “conventionalized” implies that they

⁷ Grosz, Barbara. “Chapter 3: Focusing and Description in Natural Language Dialogues.” *Elements of Discourse Understanding*, by Aravind K. Joshi et al., Cambridge University Press, 1981. Page 84.

defer to the rules of convention over linguistics, setting them apart from usual prose configurations taught in the Chinese language classroom. Indeed, conventionalized expressions are perhaps better understood as cultural acts rather than linguistic ones. Because these expressions form a distinct subset of Chinese, there is no prerequisite for learning them, which means they can be introduced at any stage of the Chinese language learning process, or even outside of the process altogether. This opens up a much broader arena of applications beyond Chinese language pedagogy, which is elaborated on in Chapter 6.

Specifically, conventionalized expressions can be understood as “a vast family of fixed phrases, [idiomatic expressions,] clichés, proverbs...and so forth, that shares some degree of conventionalization of meaning yet at the same time differs in semantic as well as syntactic properties.”⁸ An admittedly wide-ranging category, I maintain that it is a useful one, particularly for language pedagogy, because each of its subcategories share important commonalities. Namely, they seem at least to be formalized, and often figurative or allusive such that, for language learners, their meaning is not readily deducible from their parts. Hence, these highly various expressions probably do pose related problems and possibilities for language learners.

Lyle Bachman’s influential model of language competence (1990), pictured on page 5, includes a subcategory of “Sociolinguistic Competence” entitled “Cultural references & figures of speech.” Conventionalized expressions would seem to fit neatly into this category, but scholars like Jeannette Littlemore and Graham Low (2006) have suggested that these expressions also cross into others. “Illocutionary Competence,” for example, essentially refers to the ability to speak and read between the lines. As you can see, this category includes ideational functions,

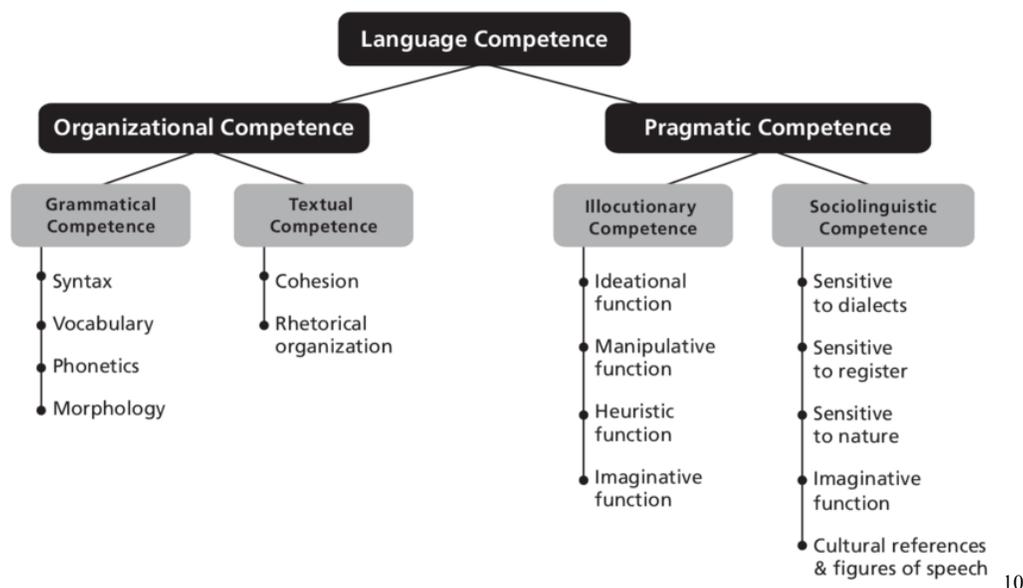
⁸ Cacciari 27.

manipulative functions, heuristic functions and imaginative functions. To borrow Littlemore and Low's summary of definitions,

ideational functions refer to our use of language to exchange information and our feelings about that information. Manipulative functions serve a primary purpose of affecting the behavior of others. Heuristic functions involve our use of language to extend our knowledge of the world around us. Finally, imaginative functions involve our ability to play with language in order to entertain others.⁹

The findings of the present study demonstrate that the use of conventionalized expressions can influence audience perception, which suggests that the ability to use these phrases probably at least serves ideational and manipulative functions as well.

Figure 1. Bachman's Components of Language Competence (1990)



The following chapter details the methodology used for this study, including research design, metrics, survey development, and participant selection. Chapter 3 presents side-by-side

⁹ Littlemore, J. *Figurative Thinking and Foreign Language Learning*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. Page 112.

¹⁰ The Impact of Authentic Materials and Tasks on Students' Communicative Competence at a Colombian Language School - Scientific Figure on ResearchGate. Available from: https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Components-of-Language-Competence-Bachman-1990-p-87_fig1_313229351 [accessed 26 Feb, 2019]

data and analysis of reactions to the two sets of survey questions. Chapter 4 enumerates limitations of the study and potential bias inherent in the design. Chapter 5 draws conclusions. Finally, Chapter 6 addresses the implications and applications of these findings in language pedagogy, diplomacy, and other cross-cultural pursuits, and further suggests directions for future study.

Chapter 2: Methodology

Hypothesis

If a message in Chinese is worded to include a conventionalized expression, then native Chinese speakers will agree more with it than if it is worded in plain prose.

Research Design

To approach the question of whether the use of conventionalized expressions makes a message more persuasive, two surveys were designed with substantively the same 10 statements in Chinese, but in one survey each statement was written to include a conventionalized expression, while each statement in the other was written in plain prose.

To give an example, the first statement of the conventionalized expressions survey was: “不干不净，吃了没病” (*Bù gān bú jìng, chī le méi bìng*). In the plain prose survey, the first statement was rendered as, “掉在地上的东西捡起来吃其实对身体有好处” (*Diào zài dìshàng de dōngxi jiǎn qǐ lái chī qíshí duì shēntǐ yǒu hǎochu*). Both roughly translate as, “Eating something unclean is acceptable for your health,” but the first packages the message in a well-known rhymed saying, while the other provides a looser assertion that eating something that has fallen on the ground is actually good for you. The substance of each message pair was intended to be as close as possible, though limitations of this design will be described in Chapter 4.

Measure of Agreement

Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each statement on a scale of 1-10. Level of agreement was selected as the metric based on observations that native Chinese speakers seem to use conventionalized expressions to bolster their arguments. A scale of 1-10 was used, as opposed to 1-5, because it was expected that answers would vary enough to merit this degree of differentiation. As it turned out, however, the most-selected rating was 1, 5, or 10 in every case, which suggests that a scale of 1-5 would have been sufficiently gradated.

To continue with the example given above, it was true, as hypothesized, that wording the statement with a conventionalized expression correlated with higher levels of agreement. In the prose version of the survey, only 3.85% of respondents selected an agreement score of 6/10 or higher, but this number jumped to 18.15% for those who read the conventionalized expressions survey. In other words, people generally felt it was more acceptable to eat unclean food when they heard the opinion couched in a well-known saying. This trend did not hold up in every case, falsifying the initial hypothesis, but persuasiveness nonetheless proved to be a useful metric for making sense of the differing perceptions.

A corollary hypothesis was that if using conventionalized expressions increases persuasiveness, then respondents would form their opinions more quickly for the conventionalized expressions survey than for the prose one. As mentioned, however, the precondition of this hypothesis was not verified, and indeed, the metadata did not reveal any significant differences in response times between the two surveys. This topic is therefore excluded from the analysis.

Survey Development

The 10 statements in the conventionalized expressions survey were written to include a range of expressions. Specifically: 3 Rhymed Sayings; 2 *Chengyu* (four-character idioms); 3 famous literary quotes; and 2 Proverbs. Content was intentionally varied, including opinions on everything from characteristics of unpleasant personalities to the need for international cooperation on space travel. Two statements were intentionally diplomatic in nature, with an eye toward testing potential diplomatic applications of the findings. All statement pairs were reviewed by Professor Xiaobin Jian to ensure near equivalence of meaning, but suggestions for improving on this process are described in Chapter 4. Specific statement pairs will be enumerated in the following chapter, and complete copies of the surveys used can be found in Appendices A and B.

Participant Selection

Chinese university students were deliberately chosen as the participant category because of the assumption that by their age and education level, they are likely to be familiar with the conventionalized expressions used in the study. Once all blank responses were deleted, the total number of participants amounted to 615: 353 participants for the plain prose survey, and 262 for the conventionalized expressions survey. A further number of responses—13/353 for the first survey, and 11/262 for the second—were eliminated because respondents indicated being younger than 18 years old, which was outside of the research parameters approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). This brought the final sample size down to 591 participants: 340 for the plain prose survey, and 251 for the conventionalized expressions survey.

Although 40/340 and 29/251 of these final participant groups left the question of age blank, those participants also left the other two biographical questions blank, along with at least one other question of the survey. Since biographical questions were asked last, it has been assumed that these participants *did* meet the requirements and simply did not reach the end of the survey. This assumption is based on the fact that the survey was only given to people believed to meet the participant criteria, and that those who did not meet the requirements were outliers.

Participants were allowed to skip questions, and data from partially completed surveys was accepted and recorded in this study. Most participants, however, did answer every question. Specifically, 296/340 participants answered every question in the plain prose survey, and 217/251 participants answered every question in the conventionalized expressions survey. Due to the difference in sample size of the two groups, responses are analyzed in terms of percentages.

No responses were disqualified on the basis of student status. Only 4 in the plain prose survey indicated “other” as their student status, and only 5 participants of the conventionalized expressions survey did so. It is possible that these participants were faculty members, but as these make up only a small fraction of total responses, and moreover are within the IRB-approved parameters, their answers have been retained. No participants indicated being doctoral students.

Figure 2. Participant Information

Survey	Total participants	Male	Female	Undergraduate students	Master’s students	Other status
Plain Prose	340	104 (30.59%)	195 (57.35%)	266 (78.24%)	30 (8.82%)	4 (1.18%)
Conventionalized Expressions	251	65 (25.90%)	157 (62.55%)	174 (69.32%)	43 (17.13%)	5 (1.99%)

Although the two groups differ in size, they are relatively comparable in terms of ratios of students by gender and student status.

Distribution of Surveys

The software platform Qualtrics was used to create and distribute the two surveys, as well as to collect the data and generate reports, which are presented in the following chapter. Each survey was distributed to a separate group of participants, with the assistance of Dr. Qiaoping Nie, a university professor at Jinan University in Guangzhou, China. Dr. Nie distributed the survey links to her students between late November and early December 2018.

Previous research done by Dr. Xin Zhang indicates that nationality of the speaker may play a role in audience perception, and so Dr. Nie was instructed *not* to disclose the American nationality of the researcher. In her 2016 dissertation entitled, “Four-character idioms in advanced spoken Chinese: perception and reaction of native speakers and a pedagogy of C2 expectations,” Dr. Zhang showed that native Chinese language speakers react favorably to hearing other native Chinese language speakers use idiomatic phrases, but fascinatingly, *less* favorably when hearing non-native Chinese speakers use the very same phrases.¹¹ This suggests that idioms are an important discourse strategy in Chinese, but one which native Chinese speakers may consider a sort of “insider language” that foreigners should be mindful of using.

This study is not intended to investigate the role of the speaker’s identity in influencing audience perception, and so to mitigate that potential factor, participants were further encouraged to imagine a native Chinese speaker by the prompt at the beginning of each survey, which specified, “请假装你的同学刚刚说了下面的这些说法” (“Please imagine your classmate has just said the statements below”).

¹¹ Zhang, Xin. "Four-Character Idioms in Advanced Spoken Chinese: Perception and Reaction of Native Speakers and A Pedagogy of C2 Expectations." Electronic Thesis or Dissertation. Ohio State University, 2016. *OhioLINK Electronic Theses and Dissertations Center*. 26 Mar 2019.

Chapter 3: Comparative Data and Analysis

An overview of agreement trends is provided in the chart below. As you can see, the hypothesis that phrasing a statement with a conventionalized saying would make it more persuasive was disproven. The researcher had guessed that using conventionalized expressions would give statements an air of credibility, leading to higher agreement ratings, but this does not appear to be the primary communicative function of conventionalized expressions. Rather, this study suggests that their primary function is to focus attention on specific aspects of a situation, and the reaction to those aspects appears to dictate the increase or decrease in agreement ratings.

Figure 3. Agreement Trend Overview

	Conventionalized Expression Type	Prose survey: mean agreement rating	Conventionalized expressions survey: mean agreement rating	Aligns with hypothesis	Margin of Difference
Q1	Rhymed Saying	1.93/10	3.68/10	✓	1.75
Q2	<i>Chengyu</i>	6.74/10	8.13/10	✓	1.39
Q3	Literary Quote (<i>Analects</i>)	9.06/10	7.73/10	×	1.33
Q4	Proverb	9.02/10	8.34/10	×	0.68
Q5	Rhymed Saying	6.18/10	4.93/10	×	1.25
Q6	Proverb	7.42/10	5.50/10	×	1.92 ¹²
Q7	Rhymed Saying	7.31/10	5.99/10	×	1.32
Q8	<i>Chengyu</i>	7.28/10	7.30/10	--- ¹³	0.02
Q9	Literary Quote	4.51/10	4.90/10	✓	0.39
Q10	Literary Quote	5.85/10	5.26/10	×	0.59

What follows is a question-by-question comparative review and analysis of responses to the plain prose and conventionalized expressions surveys, with plain prose shown first in each

¹² This was the largest margin of difference between survey responses.

¹³ This was the smallest margin of difference between survey responses, and explanations for the similar agreement trends will be posited in the Question 8 analysis.

case to provide a baseline that the conventionalized expressions survey responses can be interpreted against. An English translation has been added below each segment of the survey for convenience. Additionally, for each of the 10 statements, the conventionalized expression component has been highlighted in bold type, and *Pinyin* romanization has been added, along with classification of the conventionalized sayings (Rhymed, *Chengyu*, etc.). These additions were not present in the original version given to participants.

The questions are not presented in the order in which they appeared in the surveys, but rather are organized according to shared features central to their analysis. Q2 and Q5 include conventionalized expressions with number sets, which highlight the irresponsibility inherent to a situation. Q3 and Q4 emphasize the value of repetition in the learning process. Q6 and Q10 both address the U.S.-China diplomatic relationship, and the expressions used imply a currently comfortable diplomatic climate. Q1, Q7, and Q8 are grouped together because they represent similar limitations with regard to translation of meaning between the surveys. Q9 is presented alone because although it aligns with the initial hypothesis, the findings from the other responses shed light on a more nuanced understanding of these results, which in turn exemplifies the key conclusions of the study.

The following survey introduction was identical for both surveys. A scale of 1-10 was provided with every question, where 1 was marked as “非常不同意” (“extremely disagree”) and 10 was marked as “非常同意” (“extremely agree”).

Survey Introduction

通过参加本项问卷调查，您同意调查结果可供研究论文发表使用。本问卷调查不收集不分享任何可能涉及您个人的资料与信息，敬请放心。

By participating in this survey, you agree that the results of the survey may be published in research papers. Please be assured that no personally identifiable information will be collected or shared through participation in this survey.

请假装你的同学刚刚说了下面的这些说法。你同意吗？请选择。

Please imagine that your classmate has just said the following statements. Do you agree? Please select [on the provided scale of 1-10].

Q2 and Q5: Highlighting Irresponsibility

Question 2

Plain Prose Survey

我最讨厌什么事情都要说几句的人。 *Wǒ zuì tǎoyàn shénme shìqing dōu yào shuō jǐ jù de rén.*
I am most annoyed by those people who have something to say about everything.

Figure 4. Plain Prose Q2 Chart

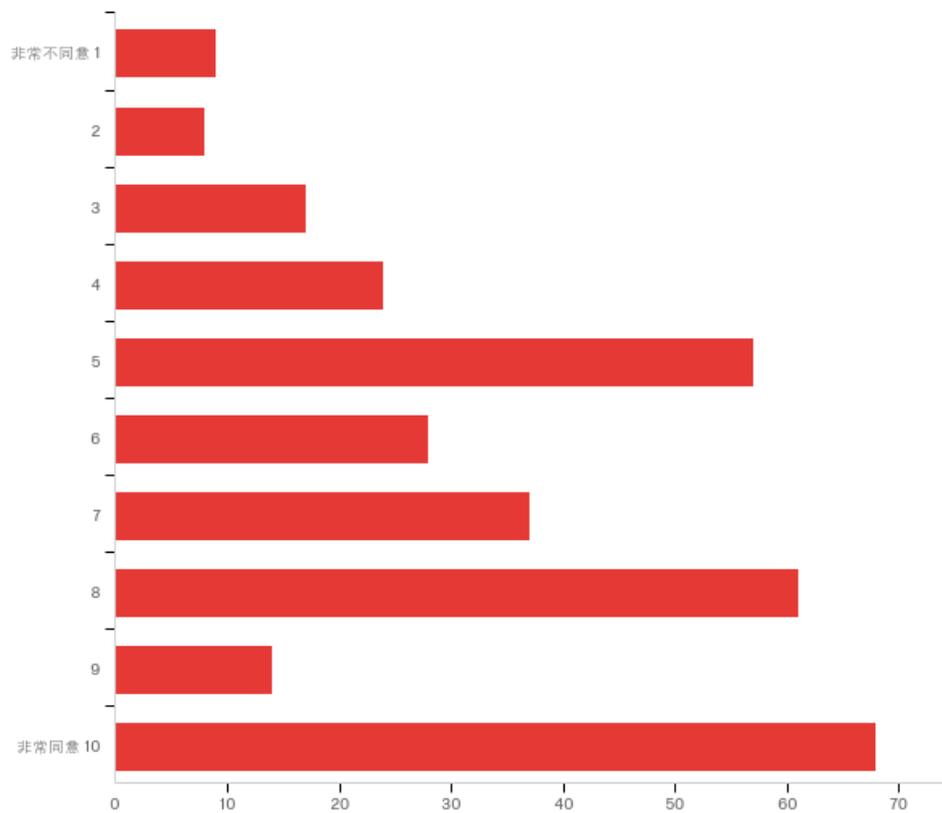


Figure 5. Plain Prose Q2 Response Summary

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	我最讨厌什么事情都要说几句的人。	1.00	10.00	6.74	2.47	6.12	323

Figure 6. Plain Prose Q2 Response Breakdown

#	Answer	%	Count
1	非常不同意 1	2.79%	9
2	2	2.48%	8
3	3	5.26%	17
4	4	7.43%	24
5	5	17.65%	57
6	6	8.67%	28
7	7	11.46%	37
8	8	18.89%	61
9	9	4.33%	14
10	非常同意 10	21.05%	68
	Total	100%	323

The mean score of 6.74/10 here demonstrates general agreement with this statement.

64.38% of participants selected an agreement rating of 6/10 or higher.

Conventionalized Expressions Survey

我最讨厌什么事情都说三道四的人。 *Wǒ zuì tǎoyàn shénme shìqing dōu shuō sān dào sì de rén.* [Chengyu]
 I am most annoyed by those people who “speak threes and fours” [i.e. make thoughtless remarks; gossip about this and that].

Figure 7. Conventionalized Expressions Q2 Chart

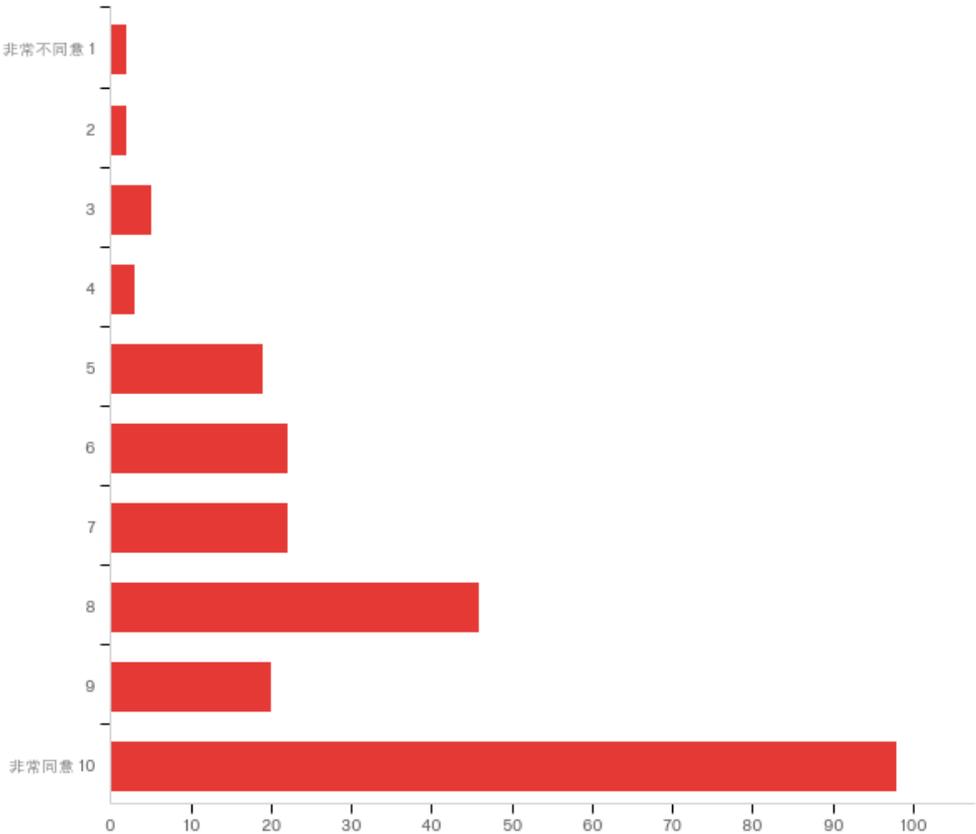


Figure 8. Conventionalized Expressions Q2 Response Summary

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	我最讨厌什么事情都说三道四的人。	1.00	10.00	8.13	2.08	4.32	239

Figure 9. Conventionalized Expressions Q2 Response Breakdown

#	Answer	%	Count
1	非常不同意 1	0.84%	2
2	2	0.84%	2
3	3	2.09%	5
4	4	1.26%	3
5	5	7.95%	19
6	6	9.21%	22
7	7	9.21%	22
8	8	19.25%	46
9	9	8.37%	20
10	非常同意 10	41.00%	98
	Total	100%	239

Q2 was one of the few examples to validate the hypothesis that incorporating a conventionalized saying increases persuasiveness. The mean agreement rating jumped from 6.74/10 in the prose survey to 8.13/10 in the conventionalized expressions one. Additionally, 87.04% chose an agreement rating of 6/10 or higher, a full 22.66% higher than the same data point in the prose survey.

Number sets are used in Chinese expressions to highlight irresponsibility. We see this in Q2 and Q5, and also in other expressions, such as 乱七八糟 *luàn qī bā zāo*, meaning literally “a terrible mess of sevens and eights,” an expression used to describe a total mess. This mention of numbers, then, probably underscores the irresponsible nature of the activity, which could explain why participants agreed more strongly with the conventionalized expressions survey. People who gossip *carelessly* are more distasteful, it would seem, than people who simply gossip. In Q5, we

also see a number set used, but it leads to stronger *disagreement*. This is important because it reveals why the original hypothesis is overly simplistic. It is not that adding an expression leads to higher levels of agreement, but that doing so underscores an *aspect* of a situation, which can in turn make a statement more or less agreeable depending on what it says.

Question 5

Plain Prose Survey

想去哪儿玩儿，别想太多，说走就走。 *Xiǎng qù nǎr wánr, bié xiǎng tài duō, shuō zǒu jiù zǒu.*

If you want to go somewhere for fun, don't overthink it, just go.

Figure 10. Plain Prose Q5 Chart

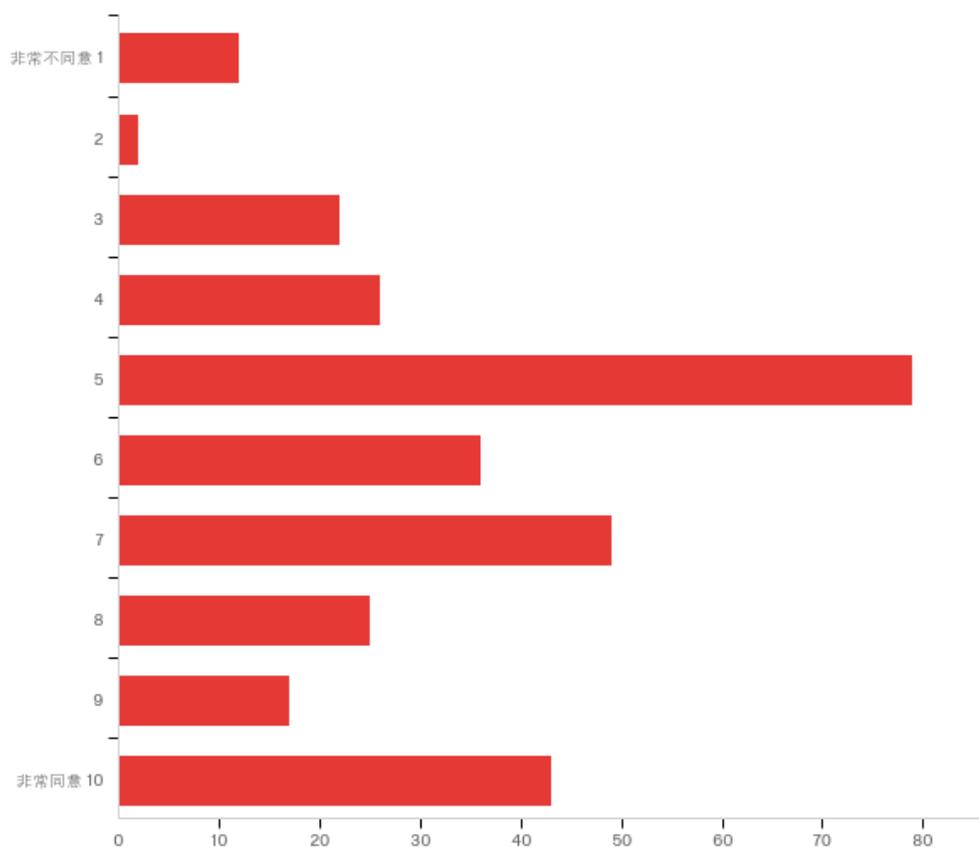


Figure 11. Plain Prose Q5 Response Summary

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	想去哪儿玩儿, 别想太多, 说走就走。	1.00	10.00	6.18	2.33	5.44	311

Figure 12. Plain Prose Q5 Response Breakdown

#	Answer	%	Count
1	非常不同意 1	3.86%	12
2	2	0.64%	2
3	3	7.07%	22
4	4	8.36%	26
5	5	25.40%	79
6	6	11.58%	36
7	7	15.76%	49
8	8	8.04%	25
9	9	5.47%	17
10	非常同意 10	13.83%	43
	Total	100%	311

Respondents reflected deeply mixed reactions to this statement, with 25.40% of them choosing 5/10, making that the most-selected rating for this statement. After all, the idea of going somewhere without any thought to the impact it will have on your responsibilities or on others is especially contrary to group-oriented cultural values in China. Still, there was a slight tendency toward agreement, with the mean agreement level as 6.18/10. 54.68% of participants selected an agreement rating of 6/10 or higher.

Conventionalized Expressions Survey

想去哪儿玩儿，不管三七二十一，说走就走。Xiǎng qù nǎr wánr, bù guǎn sān qī èrshíyī, shuō zǒu jiù zǒu. [Rhymed Saying]

If you want to go somewhere for fun, “it doesn’t matter if it’s 3, 7, or 21,” just go [i.e. the details are insignificant].

Figure 13. Conventionalized Expressions Q5 Chart

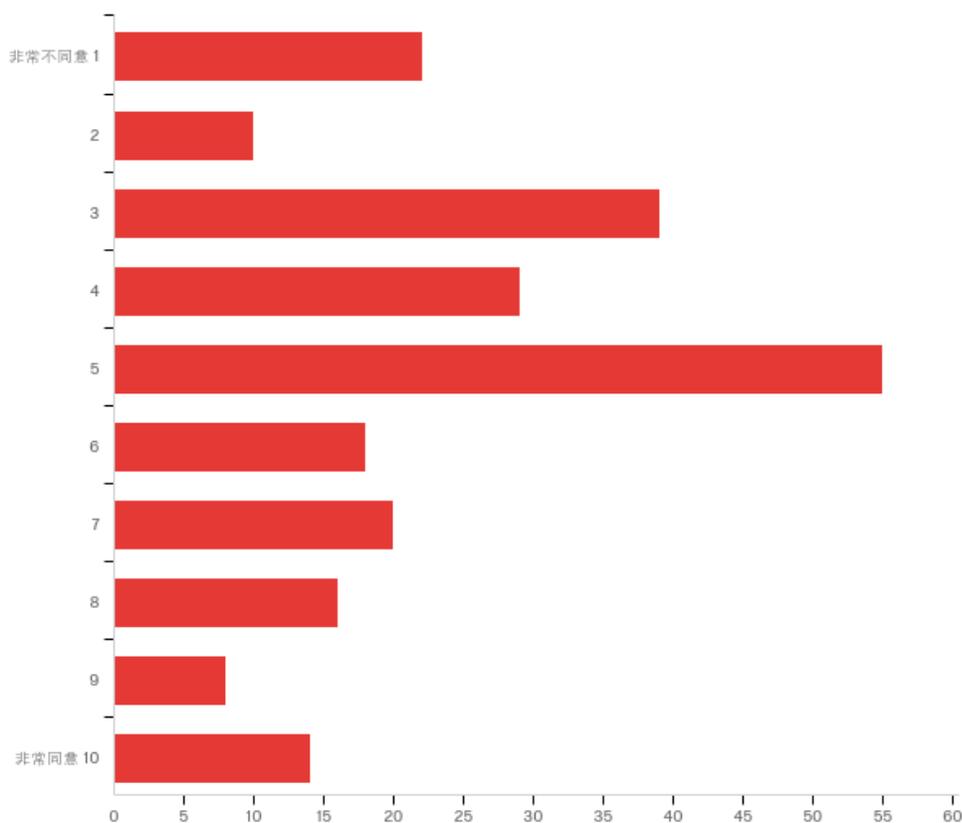


Figure 14. Conventionalized Expressions Q5 Response Summary

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	想去哪儿玩儿，不管三七二十一，说走就走。	1.00	10.00	4.93	2.41	5.83	231

Figure 15. Conventionalized Expressions Q5 Response Breakdown

#	Answer	%	Count
1	非常不同意 1	9.52%	22
2	2	4.33%	10
3	3	16.88%	39
4	4	12.55%	29
5	5	23.81%	55
6	6	7.79%	18
7	7	8.66%	20
8	8	6.93%	16
9	9	3.46%	8
10	非常同意 10	6.06%	14
	Total	100%	231

5/10 was also the most-selected rating for the conventionalized expression version of the statement, favored by 23.81% of participants. However, the overall mean agreement level trended more toward *disagreement* when this proverb was used, dropping to 4.93, as opposed to the 6.18 rating for the prose survey, with only 32.90% of participants selecting an agreement score of at least 6/10.

When the irresponsibility aspect is highlighted through the use of a number set expression, the behavior is made to seem more distasteful, but the opinion presented determines whether this leads to stronger agreement or disagreement. Q2 expressed a *critical* opinion of people who speak irresponsibly, and the use of the conventionalized expression bolstered that opinion by exacerbating a negative quality in the behavior. Q5, meanwhile, expressed an opinion *condoning* irresponsible behavior, and so the use of a conventionalized expression essentially condoned even worse behavior, and was therefore met with higher levels of disagreement.

Q3 and Q4: Highlighting Repetitiveness

Question 3

Plain Prose Survey

用对了刚学到的知识觉得很快乐。Yòng duì le gāng xuédào de zhīshi juéde hěn kuàilè.
Using correctly something you have just learned makes you feel happy.

Figure 16. Plain Prose Q3 Chart

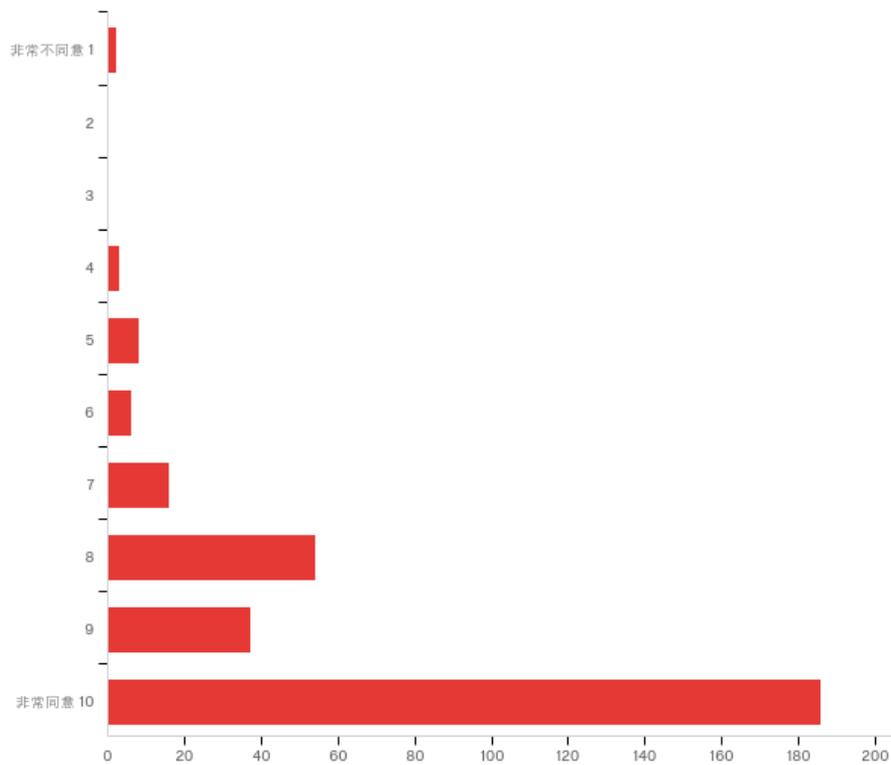


Figure 17. Plain Prose Q3 Response Summary

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	用对了刚学到的知识觉得很快乐。	1.00	10.00	9.06	1.48	2.20	312

Figure 18. Plain Prose Q3 Response Breakdown

#	Answer	%	Count
1	非常不同意 1	0.64%	2
2	2	0.00%	0
3	3	0.00%	0
4	4	0.96%	3
5	5	2.56%	8
6	6	1.92%	6
7	7	5.13%	16
8	8	17.31%	54
9	9	11.86%	37
10	非常同意 10	59.62%	186
	Total	100%	312

With a mean agreement rating of 9.06/10, the data shows that people already strongly agreed with the plain prose phrasing of the message that applying learning is joyful. A whopping 95.84% of participants chose an agreement rating of 6 or higher.

Interestingly, phrasing this message as a well-known proverb actually made it *less* persuasive, but this may be because of discrepancies in perceived meaning, which will be elaborated on following the next data set.

Conventionalized Expressions Survey

学而时习之，不亦悦乎？ *Xué ér shí xí zhī, bú yì yuè hū?* [Literary Quote (*Analects*)]

“To study and apply it at just the right time, is that not joyful?”

Figure 19. Conventionalized Expressions Q3 Chart

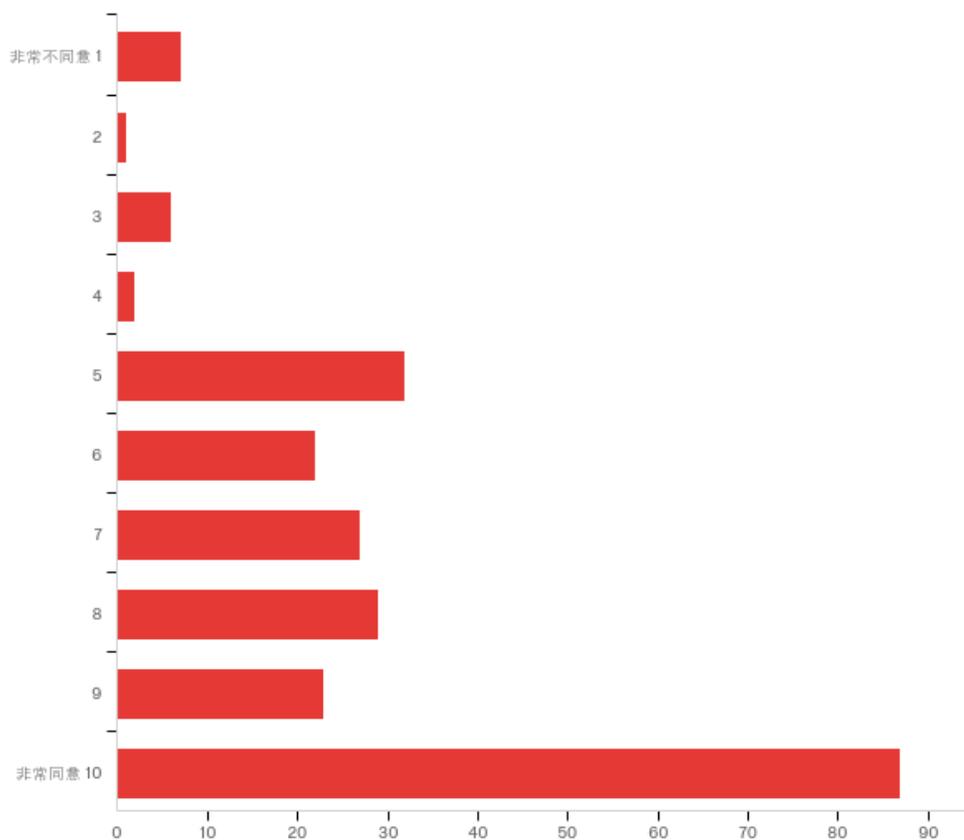


Figure 20. Conventionalized Expressions Q3 Response Summary

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	学而时习之，不亦悦乎？	1.00	10.00	7.73	2.36	5.59	236

Figure 21. Conventionalized Expressions Q3 Response Breakdown

#	Answer	%	Count
1	非常不同意 1	2.97%	7
2	2	0.42%	1
3	3	2.54%	6
4	4	0.85%	2
5	5	13.56%	32
6	6	9.32%	22
7	7	11.44%	27
8	8	12.29%	29
9	9	9.75%	23
10	非常同意 10	36.86%	87
	Total	100%	236

Overall, the mean agreement level dropped from 9.06/10 in the prose version of this statement to 7.73/10 in the conventionalized expression version. Moreover, agreement levels can be seen as far more dispersed, with a variance score of 5.59, as opposed to 2.20 in the prose survey. 79.66% still expressed high agreement ratings of 6 or more, but the percentage of respondents who chose the strongest agreement score of 10 dropped significantly, falling from 59.62% in the prose survey to 36.86% in the conventionalized expressions one.

This survey question, however, does not necessarily disprove the hypothesis, given that it may lack the intended equivalence of meaning with its prose counterpart. The prose version of this statement was based on interpretations of the quote in recent scholarship, and it is *not* how the sentence is commonly understood in Chinese. Specifically, this famous opening quote from the *Analects* is usually interpreted as “To study and practice *often*, is that not joyful?” (*italics*

added). Recent scholarship, however, has shown that 時 *shí* is not used to mean “often” in other parts of the *Analects*.¹⁴ Rather, it is used to mean “at the right time.”

The Chinese participants of this survey likely were responding to the common interpretation of this saying, given that the newer interpretation used in this study is not widely known in China. In other words, participants responding to this statement probably interpreted it as referencing study and repetition as a source of joy, whereas participants responding to the prose version were asked to imagine the joy of applying *already-learned* knowledge to a situation at hand. These are vastly different scenarios, and intuitively it makes sense that the latter would be more appealing, as the results appear to show.

Future studies should perhaps use the more commonly-held interpretation, and ideally run a precursor survey to a third group of participants, in which respondents are asked to evaluate the closeness in meaning between equivalent statement pairs that will be used in the surveys.

¹⁴ Walker, Galal, editor. *The Pedagogy of Performing Another Culture*. National East Asian Languages Resource Center, Ohio State University, 2010. Page iv.

Question 4

Plain Prose Survey

你要学会一样东西，不光要有书本知识，还要有实际经历。 *Nǐ yào xué huì yí yàng dōngxi, bù guāng yào yǒu shū běn zhīshi, hái yào yǒu shíjì jīnglì.*
If you want to learn to do something, it's not enough to have book knowledge, you also need practical experience.

Figure 22. Plain Prose Q4 Chart

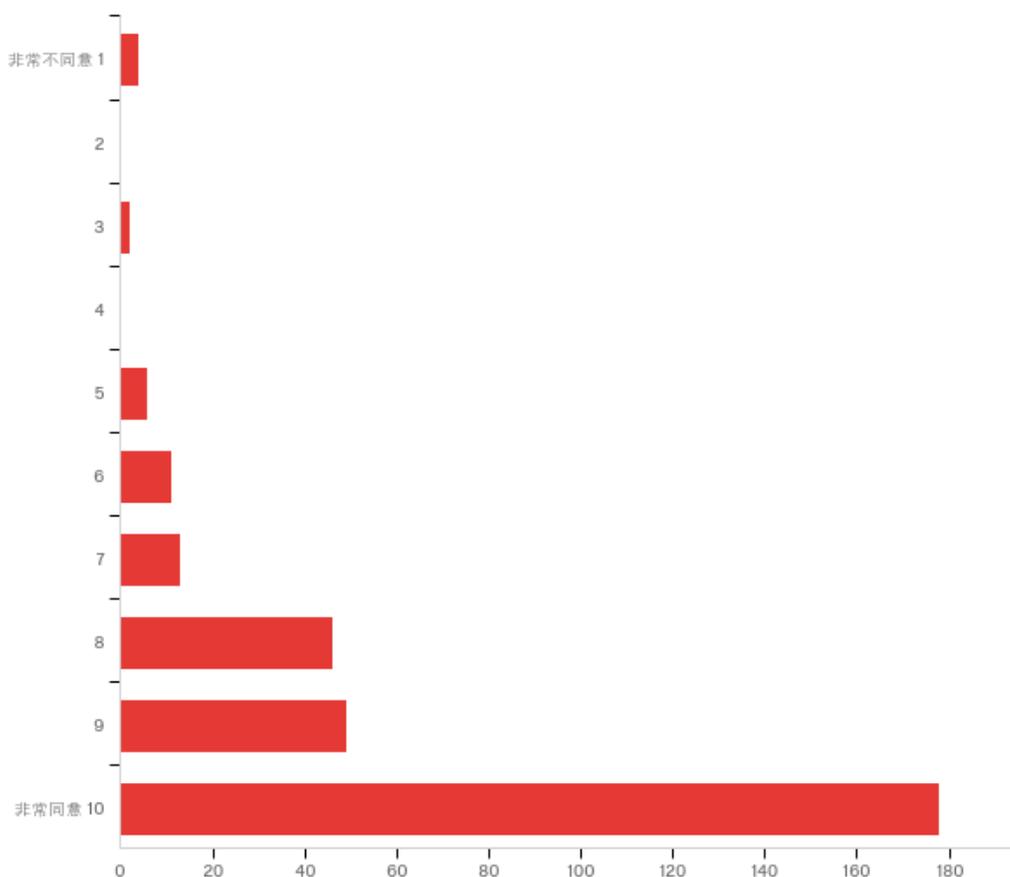


Figure 23. Plain Prose Q4 Response Summary

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	你要学会一样东西，不光要有书本知识，还要有实际经历。	1.00	10.00	9.02	1.61	2.59	309

Figure 24. Plain Prose Q4 Response Breakdown

#	Answer	%	Count
1	非常不同意 1	1.29%	4
2	2	0.00%	0
3	3	0.65%	2
4	4	0.00%	0
5	5	1.94%	6
6	6	3.56%	11
7	7	4.21%	13
8	8	14.89%	46
9	9	15.86%	49
10	非常同意 10	57.61%	178
	Total	100%	309

This statement garnered a mean agreement rating of 9.02/10, with 96.31% of respondents selecting 6/10 or higher. The assertion that practical experience is essential for learning was relatively uncontroversial.

Conventionalized Expressions Survey

你要学会一样东西，不仅读万卷书，还要行万里路。 *Nǐ yào xué huì yí yàng dōngxi, bù jǐn dú wàn juàn shū, hái yào xíng wàn lǐ lù.* [Proverb]

If you want to learn to do something, don't only “read 10,000 books,” you also need to “walk 10,000 miles.”

Figure 25. Conventionalized Expressions Q4 Chart

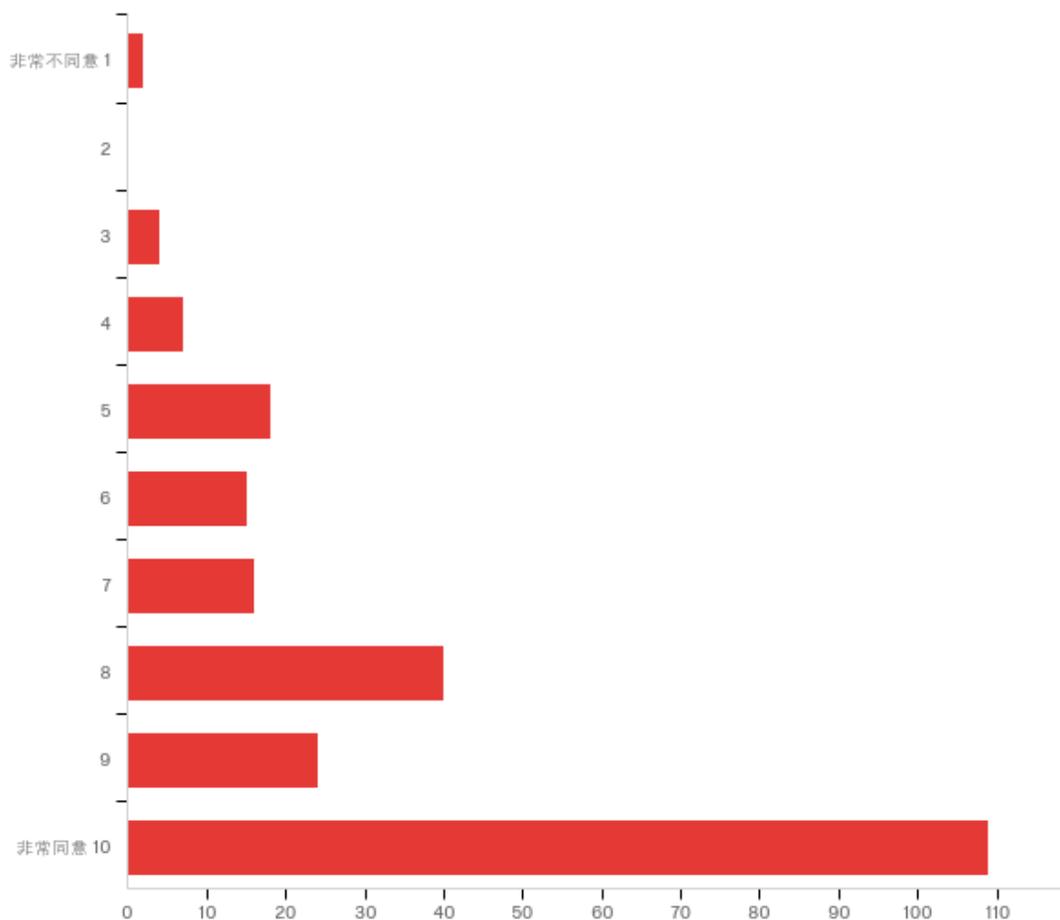


Figure 26. Conventionalized Expressions Q4 Response Summary

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	你要学会一样东西，不仅读万卷书，还要行万里路。	1.00	10.00	8.34	2.04	4.17	235

Figure 27. Conventionalized Expressions Q4 Response Breakdown

#	Answer	%	Count
1	非常不同意 1	0.85%	2
2	2	0.00%	0
3	3	1.70%	4
4	4	2.98%	7
5	5	7.66%	18
6	6	6.38%	15
7	7	6.81%	16
8	8	17.02%	40
9	9	10.21%	24
10	非常同意 10	46.38%	109
	Total	100%	235

When phrased as a conventionalized expression, however, the mean agreement level dropped to 8.34, down from 9.02 in the prose survey. Furthermore, the responses were more diverse, with a variance score of 4.17, up from 2.59 in the prose survey. Whereas 96.31% of participants selected 6/10 or higher in the prose survey, only 86.8% of participants selected the same level of agreement when exposed to the proverb. This contradicts the hypothesis, reinforcing the discovery that using conventionalized expressions does not always make statements more persuasive. Proverbs, then, are not a catch-all solution to win agreement, but rather are a nuanced communicative device for guiding perception in a specific way, and understanding their implied parameters is therefore essential for understanding whether using one will improve one's point or not.

Since the reaction to this statement is different than the reaction to the prose statement, the two statements must have been perceived differently. As stated in Chapter 1, scholars suggest

that conventionalized expressions function to highlight specific features of a larger concept. The shared concept between this statement in the two surveys is that book learning and real-world learning are equally important. The proverb, however, notably highlights *quantity*, of miles or destinations or both. Lower agreement levels, then, could be a result of perceiving 10,000 as a needlessly excessive amount. Even though it's obviously hyperbole, the phrase nonetheless highlights the importance of indefinitely large quantities of books and travel. This outcome is similar to Q3, in that in both cases the proverb was less persuasive than the prose, possibly because it highlights the necessity of endless work in learning, to which student participants may feel particular aversion.

Q6 and Q10: Highlighting a Currently Comfortable Political Climate

Question 6

Plain Prose Survey

尼克松前总统和毛泽东 1972 年建立了两国之间的关系对现代两国人还有好处。 *Níkèsōng qián zǒngtǒng hé Máo Zédōng 1972 nián jiànli le liǎng guó zhījiān de guānxi duì xiàndài liǎng guó rén hái yǒu hǎochu.*

Former President Nixon and Mao Zedong’s 1972 establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries still benefits the people of these countries today.

Figure 28. Plain Prose Q6 Chart

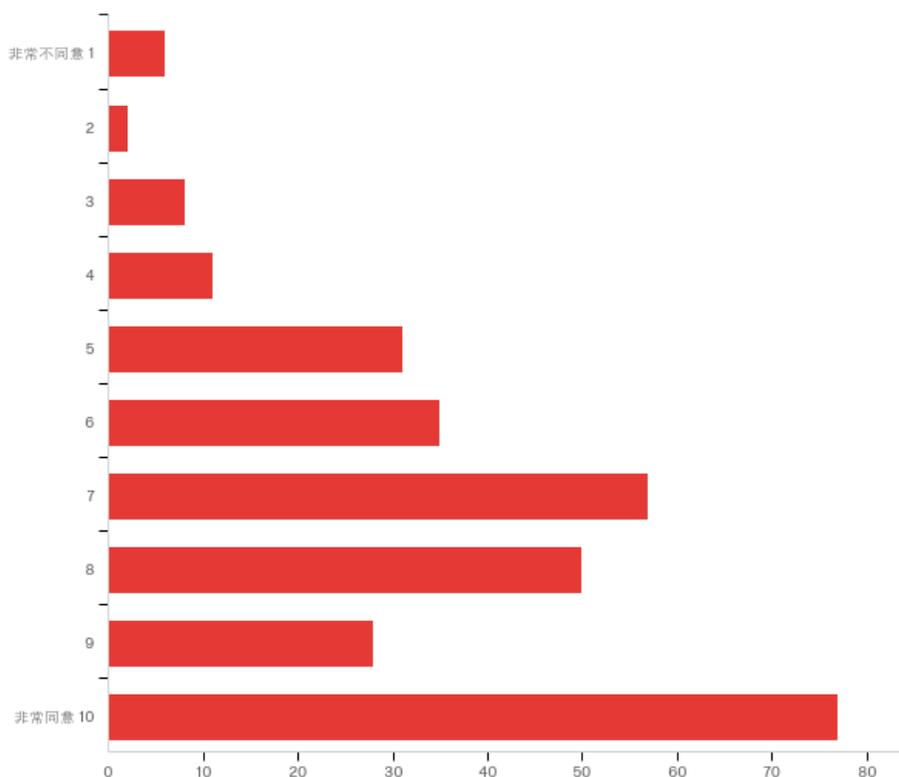


Figure 29. Plain Prose Q6 Response Summary

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	尼克松前总统和毛泽东 1972 年建立了两国之间的关系对现代两国人还有好处。	1.00	10.00	7.42	2.18	4.76	305

Figure 30. Plain Prose Q6 Response Breakdown

#	Answer	%	Count
1	非常不同意 1	1.97%	6
2	2	0.66%	2
3	3	2.62%	8
4	4	3.61%	11
5	5	10.16%	31
6	6	11.48%	35
7	7	18.69%	57
8	8	16.39%	50
9	9	9.18%	28
10	非常同意 10	25.25%	77
	Total	100%	305

There was a general tendency toward agreement with this statement. The overall mean agreement rating was 7.42/10, with 80.99% of respondents selecting a rating of 6/10 or higher.

Conventionalized Expressions Survey

尼克松前总统和毛泽东 1972 年建立了两国之间的关系真是前人栽树，后人乘凉。

Níkèsōng qián zǒngtǒng hé Máo Zédōng 1972 nián jiànli le liǎng guó zhījiān de guānxi zhēn shì qián rén zāi shù, hòu rén chéng liáng. [Proverb]

Former President Nixon and Mao Zedong’s 1972 establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries truly is **“the forerunners plant the trees, the descendants reap the shade.”**

Figure 31. Conventionalized Expressions Q6 Chart

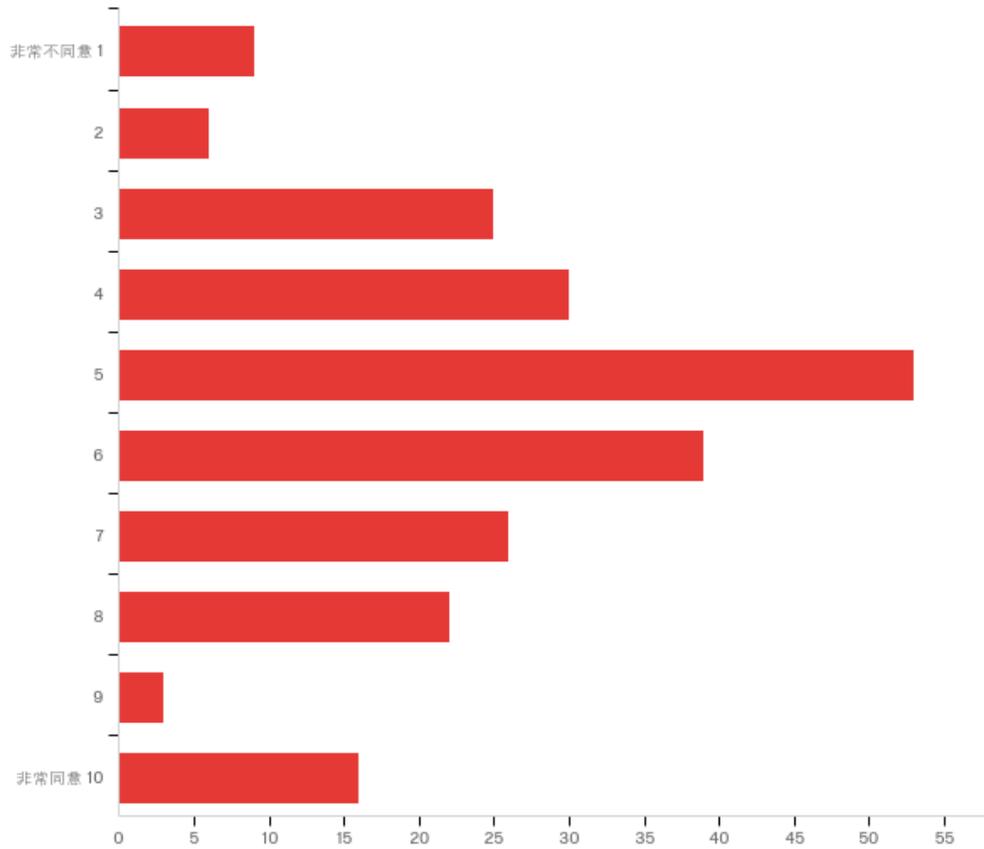


Figure 32. Conventionalized Expressions Q6 Response Summary

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	尼克松前总统和毛泽东 1972 年建立了两国之间的关系真是前人栽树，后人乘凉。	1.00	10.00	5.50	2.15	4.63	229

Figure 33. Conventionalized Expressions Q6 Response Breakdown

#	Answer	%	Count
1	非常不同意 1	3.93%	9
2	2	2.62%	6
3	3	10.92%	25
4	4	13.10%	30
5	5	23.14%	53
6	6	17.03%	39
7	7	11.35%	26
8	8	9.61%	22
9	9	1.31%	3
10	非常同意 10	6.99%	16
	Total	100%	229

When phrased with a conventionalized expression, the mean agreement score dropped from 7.42/10 down to 5.50/10, the largest margin of difference among the statement pairs, and only 46.29% of participants chose an agreement rating of 6/10 or higher. What does the expression highlight that respondents did not consider to be as correct as the prose paraphrase? Whereas the prose version simply states that previous hard work has benefits for today, the proverb used here specifies that those present benefits include a peaceful, shaded place to sit back and relax.

Given that the survey was distributed in late November and early December of 2018, at the height of U.S.-China trade war tensions, shade and relaxation are not features that describe the political climate. While the broader category of “benefits” was generally agreed with by participants in the prose survey, the specific category of *comfortable* benefits delineated by the conventionalized expression in this survey was not. The U.S. and China are not past the tree-

planting phase yet, and with much work still ahead, relaxing in the shade cannot be done for some time.

Another important consideration is that awkwardly integrated conventionalized expressions could have played a part in how the messages were perceived. Because the researcher is a non-native Chinese speaker, and only had the statements reviewed by one native speaker, the expressions may have been syntactically awkward. Native Chinese speakers have since expressed that the saying used in Q6 is usually used at the *beginning* of a statement, not the end. It is possible that if a sentence did not sound quite right grammatically, then its content may not have been perceived as “right” either, leading to lower agreement ratings.

Question 10

Plain Prose Survey

中美应该有更多的合作，比如一起去太空上月球。Zhōng Měi yīnggāi yǒu gèng duō de hézuò, bǐrú yìqǐ qù tàikōng shàng yuèqiú.

China and America should cooperate more with each other, such as by going to space together to land on the moon.

Figure 34. Plain Prose Q10 Chart

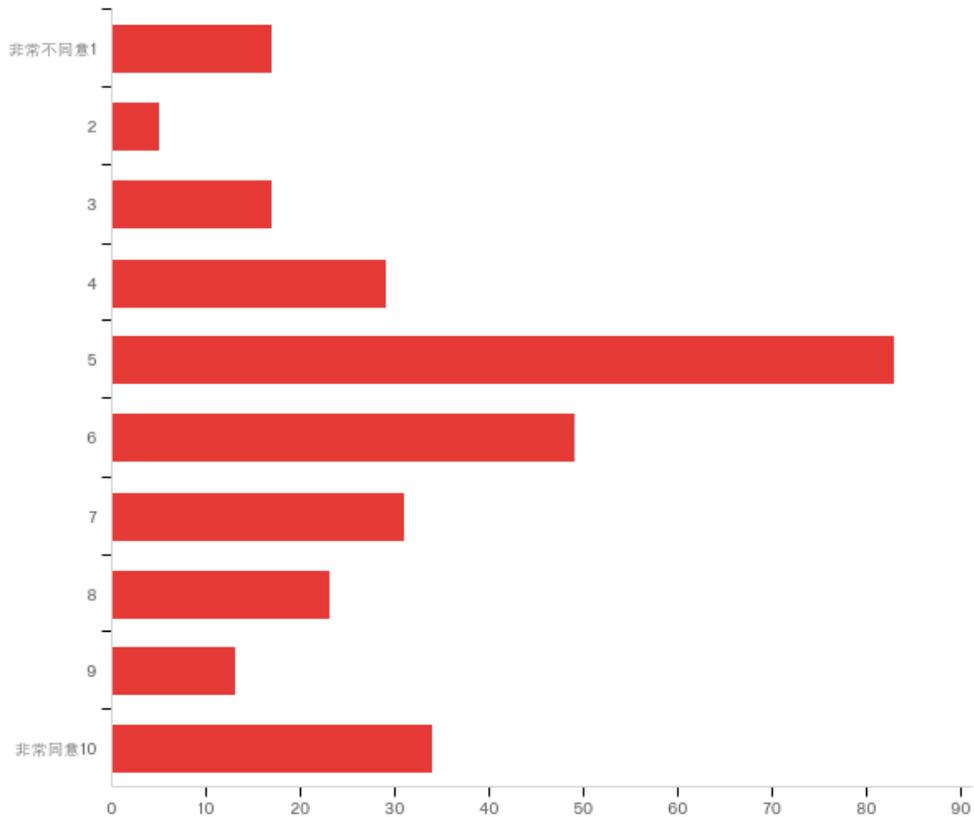


Figure 35. Plain Prose Q10 Response Summary

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	中美应该有更多的合作，比如一起去太空上月球。	1.00	10.00	5.85	2.33	5.43	301

Figure 36. Plain Prose Q10 Response Breakdown

#	Answer	%	Count
1	非常不同意 1	5.65%	17
2	2	1.66%	5
3	3	5.65%	17
4	4	9.63%	29
5	5	27.57%	83
6	6	16.28%	49
7	7	10.30%	31
8	8	7.64%	23
9	9	4.32%	13
10	非常同意 10	11.30%	34
	Total	100%	301

Participants were fairly uncertain about this question, exhibiting a mean agreement trend of 5.85/10. 5/10 was the most-selected answer, favored by 27.57% of respondents. 49.84% of participants chose an agreement score of 6/10 or higher. This question was the second diplomatic related question, and as with Q6, it is likely that a tense U.S.-China political climate factored in to participants' responses.

Conventionalized Expressions Survey

中美应该更上一层楼，比如一起去太空上月球。Zhōng Měi yīnggāi gèng shàng yì céng lóu, bǐrú yìqǐ qù tài kōng shàng yuè qiú. [Literary Quote]
 China and America should “**go one floor higher**,” such as by going to space together to land on the moon. [This quote is used to reference both going even higher and getting new perspective.]

Figure 37. Conventionalized Expressions Q10 Chart

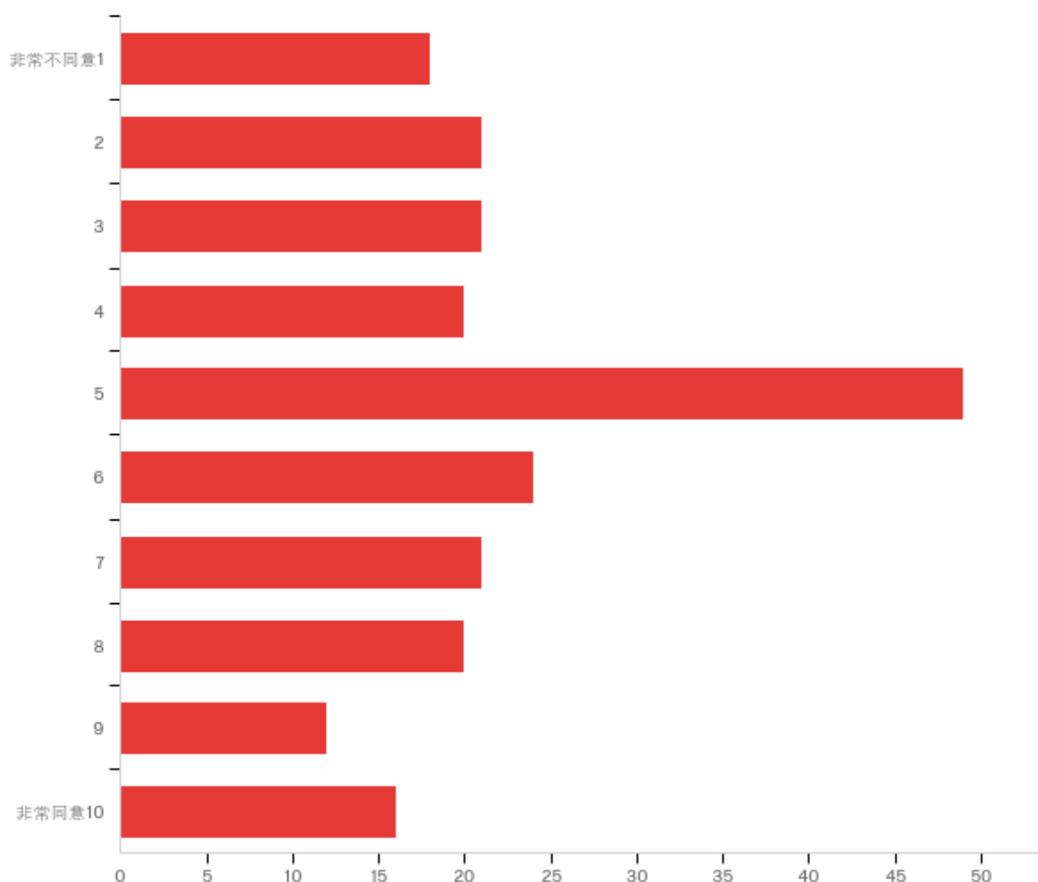


Figure 38. Conventionalized Expressions Q10 Response Summary

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	中美应该更上一层楼，比如一起去太空上月球。	1.00	10.00	5.26	2.55	6.52	222

Figure 39. Conventionalized Expressions Q10 Response Breakdown

#	Answer	%	Count
1	非常不同意 1	8.11%	18
2	2	9.46%	21
3	3	9.46%	21
4	4	9.01%	20
5	5	22.07%	49
6	6	10.81%	24
7	7	9.46%	21
8	8	9.01%	20
9	9	5.41%	12
10	非常同意 10	7.21%	16
	Total	100%	222

The researcher had expected participants to agree more with this statement than the prose equivalent, because the proverb used suggests going to new heights and gaining new perspective, which seems well suited to a goodwill space mission. This was one of the statement pairs, however, that went against the initial hypothesis. As you can see, the mean agreement level dropped slightly from 5.85/10 in the prose survey to 5.26/10 in the conventionalized expression one, and the percentage of participants who selected an agreement rating of 6/10 or higher dropped to 41.9%. This could be because of awkward syntax, as with Q6, given that native speakers have since expressed that usually one would not say that two countries had “gone one floor higher,” but rather that their 合作 *hézuò* “cooperation” had done so.

Alternatively, the lower agreement ratings could be because the proverb “to go one floor higher” is used when the situation is already in a good place, and it could be *even better*. The

tense political climate falsifies the precondition of this proverb, possibly leading respondents to disagree with the message even more. This is also a similar situation to what occurred in Q6, when participants disagreed more strongly when the proverb claimed we are currently enjoying the “shade” of good U.S.-China relations. In both Q6 and Q10, the proverb specifies a current positive situation, which is in contrast to the diplomatic landscape. Both sets of results, however, could be compromised by grammatical inaccuracies.

Q1, Q7, and Q8: Limitations around Translation Equivalence

Question 1

Plain Prose Survey

掉在地上的东西捡起来吃其实对身体有好处。 *Diào zài dìshàng de dōngxi jiǎn qǐ lái chī qíshí duì shēntǐ yǒu hǎochu.*

Picking up and eating something that has fallen on the ground is actually good for your health.

Figure 40. Plain Prose Q1 Chart

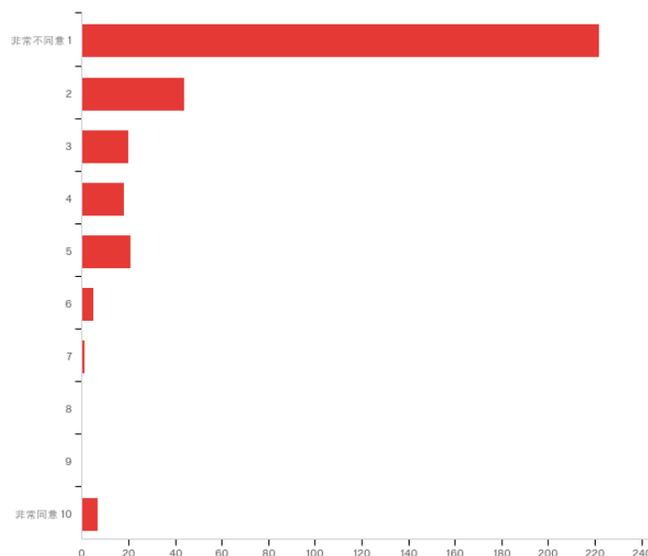


Figure 41. Plain Prose Q1 Response Summary

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	掉在地上的东西捡起来吃其实对身体有好处。	1.00	10.00	1.93	1.77	3.12	338

Figure 42. Plain Prose Q1 Response Breakdown

#	Answer	%	Count
1	非常不同意 1	65.68%	222
2	2	13.02%	44
3	3	5.92%	20
4	4	5.33%	18
5	5	6.21%	21
6	6	1.48%	5
7	7	0.30%	1
8	8	0.00%	0
9	9	0.00%	0
10	非常同意 10	2.07%	7
	Total	100%	338

As you can see, the mean was a strong disagreement score of 1.93/10. A 65.68% majority of participants selected 1, marked as “非常不同意” (“extremely disagree”), and only 3.85% of participants expressed an agreement rating of 6/10 or higher. These responses reveal a clear tendency toward disagreement. When the same message is phrased as a conventionalized saying, however, something very different occurs.

Conventionalized Expressions Survey

不干不净，吃了没病。 *Bù gān bú jìng, chī le méi bìng.* [Rhymed Saying]
If it's not clean, eating it will not make you sick. [Similar to: “A little dirt never killed anybody.”]

Figure 43. Conventionalized Expressions Q1 Chart

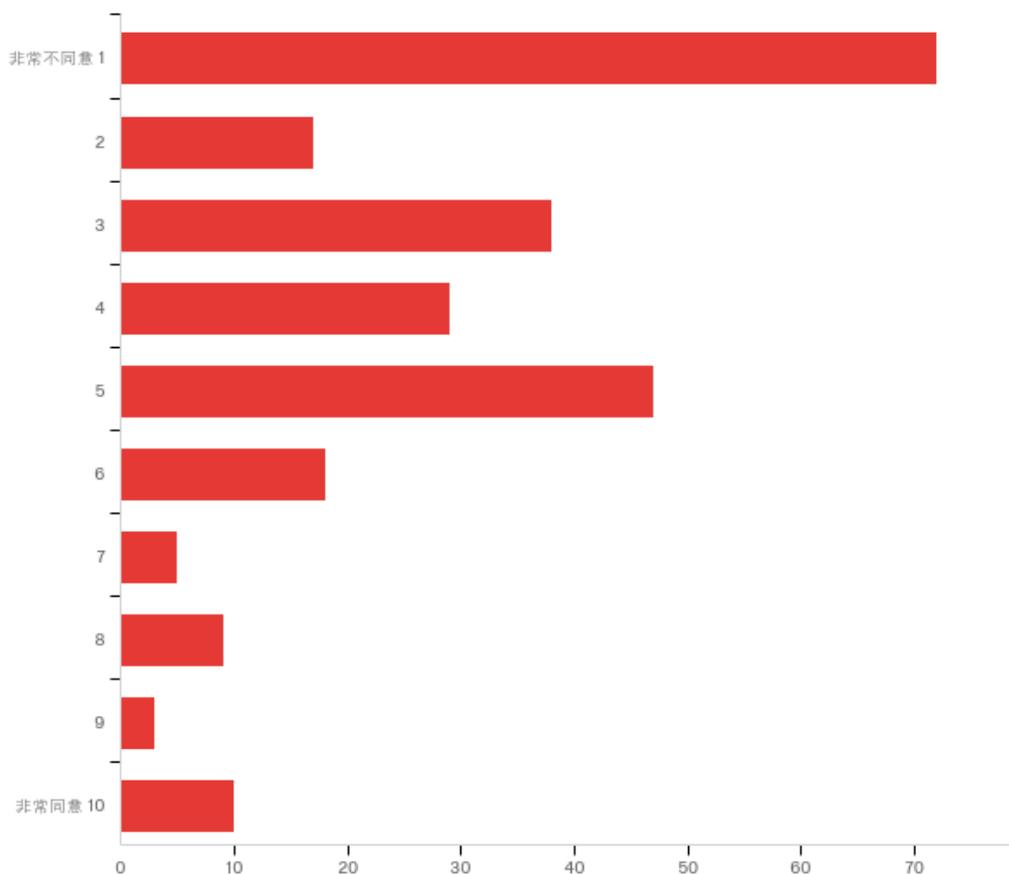


Figure 44. Conventionalized Expressions Q1 Response Summary

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	不干不净，吃了没病。	1.00	10.00	3.68	2.44	5.93	248

Figure 45. Conventionalized Expressions Q1 Response Breakdown

#	Answer	%	Count
1	非常不同意 1	29.03%	72
2	2	6.85%	17
3	3	15.32%	38
4	4	11.69%	29
5	5	18.95%	47
6	6	7.26%	18
7	7	2.02%	5
8	8	3.63%	9
9	9	1.21%	3
10	非常同意 10	4.03%	10
	Total	100%	248

Fascinatingly, the responses were far more dispersed when the message was packaged as a rhymed saying. Although an extreme disagreement score of 1/10 was still chosen more than any other rating, those respondents only make up 29.03% of the total group, and a middle score of 5/10 was the second most chosen rating, accounting for 18.95% of respondents. The dispersed nature of responses would seem to indicate a lot less decisiveness. Indeed, whereas only 6.21% of prose survey respondents chose the neutral score of “5,” this middle score was favored by 18.95% of respondents in the conventionalized expressions survey. Furthermore, 18.15% of participants expressed agreement scores of at least 6/10, a much higher percentage than the 3.85% seen in the prose survey.

Responses to this question aligned with the initial hypothesis that using a conventionalized expression increases the persuasiveness of a statement. Indeed, the mean

agreement rating increased from 1.93/10 in the prose survey to 3.68/10 in the conventionalized expressions one.

One possible explanation for this is a translation inconsistency. Whereas the plain prose version claims positive effects for one's health, the rhymed saying ventures only to say that one will not get sick. These could be more closely aligned in future studies.

Question 7

Plain Prose Survey

做事情慢没关系，别停下来就好了。 *Zuò shìqíng màn méi guānxi, bié tíng xià lai jiù hǎo le.*
Doing things slowly is no big deal, as long as you don't come to a stop, it will be fine.

Figure 46. Plain Prose Q7 Chart

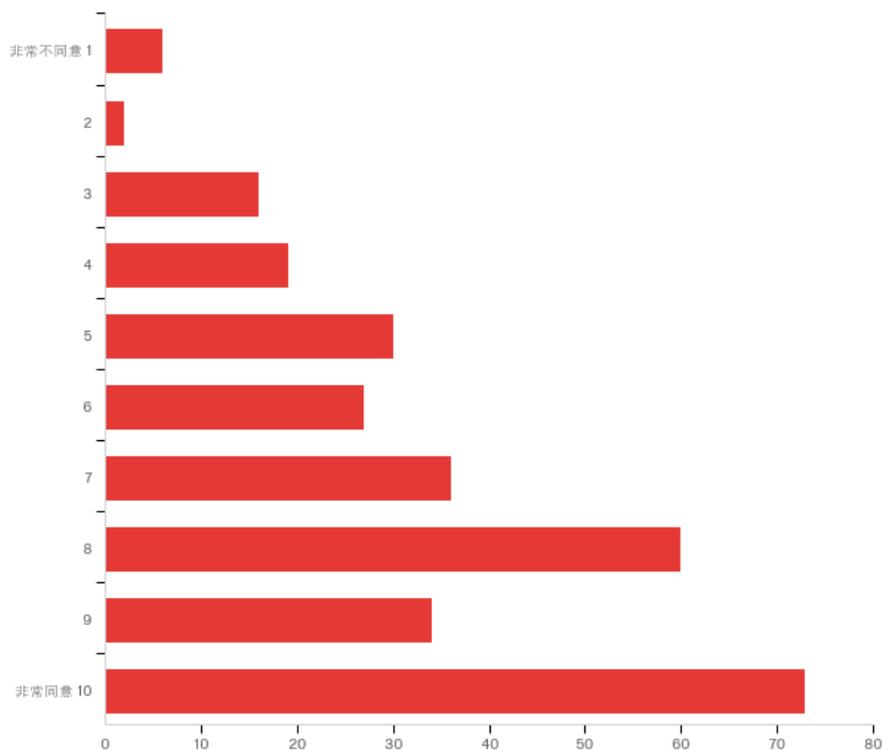


Figure 47. Plain Prose Q7 Response Summary

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	做事情慢没关系, 别停下来就好了。	1.00	10.00	7.31	2.34	5.49	303

Figure 48. Plain Prose Q7 Response Breakdown

#	Answer	%	Count
1	非常不同意 1	1.98%	6
2	2	0.66%	2
3	3	5.28%	16
4	4	6.27%	19
5	5	9.90%	30
6	6	8.91%	27
7	7	11.88%	36
8	8	19.80%	60
9	9	11.22%	34
10	非常同意 10	24.09%	73
	Total	100%	303

Generally, respondents agreed with this statement, as reflected by the mean agreement score of 7.31/10. 75.90% of participants selected an agreement rating of 6/10 or higher.

Conventionalized Expressions Survey

做事情不怕慢，全怕站。 *Zuò shìqíng bú pà màn, quán pà zhàn.* [Rhymed Saying]
When doing things, don't fear being slow, only fear coming to a halt.

Figure 49. Conventionalized Expressions Q7 Chart

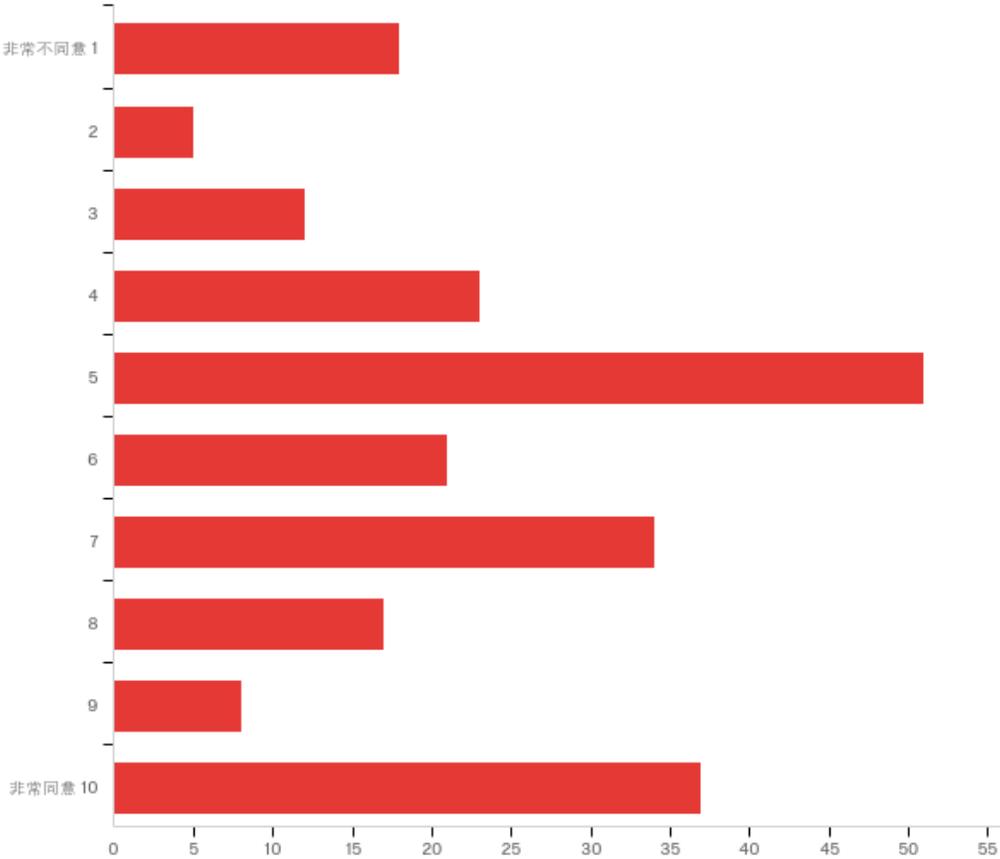


Figure 50. Conventionalized Expressions Q7 Response Summary

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	做事情不怕慢，全怕站。	1.00	10.00	5.99	2.62	6.84	226

Figure 51. Conventionalized Expressions Q7 Response Breakdown

#	Answer	%	Count
1	非常不同意 1	7.96%	18
2	2	2.21%	5
3	3	5.31%	12
4	4	10.18%	23
5	5	22.57%	51
6	6	9.29%	21
7	7	15.04%	34
8	8	7.52%	17
9	9	3.54%	8
10	非常同意 10	16.37%	37
	Total	100%	226

The rhymed expression here is somewhat more ambiguous than its prose counterpart, which could help explain why 5/10 was the most-selected rating, and 5.99/10 was the mean, exhibiting more uncertainty than was shown in the prose survey, which had garnered a mean agreement rating of 7.31/10. Furthermore, the percentage of participants who selected a high agreement score of at least 6/10 dropped from 75.90% to 51.76%. This could be because the prose version is worded more clearly, and contains reassurances, like 没关系 *méi guānxi* (“no big deal”), and 就好了 *jiù hǎo le* (“it will be fine”), leading respondents to think the speaker has outside knowledge of the matter and can be trusted.

This draws attention to an important flaw in the survey design, which will be elaborated on in the following chapter. Namely, that the prose phrasings incidentally use communicative devices of their own that influence responses.

Question 8

Plain Prose Survey

考试的时候，应该只看自己的试卷，避免作弊嫌疑。 *Kǎoshì de shíhou, yīnggāi zhǐ kàn zìjǐ de shìjuǎn, bìmiǎn zuòbì xiányí.*

During a test, you should only look at your own test paper to avoid suspicion of cheating.

Figure 52. Plain Prose Q8 Chart

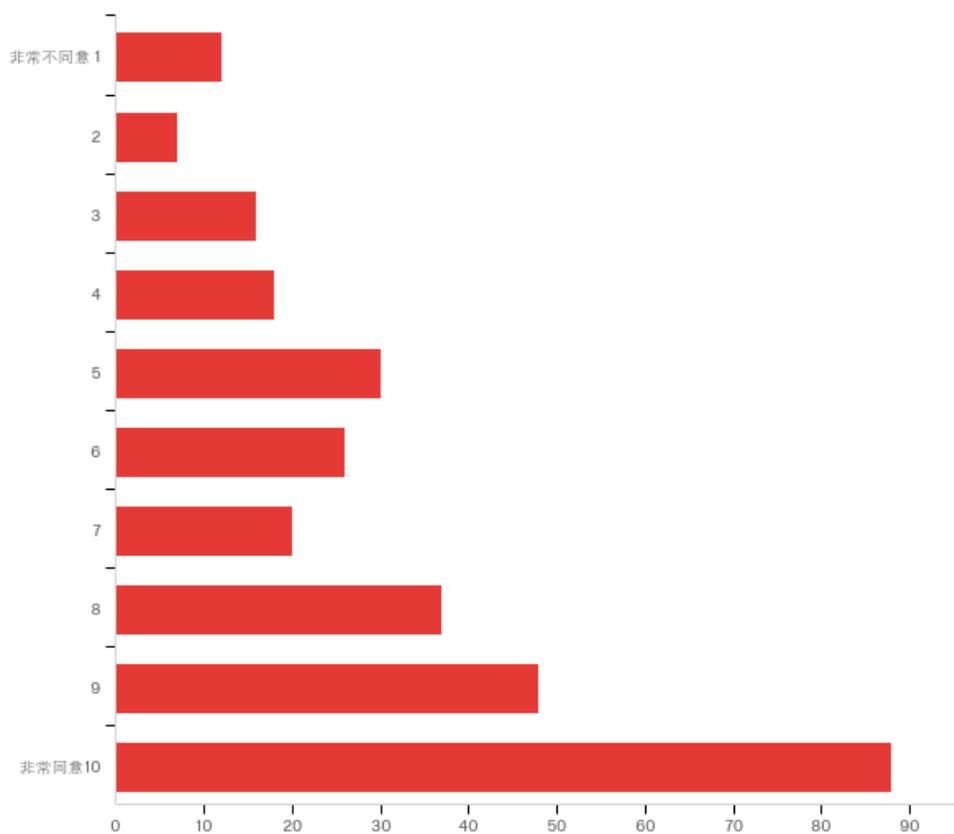


Figure 53. Plain Prose Q8 Response Summary

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	考试的时候，应该只看自己的试卷，避免作弊嫌疑。	1.00	10.00	7.28	2.68	7.18	302

Figure 54. Plain Prose Q8 Response Breakdown

#	Answer	%	Count
1	非常不同意 1	3.97%	12
2	2	2.32%	7
3	3	5.30%	16
4	4	5.96%	18
5	5	9.93%	30
6	6	8.61%	26
7	7	6.62%	20
8	8	12.25%	37
9	9	15.89%	48
10	非常同意 10	29.14%	88
	Total	100%	302

With an average rating of 7.28/10, there was a general tendency toward agreement for this question. 72.51% of participants chose a rating of 6/10 or higher.

Conventionalized Expressions Survey

考试的时候，应该只看自己的试卷，瓜田李下，避免作弊嫌疑。[Chengyu]

Kǎoshì de shíhòu, yīnggāi zhǐ kàn zìjǐ de shìjuǎn, guā tián lǐ xià, bìmiǎn zuòbì xiányí.

During a test, you should only look at your own test paper, “**in the melon field and under the pear trees,**” to avoid suspicion of cheating. [Kneeling among melons and standing under pear trees are used here to refer to inherently suspicious positions to be in, because it appears as though you are stealing fruit.]

Figure 55. Conventionalized Expressions Q8 Chart

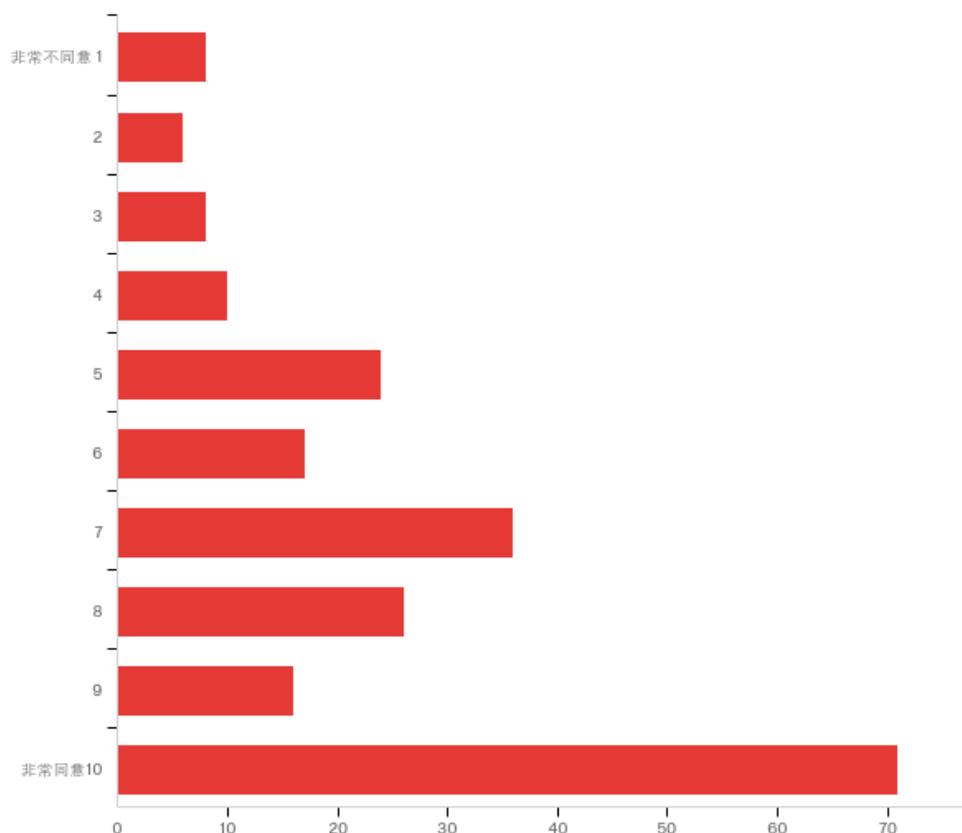


Figure 56. Conventionalized Expressions Q8 Response Summary

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	考试的时候，应该只看自己的试卷，瓜田李下，避免作弊嫌疑。	1.00	10.00	7.30	2.58	6.66	222

Figure 57. Conventionalized Expressions Q8 Response Breakdown

#	Answer	%	Count
1	非常不同意 1	3.60%	8
2	2	2.70%	6
3	3	3.60%	8
4	4	4.50%	10
5	5	10.81%	24
6	6	7.66%	17
7	7	16.22%	36
8	8	11.71%	26
9	9	7.21%	16
10	非常同意 10	31.98%	71
	Total	100%	222

Interestingly, the average agreement rating was almost identical in each survey for this question. Here, it was 7.30/10, up from 7.28 in the prose survey. 74.78% of participants chose an agreement rating of 6/10 or higher, hardly higher than the 72.51% in the prose survey.

It seems that adding the idiom in this case only barely increased the level of agreement from participants, and not to a material extent. Although there is some variation in distribution of agreement ratings between the two surveys, the patterns are very similar. This suggests that using a conventionalized expression *can* change the way a message is perceived, but it does not *always* do so. Perhaps this is because specifying a concept can be done in prose, without the aid of an idiom. For example, the phrase “to kick the bucket” could be translated as “to die” or “to die suddenly of old age.” It seems reasonable to assume that when a prose paraphrase specifies the same parameters as an idiomatic phrase, using an idiom may not alter audience perception.

In this scenario, the idiom highlights the suspicious circumstances, in which the person involved is not necessarily guilty of any wrongdoing. These parameters are also conveyed, however, by the prose phrasing of the statement.

Another possible explanation is that this is a rarely used expression, and the researcher has since learned that native Chinese speakers do not necessarily understand its meaning. If participants were unfamiliar with this expression, they may have simply ignored it, which could also account for the similar agreement trends between surveys.

Question 9

Plain Prose Survey

以前爱过，现在不可能了。*Yǐqián ài guò, xiànzài bù kěnéng le.*
If you have been in love before, then it is no longer possible.

Figure 58. Plain Prose Q9 Chart

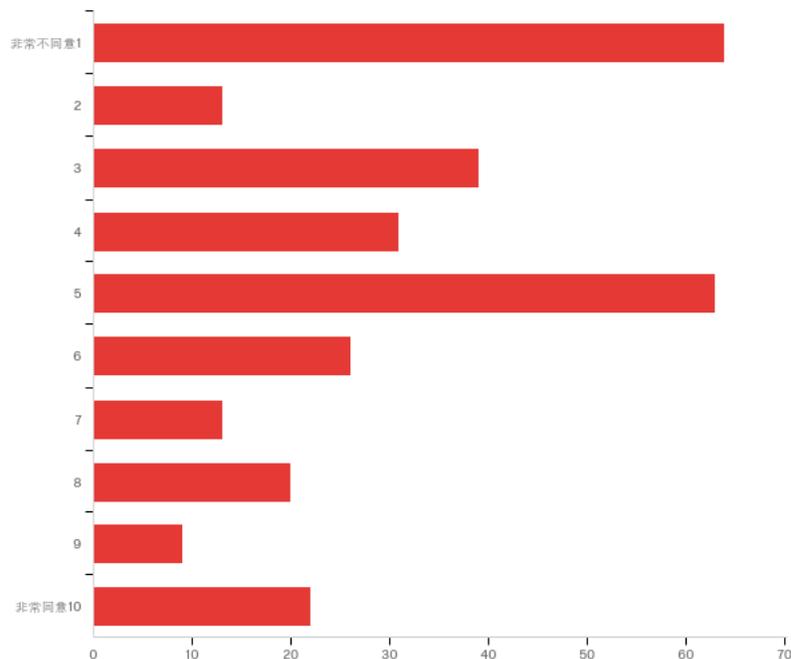


Figure 59. Plain Prose Q9 Response Summary

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	以前爱过, 现在不可能了。	1.00	10.00	4.51	2.71	7.36	300

Figure 60. Plain Prose Q9 Response Breakdown

#	Answer	%	Count
1	非常不同意 1	21.33%	64
2	2	4.33%	13
3	3	13.00%	39
4	4	10.33%	31
5	5	21.00%	63
6	6	8.67%	26
7	7	4.33%	13
8	8	6.67%	20
9	9	3.00%	9
10	非常同意 10	7.33%	22
	Total	100%	300

You can see here that participants tended toward disagreement with this assertion. The mean agreement level was 4.51/10, with only 30% of participants selecting an agreement rating of 6/10 or higher.

Conventionalized Expressions Survey

以前爱过，曾经沧海难为水，现在不可能了。 *Yiqián ài guò, céngjīng cāng hǎi nán wéi shuǐ, xiànzài bù kěnéng le.* [Literary Quote]

If you have been in love before—“**once you have known the great ocean, it’s difficult to be water**”—love is no longer possible. [This quote means something like, “once you have known something great, everything else becomes diminished.”]

Figure 61. Conventionalized Expressions Q9 Chart

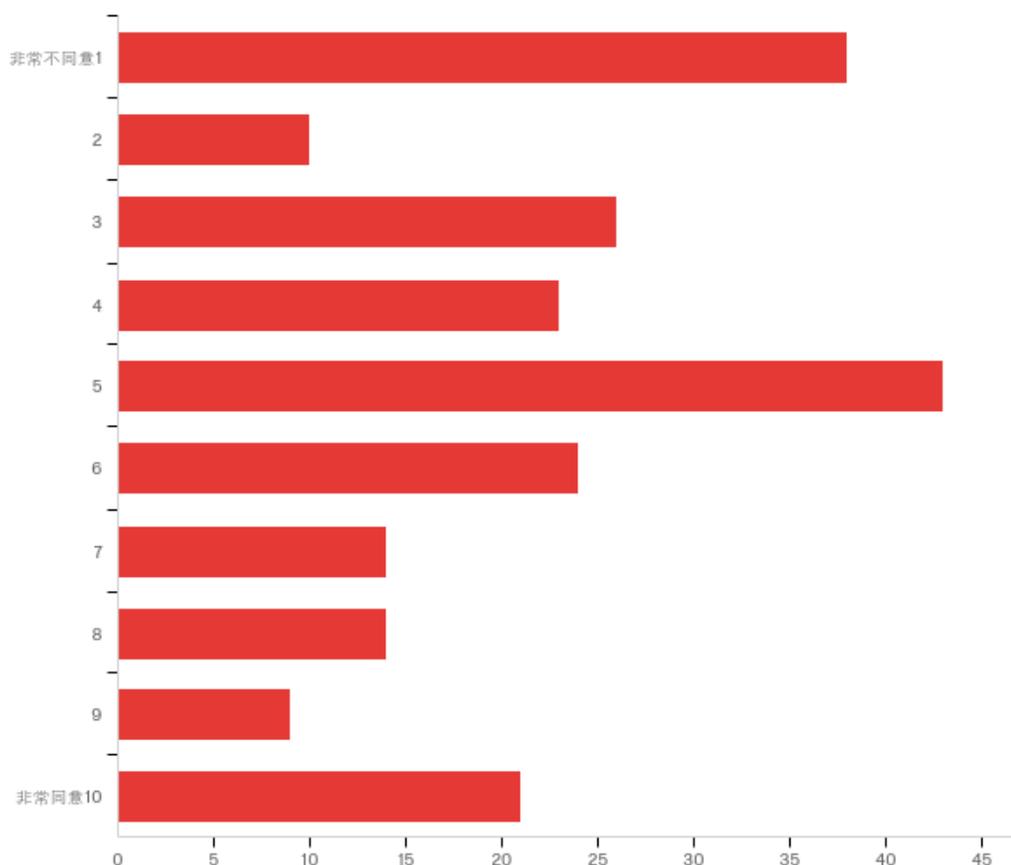


Figure 62. Conventionalized Expressions Q9 Response Summary

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	以前爱过，曾经沧海难为水，现在不可能了。	1.00	10.00	4.90	2.77	7.65	222

Figure 63. Conventionalized Expressions Q9 Response Breakdown

#	Answer	%	Count
1	非常不同意 1	17.12%	38
2	2	4.50%	10
3	3	11.71%	26
4	4	10.36%	23
5	5	19.37%	43
6	6	10.81%	24
7	7	6.31%	14
8	8	6.31%	14
9	9	4.05%	9
10	非常同意 10	9.46%	21
	Total	100%	222

The famous quote used here is from the Tang Dynasty poem 《离思》 *Li Si*, written by 元稹 Yuan Zhen, who uses metaphor powerfully to express the impossibility of water ever measuring up to a lost ocean, in order to express the hopelessness of finding love twice. This example does support the initial hypothesis because the mean agreement rating increased slightly from 4.51/10 in the prose survey to 4.90/10 in the conventionalized expression one. Additionally, the percentage of participants who selected an agreement score of 6/10 or higher rose from 30% in the prose survey to 36.94% in this one.

This statement pair is significant because although it supports the initial hypothesis, the data collected from the other responses leads to a more nuanced explanation as to the source of this increased persuasiveness. Whereas the initial hypothesis supposed the source to be a sense of credibility inherent to cultural sayings, the collected findings of this study instead suggest that

increased persuasiveness is achieved when the quote highlights a favorable (or at least less objectionable) aspect of the message. In this case, the quote draws attention to the *immeasurability* of second love to a first great love, rather than the impossibility of second love. It may be that in spite of seeking to make each statement pair as close in meaning as possible, what actually makes conventionalized expressions effective tools for altering perception is that they alter meaning to some extent, too.

Chapter 4: Limitations

Survey Design

As mentioned in Chapter 1, one limitation in the design of this study is the difficulty of equating prose paraphrases with conventionalized ones. The Q3 analysis in the previous chapter suggested one possible solution that could be adapted by future studies, namely, the creation of a third survey that presents each statement pair as a set, and participants would rate the perceived closeness in meaning. Participants could further be given space to indicate whether they think the phrases sound grammatically correct or should be adjusted in some way, which could mitigate awkward syntax as an influencing factor in perception.

A related assumption built into this study is that prose paraphrases are a neutral form of communication that can be used as a control group for observing the effects of adding in conventionalized expressions. This is a risky assumption, especially since scholars like Lakoff and Johnson, and Barbara Grosz contend that communication is never devoid of influencing factors. As stated in Chapter 1, Grosz has observed that, “in choosing a particular set of words with which to describe an entity, a speaker indicates a perspective on that entity. The hearer is led, then, to see the entity more as one kind of thing than as another.”¹⁵ The selected phrasings in the prose survey, then, highlighted and hid features from the audience, just as much as did the conventionalized expressions.

For example, as described in the Q7 analysis, the prose version of the statement was peppered with reassuring utterances, including 没关系 *méi guānxi* (“no big deal”) and 就好了

¹⁵ Grosz, Barbara. “Chapter 3: Focusing and Description in Natural Language Dialogues.” *Elements of Discourse Understanding*, by Aravind K. Joshi et al., Cambridge University Press, 1981. Page 84.

jiù hǎo le (“it will be fine”). These communicative devices could account for why respondents tended to agree more with the prose statement than with the comparatively direct rhymed saying that asserted literally, “Don’t fear slow, fully fear stopping.” Without a stable baseline, it is hard to isolate the effect of adding in a conventionalized expression.

The results point to conventionalized expressions being one of *many* various communicative devices that speakers use to guide perception. It is worth exploring whether there is such a thing as a “prose baseline” to measure against. Future studies could create a second prose survey with the statements worded in alternate ways, in order to find this out.

Another significant limitation in the survey design was the lack of methodology for selecting conventionalized expressions to be used in the study. Expressions chosen were ones that the researcher happened to like or find interesting, which may have led to the inclusion of rarely used sayings, as mentioned in the Q8 analysis.

Participants

With over 250 participants per group, the sample size was good for this study, but a larger sample size would be even better. Additionally, although university students were deliberately chosen as the participant group for this study, this means that the findings are not generalizable. Future studies, however, could try out a more diverse participant set.

Another limitation was the number of incomplete responses, 44/340 (12.94%) in the prose survey, and 34/251 (13.55%) in the conventionalized expressions survey. A “back” button was not provided in the surveys, in order to prevent participants from changing their answers, but this could have led to a higher number of incomplete responses.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

In spite of the limitations detailed in the previous chapter, the results of this study appear to support certain conclusions. Most importantly, the hypothesis that using conventionalized expressions automatically increases persuasiveness of a statement in Chinese discourse was falsified, at least for an audience consisting of university students. Evidence does *not* indicate that conventionalized expressions add “credibility status” in and of themselves. Rather, as described, conventionalized expressions are one of many linguistic devices to steer audience thinking toward certain aspects of a situation over others.

As seen in Q6, simply dropping a saying into a message does not increase positive reception of the message if the emphasized features are at odds with subjective experience. Used skillfully, an expression might highlight features while masking others, guiding audience perception toward aspects they *already believe* to be true, and avoiding features they might not believe to be true.

If the highlighted features in the conventionalized expression seem true, the audience appears to agree more with the overall message than when it is presented in prose: this can be seen in Q1 (highlights *a non-negative outcome* from eating dirty food, as opposed to a positive one), and in Q2 (highlights the *recklessness* with which someone is gossiping). Conversely, if the highlighted features do *not* resonate with the audience, they tend to disagree with the overall message more than when it is presented in prose: this can be seen in the conventionalized expression surveys of Q3 (commonly interpreted to highlight the value of *repetition* in learning), Q4 (highlights the value of *quantity* in reading and experience for learning), Q5 (highlights the *recklessness* of doing whatever one wants to), Q6 (highlights *comfortable present circumstances*

among the benefits of the U.S.-China relationship), Q7 (highlights that one should *fear* a total halt in progress), Q9 (highlights *immeasurability* of second love to a great lost first love, rather than the impossibility of ever finding love twice), and Q10 (highlights *existing strength* of U.S.-China relations).

In summary, *how* something is said appears to affect the perception of *what* is said, perhaps because to the audience, the *how* changes the *what*. Everything in the world is multifaceted, and no matter what way you describe it, you cannot describe all of its aspects at once. To win audience agreement in Chinese discourse, the key may be to find the right expressions to highlight those aspects with which the audience will likely agree.

Chapter 6: Implications and Applications

Pedagogical Applications

This study concludes that Chinese conventionalized expressions concentrate audience attention on certain aspects of a situation over others. Conventionalized expressions should be taught, therefore, with equal attention to detail, so that students understand their precise connotations and applications. Equipping students with formalized cultural sayings is just as important as equipping them with unstructured vocabulary and grammar—it is essential to the mission of teaching students not only to communicate in a foreign language, but to communicate in a foreign culture. That said, these expressions do not need to be reserved for only the most advanced language learners. As stated in Chapter 1, their unique qualities set them apart from the usual grammatical constraints of Chinese, allowing them to be integrated at any stage of the Chinese language learning process, or even outside of the process altogether.

Diplomatic Applications

There is a long tradition of diplomats using Chinese conventionalized expressions as primarily cultural tools, rather than linguistic ones. Even in 1972, on President Nixon’s famous visit to China, he gave a speech expressing his urgent wish to build diplomatic ties with China, in which he used English to quote a line from one of Mao Zedong’s poems: “10,000 years is too long—seize the day” (一万年太久，只争朝夕).¹⁶ At a 2009 Sino-American conference, Hillary

¹⁶ Goldman, Merle. “Poetry, Politics and Mao.” *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 1 Mar. 1972, www.nytimes.com/1972/03/01/archives/poetry-politics-and-mao.html.

Clinton quoted the Chinese proverb, “When people are of one mind and heart, they can move Mt. Tai” (人心齐, 泰山移) to convey that the two countries should work together to address the economic crisis.¹⁷

Dr. Xin Zhang’s research suggests that native English speakers receive different reactions than native Chinese speakers do when citing the same Chinese idioms. It would be worthwhile to replicate her study and also to conduct variations on it. Future studies could explore, for example, how citing Chinese conventionalized expressions in English versus Chinese (within an otherwise English language speech) influences perception among native Chinese speakers. One could also test the hypothesis that: If native English speakers cite a Chinese expression, then it is perceived by native Chinese speakers primarily as a gesture of goodwill, whereas if native Chinese speakers cite a Chinese expression among themselves, then it materially shapes how the audience thinks about the topic at hand.

If the above hypothesis is true, future studies could investigate whether native English speakers can achieve the perception-altering effect of citing Chinese expressions by making the quote more personal in some way, such as by mentioning a corresponding expression that exists in English. In conversations the researcher has had with Chinese university students in Suzhou, some have said that it seems strange and even dishonest for Americans to quote Chinese expressions, and that they should quote expressions from their own language. If, however, Americans can put corresponding Chinese and English expressions side-by-side, thus creating a

¹⁷ Clinton, Hillary Rodham. “Remarks at Plenary Session of the U.S.-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue.” *U.S. Department of State*, U.S. Department of State, 27 July 2009, 2009-2017.state.gov/secretary/20092013clinton/rm/2009a/july/126521.htm.

shared framework of thinking, we might overcome this problem and create new possibilities for meaningful cross-cultural exchange.

There are other ways, too, that one could make a Chinese expression more personal in order to come across as more authentic. Speaking at the same 2009 conference in which Hillary Clinton cited an ancient Chinese proverb, President Obama did something a little different:

President Hu and I both felt that it was important to get our relationship off to a good start. Of course, as a new President and also as a basketball fan, I have learned from the words of Yao Ming, who said, "No matter whether you are new or an old team member, you need time to adjust to one another." Well, through the constructive meetings that we've already had, and through this dialogue, I'm confident that we will meet Yao's standard.¹⁸

In this situation, a quote was used, rather than a conventionalized expression. Future studies could examine how native Chinese speakers perceive citations of modern quotes as opposed to the more linguistically-anomalous conventionalized expressions.

There is a tremendous history of citation in Chinese diplomacy. Not unlike Lakoff and Johnson, Confucius believed citation to be a deeply influential conversational device. Confucius is purported in the *Analects* to have had the following conversation with his son Bo Yu, as related by the latter.

Once my father was standing by himself. As I crossed the courtyard with hasty steps, he said, "Have you learned the *Book of Songs*?" On my replying "No," he added, "If you do not learn the *Songs*, you will have no means of speaking." I retired and studied the *Songs* (「未也。嘗獨立，鯉趨而過庭。曰：『學詩乎?』對曰：『未也。』『不學詩，無以言。』鯉退而學詩。') (16.13).

¹⁸ Obama, Barack. "Remarks by the President at the U.S./China Strategic and Economic Dialogue." *National Archives and Records Administration*, National Archives and Records Administration, 27 July 2009, obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/realitycheck/the-press-office/remarks-president-uschina-strategic-and-economic-dialogue.

The purpose of studying the *Book of Songs* (the *Shijing*) was to cite it in conversation, especially diplomatic conversation.

This creates new possibilities for understanding the opening line of the *Analects*, used in Q3 of the conventionalized expressions survey. 学而时习之，不亦悦乎？ *Xué ér shí xí zhī, bú yì yuè hū?* may be the most famous quote attributed to Confucius, and it has been misinterpreted for a long time. As described, recent scholarship has advanced its translation to, “To study and apply it at just the right time, is that not joyful?” Still, there could be yet another layer of meaning to be uncovered. Namely, that the object of “study” described throughout the *Analects* is not some general notion of learning, but as shown above, is quite specifically the *Book of Songs*. To “apply” this book, then, would be to cite it.

According to Confucius himself—perhaps the most venerated teacher in Chinese history—learning citation skills in Chinese is not an ornamental pursuit, but is actually indispensable for conversation, and even a source of happiness. What better argument for teaching Chinese conventionalized expressions to language students and diplomats alike? There is joy, after all, in having just the right words to say at just the right time.

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Appendix A

Plain Prose Survey¹⁹

通过参加本项问卷调查，您同意调查结果可供研究论文发表使用。本问卷调查不收集不分享任何可能涉及您个人的资料与信息，敬请放心。

By participating in this survey, you agree that the results of the survey may be published in research papers. Please be assured that no personally identifiable information will be collected or shared through participation in this survey.

请假装你的同学刚刚说了下面的这些说法。你同意吗？请选择。

Please imagine that your classmate has just said the following statements. Do you agree? Please select [on the provided scale of 1-10].

1. 掉在地上的东西捡起来吃其实对身体有好处。 *Diào zài dìshang de dōngxi jiǎn qǐ lái chī qíshí duì shēntǐ yǒu hǎochu.*
Picking up and eating something that has fallen on the ground is actually good for your health.
2. 我最讨厌什么事情都要说几句的人。 *Wǒ zuì tǎoyàn shénme shìqing dōu yào shuō jǐ jù de rén.*
I am most annoyed by those people who have something to say about everything.
3. 用对了刚学到的知识觉得很快乐。 *Yòng duì le gāng xuédào de zhīshi juéde hěn kuàilè.*
Using correctly something you have just learned makes you feel happy.
4. 你要学会一样东西，不光要有书本知识，还要有实际经历。 *Nǐ yào xué huì yí yàng dōngxi, bù guāng yào yǒu shū běn zhīshi, hái yào yǒu shíjì jīnglì.*
If you want to learn to do something, it's not enough to have book knowledge, you also need practical experience.
5. 想去哪儿玩儿，别想太多，说走就走。 *Xiǎng qù nǎr wánr, bié xiǎng tài duō, shuō zǒu jiù zǒu.*
If you want to go somewhere for fun, don't overthink it, just go.

¹⁹ Note that *Pinyin* and English translations have been added for reference.

6. 尼克松前总统和毛泽东 1972 年建立了两国之间的关系对现代两国人还有好处。
Níkèsōng qián zǒngtǒng hé Máo Zédōng 1972 nián jiànli le liǎng guó zhījiān de guānxi duì xiàndài liǎng guó rén hái yǒu hǎochu.
Former President Nixon and Mao Zedong's 1972 establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries still benefits the people of these countries today.
7. 做事情慢没关系，别停下来就好了。
Zuò shìqīng màn méi guānxi, bié tíng xià lai jiù hǎo le.
Doing things slowly is no big deal, as long as you don't come to a stop, it will be fine.
8. 考试的时候，应该只看自己的试卷，避免作弊嫌疑。
Kǎoshì de shíhou, yīnggāi zhǐ kàn zìjǐ de shìjuǎn, bìmiǎn zuòbì xiányí.
During a test, you should only look at your own test paper to avoid suspicion of cheating.
9. 以前爱过，现在不可能了。
Yǐqián ài guò, xiànzài bù kěnéng le.
If you have been in love before, then it is no longer possible.
10. 中美应该有更多的合作，比如一起去太空上月球。
Zhōng Měi yīnggāi yǒu gèng duō de hézuò, bǐrú yìqǐ qù tàikōng shàng yuèqiú.
China and America should cooperate more with each other, such as by going to space together to land on the moon.
11. 你是否已满十八周岁? Are you 18 years or older?
12. 性别 Gender
13. 你在读的学生身份是 The degree you are currently pursuing is...

Appendix B

Conventionalized Expressions Survey²⁰

通过参加本项问卷调查，您同意调查结果可供研究论文发表使用。本问卷调查不收集不分享任何可能涉及您个人的资料与信息，敬请放心。

By participating in this survey, you agree that the results of the survey may be published in research papers. Please be assured that no personally identifiable information will be collected or shared through participation in this survey.

请假装你的同学刚刚说了下面的这些说法。你同意吗？请选择。

Please imagine that your classmate has just said the following statements. Do you agree? Please select [on the provided scale of 1-10].

1. 不干不净，吃了没病。 *Bù gān bú jìng, chī le méi bìng.* [Rhymed Saying]
If it's not clean, eating it will not make you sick. [Similar to: "A little dirt never killed anybody."]
2. 我最讨厌什么事情都说三道四的人。 *Wǒ zuì tǎoyàn shénme shìqing dōu shuō sān dào sì de rén.* [Chengyu]
I am most annoyed by those people who "speak threes and fours" [i.e. make thoughtless remarks; gossip about this and that].
3. 学而时习之，不亦悦乎？ *Xué ér shí xí zhī, bú yì yuè hū?* [Literary Quote (*Analects*)]
To study and apply it at just the right time, is that not joyful?
4. 你要学会一样东西，不仅读万卷书，还要行万里路。 *Nǐ yào xué huì yí yàng dōngxi, bù jǐn dú wàn juàn shū, hái yào xíng wàn lǐ lù.* [Proverb]
If you want to learn to do something, don't only "read 10,000 books," you also need to "walk 10,000 miles."
5. 想去哪儿玩儿，不管三七二十一，说走就走。 *Xiǎng qù nǎr wánr, bù guǎn sān qī èrshíyī, shuō zǒu jiù zǒu.* [Rhymed Saying]
If you want to go somewhere for fun, "it doesn't matter if it's 3, 7, or 21," just go [i.e. the details are insignificant].

²⁰ Note that *Pinyin* and English translations have been added for reference.

6. 尼克松前总统和毛泽东 1972 年建立了两国之间的关系真是前人栽树，后人乘凉。
Níkèsōng qián zǒngtǒng hé Máo Zédōng 1972 nián jiànli le liǎng guó zhījiān de guānxi zhēn shì qián rén zāi shù, hòu rén chéng liáng. [Proverb]
 Former President Nixon and Mao Zedong's 1972 establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries truly is "the forerunners plant the trees, the descendants reap the shade."
7. 做事情不怕慢，全怕站。*Zuò shìqing bú pà màn, quán pà zhàn.* [Rhymed Saying]
 When doing things, don't fear being slow, only fear coming to a stop.
8. 考试的时候，应该只看自己的试卷，瓜田李下，避免作弊嫌疑。*[Chengyu]*
Kǎoshì de shíhou, yīnggāi zhǐ kàn zìjǐ de shìjuǎn, guā tián lǐ xià, bìmiǎn zuòbì xiányí.
 During a test, you should only look at your own test paper, "in the melon field and under the pear trees," to avoid suspicion of cheating. [Kneeling among melons and standing under pear trees are used here to refer to inherently suspicious positions to be in, because it appears as though you are stealing fruit.]
9. 以前爱过，曾经沧海难为水，现在不可能了。*Yǐqián ài guò, céngjīng cāng hǎi nán wéi shuǐ, xiànzài bù kěnéng le.* [Literary Quote]
 If you have been in love before—"once you have known the great ocean, it's difficult to be water"—love is no longer possible. [This quote means something like, "once you have known something great, everything else becomes diminished."]
10. 中美应该更上一层楼，比如一起去太空上月球。*Zhōng Měi yīnggāi gèng shàng yì céng lóu, bǐrú yìqǐ qù tàikōng shàng yuèqiú.* [Literary Quote]
 China and America should "go one floor higher," such as by going to space together to land on the moon. [This quote is used to reference both going even higher and getting new perspective.]
11. 你是否已满十八周岁? Are you 18 years or older?
12. 性别 Gender
13. 你在读的学生身份是 The degree you are currently pursuing is...