

**MORE THAN PERSON DEIXIS:
USES OF YA (丫) AMONG NATIVE AND NON-NATIVE BEIJINGERS***

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how the morpheme *ya* is used among native and non-native speakers of the Beijing dialect. It traces the development of *ya* from a lexical noun to a third person singular pronoun, initially with derogatory meaning, and then extending into a social identity marker signaling familiarity and intimacy. Evidence from both production and perception studies also shows that the use of *ya* has extended to other regions, with non-native uses of *ya* emerging in the process. In addition to native vs. non-native use, other factors also contribute to differences in the use of *ya* constructions. Among the factors identified in this study are age group, gender, and length of residency in Beijing.

Key words: *Ya*, person deixis, Beijing dialect, native and non-native, social identity marker

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 What is *Ya* (丫)

The morpheme *ya* (丫) in modern Beijing dialect often occurs after personal pronouns, as in (1a), or stands alone, as in (1b), to express deictic reference that can denote speaker's familiarity or discontent with others. For example, (1a) can be heard between close friends, in which *ni ya* (你丫) refers to 'you' in an intimate way, while in (1b) *ya* refers to 'that woman', showing dislike for her. *Ya* is mainly an oral expression that is commonly used in a casual way, but it can also be used in written form, such as in colloquial-style literary works and in language used on the internet.

- (1) a. 這麼 大的 喜事兒， 你 丫 今兒 得 請客
zheme da de xishier ni ya jiner dei qingke
such big good news you YA today must treat
啊！

a
PRT¹

'What good news! You must treat today!'

- b. 那 女人 真 八婆， 丫 唯恐 天下 不
na nüren zhen bapo ya weikong tianxia bu
that woman very gossipy YA afraid world not
亂 怎麼著！
luan zenmezhe

chaotic what

'That woman is so gossipy. Is she afraid that life is not chaotic enough?'

1.2 The Meaning of *Ya*

Attested since ancient Chinese, *ya* is rendered in character form shaped like a fork of a tree (丫), and the original meaning of *ya* was, and still is,

¹ The abbreviations used in this paper are: 1SG=first person singular; 2PL=second person plural; 2SG=second person singular; 3PL=third person plural; 3SG=third person singular; ASP=aspect marker; CLF=classifier; NP=noun phrase; PL=plural; PRT=particle.

‘fork’. Since it also looks like a kind of hair style worn by ancient Chinese girls, *ya* was also frequently used with another character *tou* 頭 (‘head’) to form *yatou* 丫頭 (‘girl’, or ‘servant girl’).

The modern extended use of *ya* as a deictic expression probably comes from the meaning associated with *yatou* 丫頭 (‘servant girl’). It is generally believed that *ya* is derived from the full form *ya tou yang de* 丫頭養的 (‘son of the servant girl’), referring to an illegitimate child or bastard (similar to ‘son of a bitch’ in English) and showing disrespect or even insult to people. The second and third characters, *tou* and *yang*, respectively, can be fused together to yield *ting*, giving rise to the shortened expression *ya ting de*, *ya ting*, or more often simply as *ya* in running speech. But now *ya* is also used to denote an intimate or casual relationship between participants, and this meaning is used with even higher frequency than its derogatory meaning. The emotion that *ya* expresses depends on the context, such as the nature of the conversation, the relationship between participants, and the mood of the speakers, etc.

1.3 Ya in Beijing Culture

The use of *ya* can be taken as one of the representations of “Beijing-flavored language and culture”, representing a typical traditional Beijing style. It is popular in literary works, TV, the internet, etc., as seen in (2) below.

- (2) a. 丫 行 於 一 條 黑 巷， 一 群 狗
ya xing yu yitiao hei xiang yi qun gou
YA walk on one CLF dark street one CLF dog
沖 丫 叫， 丫 說： 呸！ 你 這
chong ya jiao ya shuo pei ni zhe
towards YA bark YA say PEI you this
勢 利 的 狗。
shili de gou
mean DE dog
‘He walked along a dark street, a gang of dogs barking at him.
He said, “*Pei!* (A swear expression) You mean dogs.’
(Wang Shuo, *Lu Xun in my eyes*, 2002)

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- b. 領導：你 丫 神經病 吧。
lingdao ni ya shenjingbing ba
Boss you YA neuropath PRT
Boss: ‘Are you a neuropath?’
某某：我 問 著 問 著，就 來 到 了 這 裡。
mou mou wo wen zhe wen zhe jiu laidao le zheli
someone I ask ASP ask ASP JIU come ASP here
Someone: ‘I asked and asked, then I came here.’
(Modern drama—*I am not Li Bai*)
- c. 《你 丫 閉嘴》
ni ya bizui
you YA shut up
‘You Shut Up.’
(Name of a translated French film *Tais Toi*, 2003.)

Many Beijing natives, especially young people, often use the morpheme *ya*. In recent years *ya* has become more and more popular among non-natives of Beijing, where the term ‘non-natives of Beijing’ here refers to Chinese speakers from other regions of China. But *ya* is sometimes used differently from the way used by Beijing natives, thus one can tell immediately whether the speaker is a native of Beijing or not.

1.4 Purpose of This Study

In this paper, we will analyze *ya* (丫) in the Beijing dialect, identify its features and rules of usage, and explain why *ya* is so popular among non-natives. Then a comparative study will be made to examine the similarities and differences in the use of *ya* between natives and non-natives of Beijing using production and perception studies.

2. PREVIOUS STUDIES

To date, there has been little research on the morpheme *ya* and its use among native and non-native speakers of Beijing Mandarin. Previous studies on personal deixis in the Beijing dialect did not include the morpheme *ya*. Guo (2008) investigated the usage and functions of second person pronouns *ni* (你) and *nin* (您) in the Beijing vernacular,

classifying their usages into three types—congruent reference, phantom reference, and discourse markers. The referential use of different person pronouns can have social meaning, showing differences between speakers in terms of power, solidarity, and social distance, and reveal vivid characteristics of local culture. The selection of different pronouns also often relates to speakers' age, level of education, profession, social background, etc. Chen (1999) also looked at variations in the use of second person pronouns in the Beijing vernacular and showed that addressee characteristics also influence the addresser's choice of pronouns. For instance, if the addressee is more senior, *nin* should be used by the addresser; if the addressee shares common grounds with the addresser in age and social status, the choice of pronoun would then depend on the degree of personal distance between them: to a friend *ni* can be used, while to a stranger *nin* would be better. Besides, different roles that one plays in society also influence one's language register.

Zhang (1982) noted that the use of personal deixis will vary depending on factors such as social status, relationships, affection, personalities, etc. This can be seen, for example, in the use of second person pronouns *ni* (你) and *nin* (您), or first person pronouns *women* (我們) and *zanmen* (咱們). Meng (1996) further noted that variations in personal pronoun produce different rhetorical effects both in 'quantity' (i.e., singular or plural) and 'referential meaning' (i.e., first, second or third person). Chen (2002) concluded that these variations serve different pragmatic purposes and that "they play a certain role in narrating or influencing the discourse communication distance" (p. 55).

Thus far there has been little research on the morpheme *ya* and its use among native and non-native speakers of Beijing Mandarin. In this paper, I will report the findings of a production study and a perception study.

3. STUDY I—PRODUCTION STUDY

Two studies were conducted to examine the uses of *ya* based on production and perception data. Study I analyzed the uses of *ya* in both native and non-native speech production. Study II was a questionnaire investigating the perception of native and non-native speakers of the Beijing dialect towards the use of *ya*. The term 'native speakers of the Beijing dialect' in these two studies refers to people who were born in

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the city proper and the suburbs of Beijing and who grew up there (see Hu, 1988).

3.1 Method

Study I aimed to analyze the productions of *ya* by native and non-native speakers of Beijing dialect based on daily written data on the internet. Data were collected from the website ‘renren’ <http://www.renren.com/>, which is similar to ‘Facebook’ and is favored by Chinese young people. Friends leave messages freely and chat with each other in a casual way on the message board. The data collected contained various uses of *ya* among native and non-native speakers of the Beijing dialect from 26 October 2008 to 18 May 2009. The data from the internet were collected in a natural environment without the awareness of the speakers. The register was mostly colloquial and close to speakers’ daily oral expression, though the data were in written form. Altogether 455 tokens of *ya* were collected, including 330 tokens from native speakers from Beijing and 125 tokens from non-Beijingers.

412 tokens of *ya* occurred in dialogues, as in (3).

- (3) A: 這 週末 你 打算 幹 什麼?
A: *zhe zhoumo ni dasuan gan shenme*
A: this weekend you plan do what
‘A: What are you going to do this weekend?’
- B: 在 家 待 著。
B: *zai jia dai zhe*
B: at home stay PRT
‘B: Stay at home.’
- A: 你 丫 怎麼 老 宅 在 家裡?
A: *ni ya zenme lao zhai zai jiali*
A: you YA why always stay at home
‘A: Why do you always stay at home?’

24 tokens of *ya* were monologic in nature and diary-like, as in (4).

- (4) 我半夜給他打電話就是為了問他怎麼做這個，你們丫不知道吧，
丫枯葉就是一純百科全書，什麼都知道！
'I called him at midnight just asking how to cook this stuff. You guys
will never know that ya Ku Ye is a real encyclopedia and he knows
everything!' (from a blog journal)

Nineteen tokens of *ya* were in sentences without contexts, as in (5).

- (5) 丫 xxx (人名) 真 讓 我 噁心！
Ya xxx (*renming*) zhen rang wo exin
YA xxx (a person's name) really make me sick
'xxx (a person's name) really makes me sick!'

All the tokens were collected from 123 speakers, 62 natives and 61 non-natives, 104 males (56 native males and 48 non-native males) and 19 females (six native females and 13 non-native females). The participants were young people aged from 18 to 30 years old, most of whom were college students or recent graduates from college.

The tokens of *ya* were classified into two categories, namely, tokens used by native vs. non-native speakers of the Beijing dialect. Uses of the tokens were then analyzed in terms of deictic meaning in native uses as follows: third person singular (3SG), third person plural (3PL), second person singular (2SG), second person plural (2PL), and first person (1P). Non-native-like uses of *ya* were further classified into eight types. These native and non-native uses are analyzed in the following section.

3.2 Findings and Discussion

3.2.1 Native uses of *ya*

Analysis of the 330 tokens of native use reveals that *ya* was used in the following ways with different personal deixis.

3.2.1.1 Third person singular

When referring to the third person singular, *ya* often stands alone, without a preceding personal pronoun such as *ta* ('he/him' or 'she/her'), as in (6a) and (6b), respectively. This occurs 93 out of 330 times (28.2%) in native speech.

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- (6) a. 丫 已經 超越 我 了。
ya yijing chaoyue wo le
YA already beyond me ASP
'He's already beyond me.'
- b. 你 跟 丫 聊聊。
ni gen ya liaoliao
you with YA chat
'You can chat with her.'

Ya can also precede a proper name, as in (7). This usage occurs 11 out of 330 times (3.3%):

- (7) 別 告訴 丫 暉暉， 丫 自己的 事情 還沒 整
bie gaosu ya huihui ya ziji de shiqing hai mei zheng
not tell YA Huihui YA self DE affair still not do
俐落 呢。
liluo ne
clear PRT
'Don't tell Huihui. He has not cleared up his own affairs yet.'

In (7) the original meaning of the structure *ya Huihui* 丫暉暉 ('*ya* + Huihui (name of person)') is *yatou yang de Huihui* 丫頭養的暉暉 ('Huihui who is born of a servant girl'). Abbreviation yields the following reanalysis: 丫(頭養的)暉暉 → 丫暉暉. That is, *ya (tou yang de) Huihui* → *ya Huihui*.

3.2.1.2 Third person plural

When referring to third person plural, *ya* is followed by the collective marker *men* (們), forming *ya men* (丫們), as in (8). This occurs eight out of 330 times (2.4%).

- (8) a. 丫 們 瘋 了。
ya men feng le
YA MEN crazy ASP
'They are crazy.'

- b. 丫 們 六年級 就.....
Ya men liu nianji jiu
YA MEN six grade JIU
'When they were in Grade Six, they'd...'

Ya can also be added after the third person plural pronoun *tamen* ('they/them'), forming *tamen ya* 他們丫 ('3PL'+*ya*') as in (9). This occurs four out of 330 times (1.2%).

- (9) 他們 丫 太 樂 了。
tamen ya tai le le
they YA so amusing PRT
'They are so amusing.'

3.2.1.3 Second person singular

Ya frequently occurs after second person singular *ni* ('you'). In fact, this combination of *ni* and *ya*, i.e., *ni ya* 你丫 ('2SG+*ya*'), as in (10), is the most common use with the highest frequency among the collected tokens—188 out of 330 tokens (57%).

- (10) a. 你 丫 加油 吧!
ni ya jiayou ba
you YA cheer PRT
'You go for it!'
b. 科比 瞅 你 丫 那 操行!
Kebi chou ni ya na caoxing
Kobe look you YA that behavior
'Damn you Kobe, look at your disgusting behaviors!'

3.2.1.4 Second person plural

As for second person plural, native speakers often add *ya* to second person plural pronoun *nimen* 你們 ('you'), producing *nimen ya* 你們丫 ('2PL+ *ya*'), as in (11). Some native speakers argue that this usage is controversial, since until recently Beijing speakers did not say *nimen ya*, so this use is considered non-native-like by some. But now most natives do not think this use is unnatural, as this kind of usage is now accepted by more and more people. This occurs 26 out of 330 times (7.9%).

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- (11) a. 你們 丫 的 照片 呢?
nimen ya de zhaopian ne
you (2PL) YA DE photo PRT
'Where are your photos?'
b. 為什麼 你們 丫 都 知道?
weishenme nimen ya dou zhidao
why you YA all know
'Why do all of you know that?'

This usage resembles words like *fellow*, *guy*, etc. in English. All of them can occur after second person plural pronoun *you*, as in (12).

- (12) a. *You guys* have done a fabulous job!
b. Leave me alone, *you fellows!*

This usage can be extended to *boys*, *girls*, etc. as in *you boys* and *you girls*.

3.2.1.5 First person

In native Beijing speech, *ya* on its own does not have a self-referential meaning—unlike first person singular *wo* ('I/me') or plural *wo men* ('we/us')—nor can it self-position, unlike third person plural *renjia* ('other people'), which can be used coquettishly to refer to self in addition to citing others (Huang, 2004). That is to say, native speakers of the Beijing dialect seldom use *ya* to refer to themselves. This is largely because *ya* originally had a derogatory meaning, such that native speakers are inclined to avoid using this word on themselves. None of the collected tokens produced by native Beijingers have such self-referential use.

3.2.1.6 Summary on native uses of *ya*

Table 1 summarizes native speaker productions of *ya* in the Beijing dialect.

Table 1. Native speaker productions of ya in the Beijing dialect

Uses of <i>ya</i> according to person deixis	Male	Female	Total	Percentage (x/330)	Derogatory use	Percentage (x/330)
<i>ni ya</i> 2SG+ <i>ya</i> (2SG)	177	11	188	57.0%	11	5.9%
<i>ya</i> (3SG)	85	8	93	28.2%	20	21.5%
<i>ya</i> + proper name (e.g. <i>ya Lisi</i>)	10	1	11	3.3%	2	18.2%
<i>nimen ya</i> 2PL+ <i>ya</i> (2PL)	24	2	26	7.9%	2	7.7%
<i>ya men</i> <i>ya</i> +PLmarker (3PL)	8	0	8	2.4%	2	25.0%
<i>tamen ya</i> 3PL+ <i>ya</i> (3PL)	4	0	4	1.2%	3	75.0%
Total	308	22	330	100%	40	12.1%
Percentage (x/330)	93.3%	6.7%	100.0%			

In sum, *ya* can be taken as a marker of personal deixis (third person), a personal pronoun clitic (second person), and it can precede a proper name. It does not apply to first person.

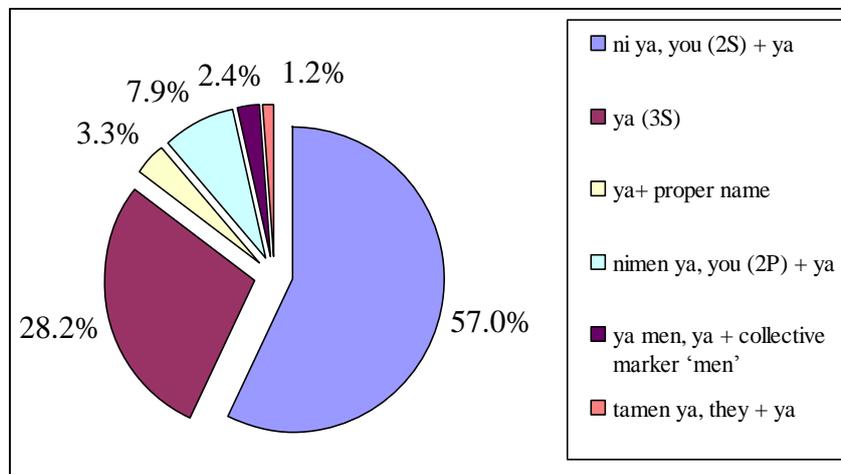


Figure 1. Native speaker productions of *ya* with different personal deixis

Figure 1 illustrates the percentage of each use of *ya* with different personal deixis. The second singular *ni ya* (57.0%) and the third singular *ya* (28.2%) occur most frequently, together accounting for 85.2% of the uses of *ya*. This implies that in direct speech, the specific target second person singular is frequently used as a solidarity marker.

From Table 1 we can see that among Beijing native speakers, up to 93.3% of the tokens of *ya* are produced by males and only 6.7% are by females. The proportion between males and females is about 14:1. And females do not use it in so many ways as males do. This implies that a gender difference is seen in the use of *ya* and that it is used much more widely among males than females.

12.1% of the tokens express a kind of discontent or disrespectful attitude. Relatively higher percentages of such emotional expression are found for third person plural *tamen ya* (three out of four tokens, 75%) and *ya men* (two out of eight times, 25%), and third person singular *ya* (20 out of 93 times, 21.5%) and ‘*ya* + proper name’ (two out of 11 times, 18.2%). That is, speakers often avoid scolding listeners directly (which can be implied from the much lower proportion of ‘derogatory *ya*’ in second person, 5.9% *ni ya* and 7.7% *nimen ya*). Rather, people tend to direct their discontent at someone else in order to complain or to vent their feelings so as to avoid head-on clashes with the people who are being scolded.

Ya shares some common grounds with its equivalents in English such as *fellow*, *guy*, *bugger*, etc. The original meaning may not be very decent, as *ya* means ‘one who is born of a servant girl’, and *bugger* originated from a kind of insect. They can all occur after personal pronouns, such as singular form 你丫 (*ni ya*, ‘you’), equivalent to *you bugger*, second or third plural form 你們丫 (*nimen ya*, ‘you’) and 丫們 (*ya men*, ‘they/them’), both equivalent to *you fellows*, *you guys*, *you buggers*, etc. in the second person and *those fellows*, *those guys*, *those buggers*, etc. in the third person. They cannot refer to first person singular pronoun, *‘我丫’ (*wo ya*) in the sense of **I fellow/ guy/ bugger*. Meanwhile, there are some differences between *ya* and its equivalents in English. *Ya* in the Beijing vernacular cannot refer to first plural pronoun we, as *‘我們丫’ (*women ya*, ‘we’), while in English it is possible to say *we/us fellas* (< *fellows*), *we/us guys* but not *we/us buggers*. It is probably because the word *bugger* has an inherent derogatory reading, while *fellow* and *guy* do not. What’s more, *ya* can stand alone to express a third person singular meaning, as 丫 (*ya*), while in English it is not possible to use *bugger* as

an independent referential noun. It suggests that words with a transparent lexical origin still function as nouns and need definiteness markers for grounding. Another contributing factor is that the Chinese language allows greater freedom for noun phrases to stand alone without a definiteness marker.

3.2.2 Phenomena of non-native uses of *ya*

Among the 125 tokens produced by non-native speakers of Beijing, there were 81 tokens (64.8%) of native-like uses, and these showed a fairly similar distribution as those of native uses. More specifically, 48 tokens (38.4%) were used as second person singular *ni ya* 你丫 ('2SG +ya'), 29 tokens (23.2%) as third person singular *ya* 丫 (3SG), one token (0.8%) as 'ya + proper name', and three tokens (2.4%) as second person plural *ni men ya* 你們丫 ('2PL + ya'). However, there was no token used as third person plural *ya men* 丫們 (*ya* + collective marker *men*) or 他們丫 (*tamen ya*, 3PL (*ta* + collective marker *men*) + *ya*).

In addition to the native-like uses, some uses of *ya* which do not occur in the speech of native speakers were observed among the 125 tokens.

3.2.2.1 Incorrect reference for stand-alone *ya*

As noted in 3.3.1.2, the stand-alone referential *ya* can only be used for the third person singular. But in non-native speech it is sometimes wrongly used to refer to the second person 'you'. This occurs 11 out of 125 times (8.8%).

- (14) a. 丫 找 抽 啊!
 ya zhao chou a
 YA find beat PRT
 'You want to be beaten?!'
 b. 丫 還 年輕, 沒 事兒。
 ya hai nianqing meishier
 YA still young no problem
 'You are still young, so don't worry.'

This is probably due to a lack of awareness that native speakers restrict the use of *ya* to a narrower range of personal deictic reference.

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3.2.2.2 Inappropriate extension to self-positioning *ya*

We noted earlier in Section 3.3.1.5 that *ya* is rarely used to refer to the speaker himself/herself, largely because *ya* originally had a derogatory meaning. However, non-native speakers may not know the original meaning of *ya*, and some of them apply this word to themselves as well. This inappropriate extension to the first person occurs four times out of 125 tokens (3.2%).

- (15) a. 我 丫 叫 高銘。
Wo ya jiao gaoming
I YA call GaoMing.
'My name is Gao Ming.'
- b. 我 丫 超級 想念 你。
Wo ya chaoji xiangnian ni
I YA very miss you
'I miss you so much.'

This self-positioning *ya* initially was not used by native speakers, but now native speakers are influenced by this non-native like use through the internet, and occasionally some native speakers imitate this non-native-like use to refer to themselves as a form of self-mockery. For example,

- c. 我 丫 已經 負 資產 了。
Wo ya yijing fu zichan le
I YA already negative property PRT
'I'm already in debt.'

Thus non-native uses can also influence native uses with the popularization of the use of the internet.

3.2.2.3 Word order reversing

Ya frequently occurs after the second singular person pronoun *ni*. But some non-natives reverse the order of *ni* and *ya*, forming *ya ni* 丫你 ('*ya*'+'*you*'). This occurs four out of 125 times (3.2%).

- (16) a. 丫 你 夠 能 忍 的 !
ya ni gou neng ren de
YA you enough can bear PRT
'You can bear so much!'
- b. 丫 你 別 減肥 了 !
ya ni bie jianfei le
YA you no lose weight PRT.
'Stop losing weight!'

This is probably due to a lack of negative evidence. That is, no one tells the non-native speaker that *ya* is not ordinarily used in front of *ni* ('you'), therefore non-native speakers will sometimes use this form without knowing it is incorrect.

3.2.2.4 With preceding adjectives

Some non-native speakers add *ya* to a preceding adjective, forming 'adjective + *ya*', which occurs two out of 125 times (1.6%).

- (17) a. 你們 兩 個 小 丫 的 !
nimen liang ge xiao ya de
you two CLF little YA DE
'You two little guys!'
- b. 傻 丫 !
sha ya
silly YA
'Silly guy!'

In (17a) and (17b), the word combinations *xiao ya* 小丫 ('little'+*ya*) and *sha ya* 傻丫 ('silly'+*ya*) function like NP constructions, in which *ya* is regarded as a light noun and modified by preceding adjectives. This pronominal *ya* is similar to the English pronominal 'one'.

3.2.2.5 With preceding demonstrative

Similar to the use with preceding adjectives, some people also add a demonstrative such as *zhe* 這 ('this') and *na* 那 ('that') before *ya*. Native speakers reserve the use of *ya* as the pronominal use, while

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non-natives may widen the range of its use as a noun, thinking that it can be combined with a demonstrative to form a nominal phrase. This occurs four out of 125 times (3.2%).

- (18) a. 這 丫 從 四川 回來 了。
zhe ya cong Sichuan huilai le
this YA from Sichuan back ASP
'This guy has come back from Sichuan.'
- b. 裝 B 那 丫。
zhuang bi na ya
pretend fool that YA
'That guy is demure.'

Though no such tokens were found in the native data in the present study, some Beijing native speakers think that this kind of use is acceptable, which we further investigate in the perception study in Section 4.

3.2.2.6 Incorrect apposition with third person

As noted in Section 3.3.1.2, *ya* is always used alone when referring to third person singular. It has its own independent deictic meaning. But some non-native speakers still add a personal pronoun *he/him* or *she/her* in front of *ya*.

- (19) 可以 的 小 夥， 幹 他 丫 的！
keyi de xiao huo gan ta ya de
good DE little guy beat he ya DE
'Good job guy! Beat him!'

This structure is similar to that of the second person singular *ni ya* 你丫 ('you'+*ya*'). It is possible that non-native speakers at times overgeneralize the use of *ya*, ignoring differences in personal deictic constraints. However, the use of this generalization was infrequent—only one token was found out of 125 tokens (0.8%), indicating that non-native speakers were generally aware that the third person singular *ya* is an independent morpheme.

3.2.2.7 Separated monosyllable *ya*

Some people put *ya* separated from the rest of the sentence with a comma, either at the beginning or at the end of a sentence. This occurs five out of 125 times (4%).

- (20) a. 丫，這回知道我每 天的感受 了 吧。
ya zhe hui zhidao wo meitian de ganshou le ba
YA this time know I everyday DE feeling ASP PRT
'Dude, finally you understand the feelings that I have every day
this time, don't you?'
- b. 咋 了，丫？
za le ya
what LE YA (2SG)
'What's up, buddy?'

From (20a) and (20b) we can see that this kind of separated stand-alone *ya* is similar to the word *buddy* or *dude* in English, both of which can also be separated from the rest of the sentence with a comma. This deictic use functions to attract listener's attention, often with a referential meaning to the second person, i.e., the listener. In Chinese some monosyllabic proper nouns can be used in a similar way, as in (21a) and (21b) below.

- (21) a. 親，你在美國要保重身體啊。
qin ni zai mei guo yao baozhong shenti a
darling you in the U.S. should take care body PRT
'Darling, take care of yourself when you are in the U.S.'
- b. 最近過得怎麼樣啊，妞？
Zuijin guode zenmeyang a niu
Recently live how PRT girl (2SG)
'How are you these days, girl?'

Perhaps some non-native speakers are influenced by the use of words such as *qin* 親 ('darling/dear') and *niu* 妞 ('girl'), and overextend it to the word *ya*. But native speakers find it unnatural to use *ya* in this way.

3.2.2.8 Interjectional *ya de*

In native speech, it is possible to find the morpheme *de* 的 following the deictic morpheme *ya*. For example,

- (22) 他 要是 敢 欺負 你，我 就 抽 丫 的。
ta yaoshi gan qifu ni wo jiu chou ya de
he if dare bully you I will beat YA DE
'If he dares to bully you, I'll beat him.'

Ya de 丫的 here is the abbreviation of *ya (tou yang) de* 丫(頭養)的 ('the one who is born of a servant girl'). It is a nominalized phrase and *de* 的 is a nominalizer. This kind of *ya de* 丫的 construction has a pronominal (referential) meaning.

Non-natives sometimes separate *ya de* 丫的 from the rest of the sentence with a comma with non-referential meaning and function. For instance,

- (23) a. 丫 的，我 快 哭 了！
Ya de wo kuai ku le
YA DE I soon cry PRT
'Gosh, I'll burst into tears!'
b. 陽光 怎麼 沒 把 你 曬 死 啊，丫 的。
Yangguang zenme mei ba ni shai si a ya de
Sunshine why not BA you burn dead PRT YA DE
'Why didn't you get sun-burned to death? Damn it.'

In (23a) and (23b), *ya de* 丫的 does not have any referential meaning, but is used as a stance marker to express certain emotions and strong feelings, and it is capable of standing alone. It functions as an interjection, like *ma de* 媽的 in Chinese and 'ugh', 'gosh' or 'shit' in English. None of the native speakers use *ya* in this way among the collected data (0 token out of 330 instances of *ya*), while non-natives use it quite productively, yielding 13 out of 125 tokens (10.4%).

Use of Ya among Native and Non-native Beijingers

3.2.2.9 Summary of non-native uses of *ya*

As mentioned earlier in Section 3.2.2, non-native speakers use 81 out of 125 tokens (64.8%) of *ya* in the same way as native speakers, as illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2. Native-like uses of *ya* produced by non-native speakers

Native-like uses of <i>ya</i> by non-native speakers	Male	Female	Total	Percentage (x/125)
<i>ni ya</i> 2SG+ <i>ya</i>	45	3	48	38.4%
<i>ya</i> 3SG	21	8	29	23.2%
<i>ya</i> + proper name	1	0	1	0.8%
<i>nimen ya</i> 2PL+ <i>ya</i>	3	0	3	2.4%
<i>ya men</i> <i>ya</i> +PLmarker <i>men</i>	0	0	0	0.0%
<i>tamen ya</i> 3PL + <i>ya</i>	0	0	0	0.0%
Total native-like usage	70	11	81	64.8%
Percentage (x/125)	56.0%	8.8%	64.8%	

The native-like uses were mainly on the second singular *ni ya* (38.4%) and the third singular *ya* (23.2%), while there was no use on the third person plural *ya men* 丫們 and *tamen ya* 他們丫. Males use *ya* more often, and slightly in more ways than females, although a larger language sample is needed to verify if this difference is significant.

Table 3. Non-native-like production of *ya*

Non-native-like uses of <i>ya</i> by non-native speakers	Male	Female	Total	Percentage (x/125)
Incorrect reference for stand-alone <i>ya</i>	9	2	11	8.8%
<i>wo ya</i> 1SG+ <i>ya</i>	2	2	4	3.2%
<i>ya ni</i> <i>ya</i> +2SG	0	4	4	3.2%
Adjective + <i>ya</i>	2	0	2	1.6%
<i>ta ya</i> 3SG + <i>ya</i>	1	0	1	0.8%
<i>separated ya</i>	3	2	5	4.0%
Interjectional <i>ya</i> DE	5	8	13	10.5%
Deictic pronoun + <i>ya</i>	3	1	4	3.2%
Total	25	19	44	35.3%
Percentage (x/125)	20.0%	15.2%	35.2%	

As seen in Table 3 above, 35.3% of uses by non-native speakers are different from those of native speakers. These non-native uses are classified into: incorrect reference for stand-alone *ya* (i.e., extending *ya* to refer to second person), inappropriate extension to self-positioning *ya* (i.e., *wo ya*), word order reversing (i.e., *ya ni*), occurrence with preceding adjectives, incorrect apposition with third person, separated monosyllable *ya*, interjectional ‘*ya* DE’, and occurrence with preceding demonstrative (e.g., *zhe ya*, ‘that’ + ‘*ya*’). The acceptability of the last construction is controversial, and further analysis is needed using a grammaticality judgment task in Study II. 56.8% of the non-native-like tokens are produced by males and 43.2% by females.

Figure 2 shows the combined statistics for both native-like uses and non-native like uses.

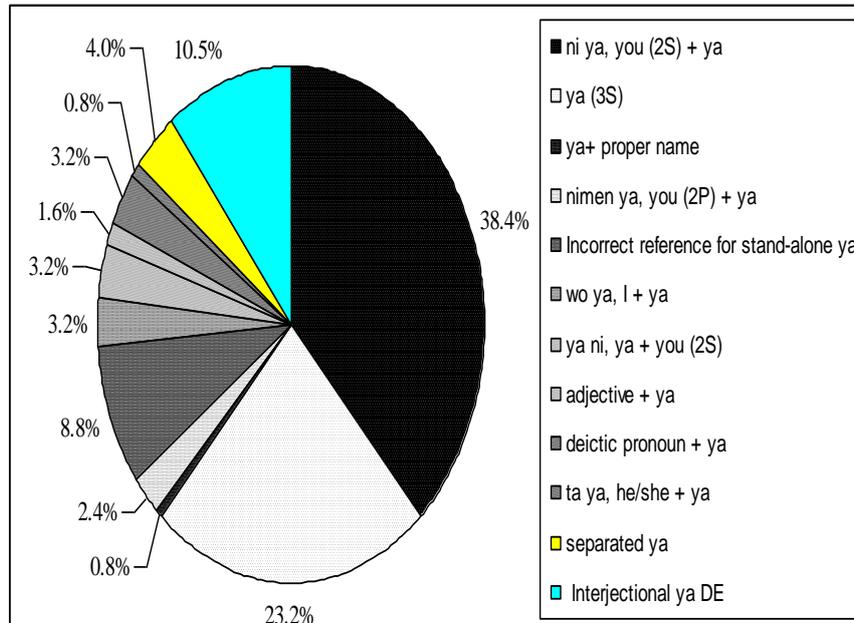


Figure 2. All uses of ya by non-native speakers

Figure 2 is divided into 12 parts, comprising four native-like ways and eight non-native-like ways, which show that non-native speakers use *ya* in more diverse ways than native speakers (recall Figure 1 in Section 3.3.1.6). It indicates that non-natives tend to overextend the use of *ya*. Though almost two thirds (64.8%) are native-like, there are still up to 35.3% non-native-like uses. Among native-like uses, the most frequent uses are the second person singular *ni ya* (38.4%) and the third person singular *ya* (23.2%). Non-native-like uses are demonstrated in many different ways, in which the interjectional *ya* DE (10.5%) and incorrect reference for stand-alone *ya* (8.8%) form a larger proportion.

As for gender, the statistics for non-native speakers in Table 4 indicate that altogether 76.0% are used by males and 24.0% are used by females. The proportion between males and females is about 3:1, compared to 14:1 among native speakers of Beijing. So it seems that non-native females tend to use *ya* more often than native females. Males use *ya* in native ways 70 out of 95 times (73.7%), while females use *ya*

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in native ways 11 out of 30 times (36.7%) and in non-native ways 19 out of 30 times (63.5%). Percentage wise, females tend to produce more non-native like uses of *ya* than males.

Table 4. Uses of *ya* by male and female non-native speakers

Uses of <i>ya</i> by non-native speakers	Male (x/125)	Female (x/125)	Total	Percentage (x/125)
Native-like	70 (56.0%)	11 (8.8%)	81	64.8%
Non-native like	25 (20.0%)	19 (15.2%)	44	35.2%
Total	95 (76.0%)	30 (24.0%)	125	100.0%

Only five tokens express derogatory emotion, taking up 4% out of 125 tokens. This percentage is much lower than the 12.1% in native speaking. It is noted that all the five tokens with derogatory meaning are produced by males. Non-native speakers, especially non-native females, often use *ya* to express familiarity or solidarity between friends.

4. STUDY II—PERCEPTION STUDY

In the previous section, Study I analyzed *ya* in both native and non-native speech in written production over the internet. Study II analyzed people's perception towards *ya*, aiming to examine whether there are differences in the use of *ya* in production vs. perception data. Study II comprised a questionnaire and investigated the perception towards the cognition of *ya* and its uses with different personal deictic meanings by native and non-native speakers of the Beijing dialect.

4.1 Participants

The participants are Chinese young people aged from 20 to 30 years old. They were divided into two groups: one group comprised of Beijing native speakers, and the other group comprised of non-native speakers of Beijing dialect (i.e., Chinese people from other parts of China). Altogether there were 50 participants, 25 participants in each group. In

the non-native group, there were eight participants who had lived in Beijing for five years or more; the other 17 participants had never been to Beijing or had stayed there for less than one year. The prerequisite for inclusion was that all of the participants had known or heard of the word *ya* (丫).

4.2 Method

Each participant was asked to complete a questionnaire in Chinese. The questionnaire consisted of two parts—(i) the participants' familiarity with the use of *ya* and (ii) the participants' acceptability judgment on the use of *ya* with different personal deictic meanings.

4.2.1 Participants' familiarity with the use of *ya*

The participants were asked five questions about their knowledge of the meaning of *ya*, including: how frequently they use *ya*; how they got to know about *ya* and its uses; the regional status of *ya*; what kind of emotions *ya* can express; what pragmatic uses are associated with *ya*, etc. Each question was followed by a set of responses, and participants could select more than one response. One of the questions (Q5) is reproduced below (See Appendix I for the full list of questions).

Q5: In which situation(s) would you consider it inappropriate to use *ya*?

- A. In a very solemn and formal occasion or context.
- B. Casual and free talk between friends.
- C. Junior to senior, student to teacher, children to parents, employee to employer.
- D. When a gentlewoman speaks in public.
- E. All situations are appropriate; just use it whenever you like.

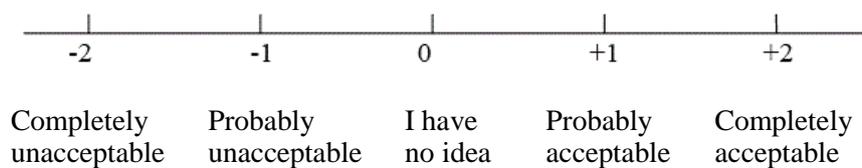
4.2.2 Participants' acceptability judgment on the use of *ya* with different personal deictic meanings

Eight test items were constructed for the perception study. Each test item comprised a sentence with an intended referent left blank, and was followed by a list of *ya* constructions with different personal deictic meanings, as listed in Table 5 below.

Table 5. List of *ya* constructions based on person deixis

2 nd person singular	<i>ni ya</i> (你丫)	2SG + <i>ya</i>
	<i>ya ni</i> (丫你)	<i>ya</i> + 2SG
	<i>ya</i> (丫)	
3 rd person singular	<i>ya</i> (丫)	
	<i>ta ya</i> (他丫)	3SG + <i>ya</i>
	<i>ya ta</i> (丫他)	<i>ya</i> + 3SG
	<i>ya</i> + proper name	
	<i>zhe ya</i> (這丫)	'this' + <i>ya</i>
	<i>Adj</i> + <i>ya</i>	
3 rd person plural	<i>ya men</i> (丫們)	<i>ya</i> + Plural marker <i>men</i>
	<i>tamen ya</i> (他們丫)	3PL + <i>ya</i>
	<i>ta ya men</i> (他丫們)	3SG + <i>ya</i> + Plural marker <i>men</i>
2 nd person plural	<i>nimen ya</i> (你們丫)	2PL + <i>ya</i>
	<i>ni ya men</i> (你丫們)	2SG + <i>ya</i> + Plural marker <i>men</i>
1 st person singular	<i>wo ya</i> (我丫)	1SG + <i>ya</i>

Participants were asked to judge the degree of acceptability of each kind of use by giving a number on a scale as given below.



For example:

好 長 時間 沒 見 你 了， ___ 最近 幹 嘛
hao chang shijian mei jian ni le *zuijin gan ma*
very long time not see you ASP recently do what
呢？（指“你”）

ne

PRT (referring to *you*)

‘I haven’t seen you for a long time. What are ___ doing these days?’

(The instruction in parentheses indicates that the correct response should refer to second person singular ‘you’.)

- A. 你 丫 *ni ya* (2SG + *ya*) ()
- B. 丫 你 *ya ni* (*ya* + 2SG) ()
- C. 丫 *ya* ()

Participants could mark ‘completely unacceptable’, ‘probably unacceptable’, ‘I have no idea’, ‘probably acceptable’, and ‘completely acceptable’ for each use of *ya*, which would be scored as -2, -1, 0, 1, and 2, respectively. Then comparing the mean scores from the native and non-native speaker groups, we can determine whether there are similarities or differences between the two groups. See Appendix A for the full questionnaire.

4.3 Results

4.3.1 Participants’ familiarity with the use of *ya*

4.3.1.1 Frequency of using *ya*

56% of native speakers said that they use *ya* very frequently in their daily life, 28% use it occasionally, and only 16% seldom or never use it. Results from non-native speakers were 12%, 52%, and 36% respectively, as shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Frequency of the use of *ya* among native and non-native speakers

Uses of <i>ya</i>	Very often	Occasionally	Seldom/never	Total
Native speakers	14 (56%)	7 (28%)	4 (16%)	25 (100%)
Non-native speakers	3 (12%)	13 (52%)	9 (36%)	25 (100%)

Ya is used with a high frequency among more than half of the native speakers (young Beijingers), indicating that it is deeply rooted in vocabulary of native speakers. Although non-native speakers do not use *ya* as frequently as native speakers, more than half of them tend to use it 'occasionally', which indicates that the use of *ya* is also popular among non-native young people.

Further analysis from a gender perspective highlighted in Table 7 below reveals that there are significant differences in the use of *ya* between males and females. No matter native or non-native speakers, males tend to use *ya* more often than females. Native males tend to use *ya* with a high frequency, while non-native males tend use it occasionally. More than half of non-native females seldom or never use this word. See Figure 3.

Table 7. Frequency of native and non-native use of *ya* according to gender

Frequency of use of <i>ya</i>	Native speakers		Non-native speakers	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Very often	12 (75%)	2 (22.2%)	2 (20%)	1 (6.7%)
Occasionally	4 (25%)	3 (33.3%)	7 (70%)	6 (40.0%)
Seldom/never	0 (0%)	4 (44.4%)	1 (10%)	8 (53.3%)
Total	16 (100%)	9 (100.0%)	10 (100%)	15 (100.0%)

Use of Ya among Native and Non-naive Beijingers

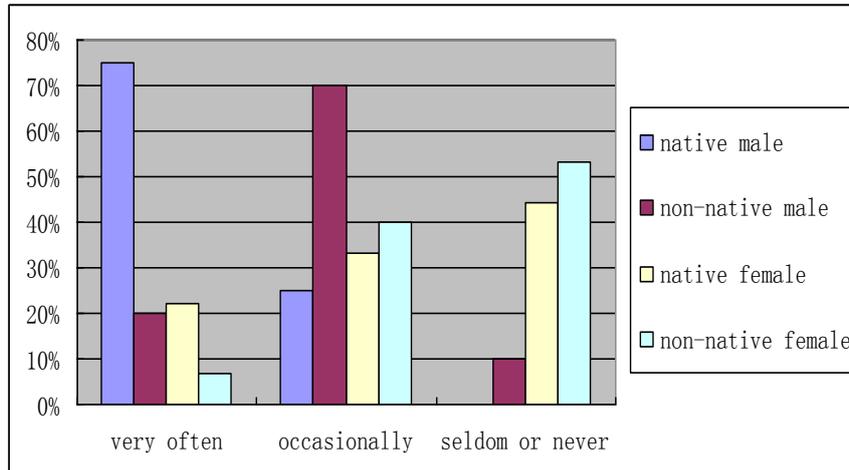


Figure 3. Comparison of frequency of native and non-native use of *ya* according to gender

4.3.1.2 How participants come know about *ya*

96% native speakers and 48% non-native speakers said that they came to know about *ya* because many of their friends and people around them use it. 52% non-native speakers knew it from literary works, teleplays, etc., while no native speakers claim that they knew it through these means. 8% of each group got to know it from the internet. See Figure 4.

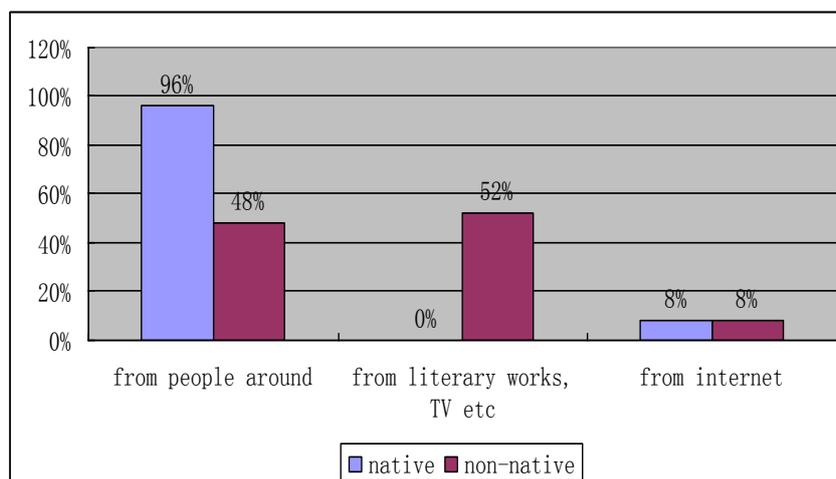


Figure 4. How the participants come to know about *ya*

4.3.1.3 Regional status of *ya*

Up to 88% of native speakers and 84% of non-native speakers are aware that *ya* 'originated from the Beijing dialect'. Only 12% natives and 16% non-natives do not know where *ya* originated from and they just think that all Chinese people use it now. The responses of the two groups on this question are fairly close to each other.

4.3.1.4 The emotion that *ya* expresses

As for the emotion(s) that *ya* can express, 72% natives and 60% non-natives think *ya* can be used to express one's disrespect, insult, anger, rebuke, etc. 68% natives and 76% non-natives also think it can be used to show familiarity or solidarity between participants. 20% natives and 8% non-natives do not think *ya* expresses any special feeling.

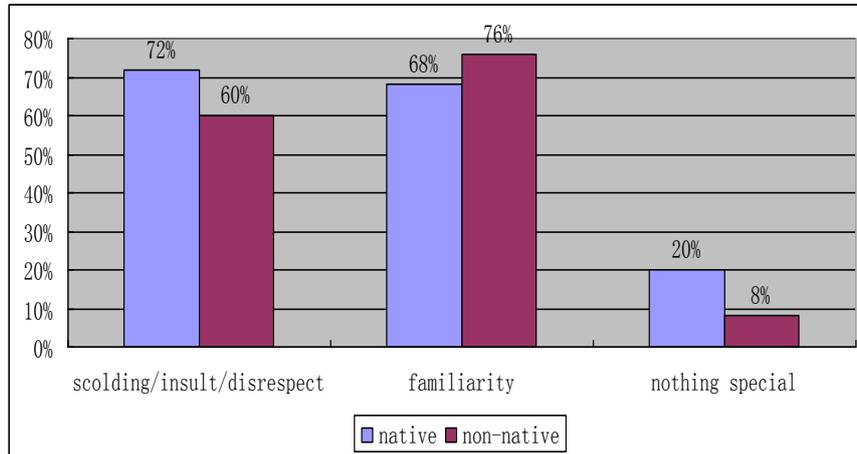


Figure 5. The emotion(s) that *ya* expresses

As Figure 5 illustrates, more than half of the participants in both groups think that *ya* can have both derogatory and intimacy meanings. It should be pointed out, however, that more natives ascribe a rebuke or scolding function to *ya* while more non-natives think *ya* tends to express familiarity.

4.3.1.5 Pragmatic uses of *ya*

In what situation or context, and in what relationship between participants, is it inappropriate to use *ya*? Most participants from both groups do not think it is appropriate to use *ya* in the following situations: in very solemn and formal occasions (92% natives and 96% non-natives); junior to senior, student to teacher, children to parents, employee to employer (96% natives and 92% non-natives). More than half of the participants (68% natives and 60% non-natives) suggest that a gentlewoman should not use this word in public. Each group has one person (4%) that even thinks it is inappropriate to use it in casual and free talk between friends, while again only one person (4%) from both the native and non-native groups thinks *ya* can be used anywhere.

Overall, understanding of the pragmatic use of *ya* between the two groups is almost the same. That is, both groups share common grounds in understanding with respect to the uses of *ya* in accordance with power

and solidarity between addresser and addressee, the degree of familiarity or formality of the relationship, and the role that addresser plays in the society, etc., which are called ‘tenors of discourse’ (Gregory & Carroll, 1978).

4.3.2 Participants’ acceptability judgment on the use of *ya* with different personal deictic meanings

Table 8 shows the mean scores of the participants’ acceptability judgment on the use of *ya* with different personal deictic meanings in both native-like uses and non-native-like uses. Results of paired-samples t-tests indicate that there are significant differences ($p < 0.05$) between the two groups in the use of *ya* in the following forms: *ya* + proper name, *tamen ya* (3PL + *ya*), *nimen ya* (2PL + *ya*), Adj + *ya*, and *ya* referring to second person singular.

Table 8. Mean scores of the participants’ acceptability judgment on the uses of *ya*

	Referential uses of <i>ya</i>			Native speaker’s judgment	Non-native speaker’s judgment	Statistical significance
	Chinese characters	Romanization	Gloss			
Native-like uses	你丫	<i>ni ya</i>	2SG + <i>ya</i>	2	1.8	
	丫	<i>ya</i>	3SG	2	1.64	
	丫+人名 e.g. 丫晖晖	e.g. <i>ya Huihui</i>	<i>ya</i> +Proper name	1.6	0.04	$p < 0.05$
	丫们	<i>ya men</i>	<i>ya</i> + PL	1.2	1.6	
	他们丫	<i>tamen ya</i>	3PL + <i>ya</i>	1.36	-0.24	$p < 0.05$
	你们丫	<i>nimen ya</i>	2PL + <i>ya</i>	1.64	0.4	$p < 0.05$
Non-native-like uses	我丫	<i>wo ya</i>	1SG + <i>ya</i>	-0.8	-1.36	
	形容词+丫 e.g. 小丫	e.g. <i>xiao ya</i>	Adj + <i>ya</i> e.g. little + <i>ya</i>	-1.04	0.8	$p < 0.05$

4.3.2.1 Acceptability judgment on native-like uses of *ya*

Figure 6 highlights the judgment of the two groups on native-like uses of *ya*. Both groups show clear acceptance of *ni ya* (2SG + *ya*), third person singular ‘stand-alone *ya*’, and third person plural *ya men* (*ya* + Plural

marker). That is, the mean scores are all above +1, especially with respect to *ni ya* and the third person singular *ya*, whose mean scores reach the optimal +2 by natives and above +1.5 by non-native speakers.

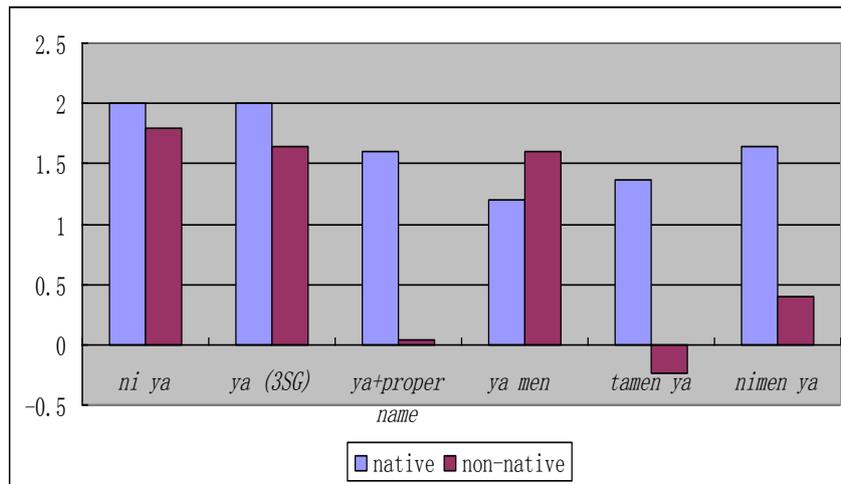


Figure 6. Participants' acceptability judgment on native-like uses of *ya*

On the other hand, there are significant differences between the two groups with regard to '*ya* + proper name', *tamen ya* ('they' + *ya*), and *nimen ya* (2PL + *ya*). Native speakers show a strong acceptance of these three uses (their mean scores are all above +1.5), while non-native speakers indicate that they have almost no idea in judging '*ya* + proper name' (its mean score is very close to 0), slight rejection of *tamen ya* (the mean score is below 0), and slight acceptance of *nimen ya* (the mean score is below +0.5). These results are consistent with the findings from Study I.

4.3.2.2 Participants' acceptability judgment on non-native-like uses of *ya*

Both groups tend to reject non-native-like uses of *ya*, as highlighted in Figure 7 below, except in the following cases.

'Adjective + *ya*': Natives show a clear rejection (the mean score is below -1) while non-natives tend to accept it (the mean score is close to

+1). There is a significant difference between the judgment of each group ($p < 0.05$).

‘Stand-alone *ya*’ referring to second person singular: Natives show a clear rejection (the mean score is -1) while non-natives have a tendency to slightly accept it (the mean score is above 0). The two groups show a significant difference from each other ($p < 0.05$).

‘Third person singular *ta ya*’: Natives tend to accept it and non-natives tend to reject it. But the degree of acceptance is very low for both native and non-native groups, with mean scores 0.24 and -0.12, respectively. Both mean scores are close to 0, with most responses taking the form ‘I have no idea’, therefore the difference is not significant ($p > 0.05$).

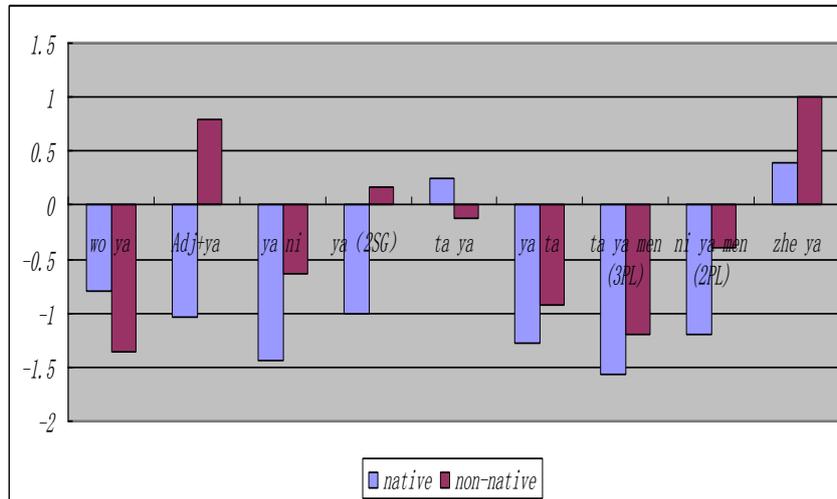


Figure 7. Participants’ acceptability judgment on non-native-like uses of *ya*

With respect to other non-native-like uses, the results in Figure 7 suggest that native speakers often indicate a stronger rejection than non-natives, except for *wo ya* (‘1SG+*ya*’), which is different from Study I.

As for the use of *zhe ya* (‘this+*ya*’), it has been mentioned in Study I in Section 3.3.2.5 above that, although some native speakers think it is acceptable, no such token was found in the native speakers’ data

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collected in Study I. From this perception study, we can see that both groups tend to think this use is acceptable, and non-natives show a stronger acceptance of it (the mean score is +1) than natives (the mean score is +0.4). The t-test value shows there is no significant difference between the two groups ($p>0.05$).

4.3.2.3 Comparison between non-native (≤ 1 year and ≥ 5 years) and native speakers

In the non-native group, there were eight participants who had lived in Beijing for five years or more, while the other 17 participants had never been to Beijing, or stayed less than one year. They were compared with the native groups by mean scores, as summarized in Figure 8.

In most cases, there are clear differences between non-natives who had lived longer than five years in Beijing and the ones who had stayed less than one year or never at all. The ' ≥ 5 years' group performed more like native speakers than the ' ≤ 1 year or never' group did, except for the fifth usage *ta ya* (3SG + *ya*) and the twelfth usage *wo ya* (1SG + *ya*).

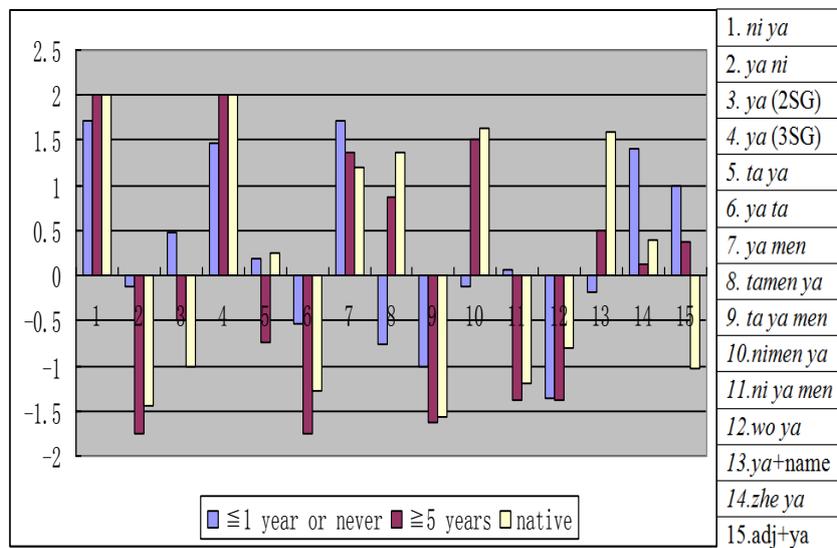


Figure 8. Comparison between non-native (≤ 1 year and ≥ 5 years) and native speakers

5. GENERAL DISCUSSION

As Holmes (2001: 223) said, ‘Language varies according to its uses, as well as its users, according to where it is used and to whom, as well as according to who is using it’. Through two comparative studies, both similarities and differences between native and non-native speakers in the use of *ya* were identified.

5.1 Native vs. Non-native Use

The results of Study I and Study II are summarized in Table 9. The production study demonstrates that native speakers mainly have six uses of *ya* according to person deixis. Non-native speakers include more non-native-like ways. The perception study also shows that there are significant differences in the acceptability of three native-like uses between the two groups. Worth noting is that the two *ya* constructions which are not found in non-native uses—*ya men* (*ya* + Plural marker) and *tamen ya* (3PL + *ya*)—also occur with very low frequency (2.4% and 1.2%) among native speakers. The two most frequent uses by natives—*ni ya* and *ya* (3SG)—are also used with the highest frequency by non-natives (38.4% and 28.2%), and the perception results for these two uses are very similar between the two groups. This suggests that, during the process of the spread of a dialect through ‘geographical space’ as measured in terms of native vs. non-native usage, some language features are well accepted and mastered by non-natives because of abundant positive evidence, while some features may be lost or rejected due to insufficient positive evidence.

Table 9. Results of study I and study II

	Referential meaning	Production study		Perception study		
		Native	Non-native	Native	Non-native	Statistical significance
Native-Like uses	<i>ni ya</i> 2SG+ <i>ya</i>	57.0%	38.4%	2	1.8	
	<i>ya</i> 3SG	28.2%	23.2%	2	1.64	
	<i>ya</i> +proper name	3.3%	0.8%	1.6	0.04	p<0.05
	<i>nimen ya</i> 2PL+ <i>ya</i>	7.9%	2.4%	1.64	0.4	p<0.05
	<i>ya men ya</i> <i>ya</i> +PLmarker	2.4%	0%	1.2	1.6	
	<i>tamen ya</i> 3PL+ <i>ya</i>	1.2%	0%	1.36	-0.24	p<0.05
	Demonstrative + <i>ya</i>	0%	3.2%	0.4	1	
Non-native Like uses	Incorrect reference <i>ya</i> (2SG)	0%	8.8%	-1	0.16	p<0.05
	<i>wo ya</i> 1SG+ <i>ya</i>	0%	3.2%	-0.8	-1.36	
	<i>ya ni</i> <i>ya</i> +2SG	0%	3.2%	-1.44	-0.64	
	Adjective + <i>ya</i>	0%	1.6%	-1.04	0.8	p<0.05
	<i>ta ya</i> 3SG+ <i>ya</i>	0%	0.8%	0.24	-0.12	

There are many uses by non-native speakers which sound unnatural to native speakers. This may be attributed to the following reasons. First, non-natives tend to overgeneralize or overextend the rules of the use of *ya*, ignoring the differences in personal deictic meaning. For example, the stand-alone *ya* can have a third person singular meaning, but some non-natives overgeneralize this use and overextend it to other personal referential meanings, such as second person singular ‘you’.

Second, due to the lack of negative evidence, non-natives sometimes think some uses are correct because they have not been proven false yet. For example, some non-native speakers reverse the word order and produce *ya ni* instead of *ni ya*, simply because no one had ever told them that it is unnatural to say *ya ni*.

Third, non-native speakers may have imitated some incorrect uses from their peers or from the internet, books, etc. produced by non-native speakers. Take Guo Jingming’s (2003) novel *Never Flowers in Never Dream*, for example. The young author is a non-native of Beijing who uses *ya* very frequently in this novel. In this 180,000 word novel, the word *ya* with personal referential meaning occurs 151 times. However,

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several tokens of *ya* (in fact at least seven tokens) sound very unnatural. For example,

- (24) a. 聞婧 你 老 丫 的， 還 記 得 我 嗎？
Wenjing ni lao ya de hai jide wo ma
Wenjing you old YA DE still remember me PRT
‘Hey Wen Jing you old woman, do you remember me?’
(Guo 2003:125)
- b. 她 丫 就 知 道 叫 老 子 出 來 撐 腰， ...
ta ya jiu zhidao jiao laozi chulai chengyao
She YA JIU know call father come out support
‘The only thing she knows is to make her father support her, ...’
(Guo 2003:3)

(24a) comprises an ‘Adjective + *ya*’ construction, and (24b) comprises an incorrect apposition of *ya* with third person singular pronoun *ta* ‘she’ forming a *ta ya* construction. Both are non-native-like. This novel is very popular among young people. The deliberate but unnatural imitation of Beijing vernacular, including the use of *ya*, may have set incorrect examples for non-native readers and widely affected them in the ways they use *ya*.

The length of time that non-natives have lived in Beijing can influence their usage of *ya*. Study II reports that non-natives who have lived longer than five years in Beijing are generally more native-like in using *ya* than those who have stayed less than one year or never. The longer one has stayed in a place, the more experience of local culture and the more local linguistics knowledge one will acquire, the more precise language rules he/she could generalize, and the more native-like will be his/her language use. That is, ‘common situational contexts’ and ‘experiential contexts’ of the users generate ‘common verbalizations’ (Firth, 1964). In other words, it is important to know the normal distribution and rules of stable forms in a language, without which it would be easy to make an incorrect deduction (Holmes, 1992).

5.2 Gender Differences

Language is in some ways gendered, and *ya* also exhibits sex-preferential speech features. Males and females do not speak in exactly the same way. Study I shows that among Beijing native speakers,

up to 93.3% of *ya* tokens are produced by males and only 6.7% by females. And among non-natives 76.0% of *ya* tokens are used by males and 24.0% by females. In Study II, 95% native males and 90% non-native males claim that they use *ya* 'very often' or 'occasionally', while 44.4% native-females and 53.3% non-native females 'seldom or never' use this word. The two studies suggest that *ya* is more preferred by males than females, no matter native or non-native.

Previous studies have also shown that men tend to use more vernacular forms than women, while women tend to use more 'standard' and formal forms than men (Holmes, 1992). The findings suggest that society tends to expect women to have 'better' behavior than men, and that women are expected to speak in more standard and elegant way, and men are generally allowed more freedom in language use than women. Also, females are expected to avoid giving offence to others by speaking politely and gently (Holmes, 1992). This observation is also supported by the findings in Study II, where more than half the participants (68% natives and 60% non-natives) respond that a gentlewoman should not use the word *ya* in public. That is, both from both production and perception perspectives, *ya* is a vernacular strongly associated with masculine use.

5.3 Expression of Emotion

Study I shows that 12.1% of native uses of *ya* express a kind of derogatory emotion, while only 4% of non-native uses do so. Study II shows that more natives know that *ya* often has a scolding meaning while more non-natives think that *ya* tends to express familiarity. Though the original meaning of *ya* is to insult people and more than half of the participants in both groups know this meaning, it seems that its extended meaning, which marks familiarity and solidarity, has become more wide-spread, especially among non-native speakers. It is possible that this result here is partly due to the data being collected mainly from the internet, where people tend to avoid offending others in public.

5.4 Imitation and Age

In Study II, 96% of Beijing natives said that they knew the word *ya* from friends and people surrounding them, which is consistent with *ya*'s regional status as part of the Beijing vernacular. On the other hand, more

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than half of the non-natives got to know about *ya* from literary works, teleplays, the internet, etc. In recent years some non-native writers also choose to use *ya* in their works, which set models for people, especially young people, to imitate.

When people find a certain language use is interesting or attractive, they will tend to accept its influence and then try to imitate it in their own speech. This kind of imitation is active and self-initiated. Generally, the ability of the young is better than the old. And it is easier to imitate if the imitator shares common grounds with the model in some ways, such as social background and personality, etc. (Wang, Sun & Yao, 1995). Hu & Zhang (1990) made an investigation on popular vocabulary among young people in Beijing during the 1970s and 1980s, observing that new words spread fast and become popular among young people.

Besides, most social dialectologists found that ‘adolescents use the highest frequencies of vernacular forms, especially if they are forms which people clearly recognize or identify as non-standard, like slang’ (Holmes, 1992: 184). It signals ‘membership of a particular group—the young’, and those forms act as ‘solidarity markers of group membership’ (Holmes, 1992: 184).

5.5 Regional and Social Dialects

Most people, both native and non-native speakers, are aware that *ya* ‘originated from the Beijing dialect’. An interesting question is why *ya* has become so popular across geographic space? One of the reasons is that the use of *ya* is taken as one of the representations of “Beijing-flavored language and culture”, representing a typical traditional Beijing style. Jiao (2000) pointed out that people preferring to use language with a Beijing flavor reveals the sense of priority for regional and cultural factors—including a sense of being associated with Beijing, the centre of culture and political power. Also, as mentioned above, the willingness to accept and imitate Beijingers’ use of *ya* underscores a strong tendency among the young to follow the trend in the use of popular vocabulary. It is a kind of ‘herd mentality’. People are inclined to approach certain groups consciously or unconsciously, and groups tend to use language in similar ways, in part due to similar experiences, and in part for the express purpose of highlighting similar experiences.

Vernacular language tends to indicate intimacy between participants rather than Standard Mandarin. As noted in Chen (1999), under certain circumstances, a regional dialect may shift to a social dialect, and in the process of spread, it may be affected by other regional dialects and finally become different from the original regional dialect to a certain degree. In this vein, *ya* has features of both regional and social dialects. For native Beijingers, the regional dialectal feature indicates ‘where they come from’ and the social dialectal feature indicates ‘who they are’ (Romaine, 2000: 2); for non-native Beijingers, the regional and social dialectal features translate into ‘where and who they wish to affiliate with’.

6. CONCLUSION

From the two production and perception studies on the use of *ya* by native speakers of the Beijing dialect and non-native speakers of the dialect, the conclusion is reached that *ya* in the Beijing vernacular can have deictic meaning and can also denote speaker’s solidarity or discontent with others in casual ways. The use of *ya* is related to gender, age, cultural experience, etc. Generally speaking, males and young people prefer to use *ya* more frequently. And now *ya* has both features of regional and social dialect among natives and non-natives of Beijing. The results of the studies denote that natives and non-natives share a common ground in their understanding of the use of *ya*, such as its regional status, meanings, and pragmatic use. A major difference lies in the use of *ya* with different personal deictic meanings. Native Beijingers use *ya* in different ways with an awareness of different personal deictic meanings, while non-native Beijingers sometimes use it in unnatural ways, ignoring differences in personal referential meanings. The non-native-like uses may be due to the overgeneralization or overextension of the rules in using *ya*, the lack of negative evidence, and the imitation from some incorrect examples produced by other non-natives on the internet and in books written by non-natives.

APPENDIX A

Questionnaire on the use of *ya*

I . Participants' familiarity with the use of *ya*

You can choose more than one response for Questions 2, 4, and 5.

1. How often do you use *ya* in your daily life?
 - A. Very often
 - B. Occasionally
 - C. Seldom/never
2. How did you get to know about *ya* ?
 - A. From friends.
 - B. From literary works, teleplays, etc.
 - C. From the internet.
3. In your opinion, what is the origin of deictic *ya* in words such as *ni ya*?
 - A. It originated from the Beijing dialect.
 - B. I do not know where *ya* originated from, since all Chinese people use this word now.
4. What do you think is the emotion expressed by *ya*?
 - A. *Ya* expresses one's disrespect, discontent, anger, etc.
 - B. It signals familiarity or solidarity between friends.
 - C. Nothing special.
5. In which situation(s) would you consider it inappropriate to use *ya*?
 - A. In a very solemn and formal occasion or context.
 - B. Casual and free talk between friends.
 - C. Junior to senior, student to teacher, children to parents, employee to employer.
 - D. When a gentlewoman speaks in public.
 - E. All situations are appropriate; just use it whenever you like.

II. Participants' acceptability judgment on the use of ya with different deictic meanings

Please judge the degree of acceptability on the use of *ya* in the given sentences by giving a number on a scale of -2 to +2 as interpreted below

-2	-1	0	+1	+2
completely unacceptable	probably unacceptable	I have no idea	probably acceptable	completely acceptable

1. 叻，好長時間沒見著你了，_____最近幹嘛呢？
 'I haven't seen you for a long time. What are _____ doing these days?'
 (The intended referent is second person singular 'you'.)
 A. 你丫 *ni ya* (2SG + *ya*) ()
 B. 丫你 *ya ni* (*ya* + 2SG) ()
 C. 丫 *ya* ()
2. 二子怎麼沒影兒了？_____溜得還挺快！
 'Where is Erzi, _____ has run away so fast.'
 (The intended referent is third person singular 'he'.)
 A. 丫 *ya* ()
 B. 他丫 *ta ya* (3SG + *ya*) ()
 C. 丫他 *ya ta* (*ya* + 3SG) ()
3. _____太能瘋玩了。
 '_____ are so crazy.'
 (The intended referent is third person plural 'they'.)
 A. 丫們 *ya men* (*ya* + Plural marker) ()
 B. 他們丫 *tamen ya* (3PL + *ya*) ()
 C. 他丫們 *ta ya men* (3SG + *ya* + Plural marker) ()
4. _____合夥耍我是吧！
 '_____ are playing tricks on me together, aren't you?!'
 (The intended referent is second person plural 'you'.)
 A. 你們丫 *ni men ya* (2PL + *ya*) ()
 B. 你丫們 *ni ya men* (2SG + *ya* + Plural marker) ()
5. _____最近很鬱悶。(指“我”)
 '_____ am really depressed recently.'
 (The intended referent is 'I'.)
 A. 我丫_____ *wo ya* (1SG + *ya*) ()

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6. 這事你別告訴___! (“灰灰”，人名)
'Don't tell ___ about anything of this.'
(The intended referent is a person named Huihui.)
A. 丫灰灰 *ya Huihui* (*ya* + *Huihui*) ()
7. ____, 剛從隔離區回來。(指“這個人”)
'____, has just come back from the pesthole.'
(The intended referent is 'this guy'.)
A. 這丫 *zhe ya* (*this* + *ya*) ()
8. 看那____。(意思為“看那個傻人”)
'Look at that ____.'
(The intended referent is the 'stupid guy'.)
A. 傻丫 *sha ya* (*stupid* + *ya*) ()

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Use of Ya among Native and Non-naive Beijingers

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不僅是人稱指示—對北京人與非北京本地人使用「丫」的分析

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本文對北京方言中一流行語素「丫」進行了研究，對北京人和非北京（即中國其他地區）人如何使用「丫」進行了比較學習。「丫」由一名詞詞素發展為含人稱指示意義的語素，最初含有貶義色彩，後逐漸擴展為可表示熟悉親密之意的社會認同標誌。近年來「丫」的使用擴展到北京以外的地域，而非北京人與北京本地人使用「丫」存在差異現象。本文從輸出和接受兩個角度進行探究，總結「丫」的不同用法，對北京人與非北京人使用「丫」進行比較。結果顯示，在北京方言中，根據人稱指稱意義的不同，「丫」具有多種用法。而除地域因素以外，年齡、性別、在北京生活時間等因素都是影響「丫」用法差異的因素。

關鍵字：丫，人稱指示，北京，方言，本地與非本地，社會認同標誌