

Research Article

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Request for confirmation sequences in Egyptian Arabic

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Abstract: The article presents a description of request for confirmation (RfC) sequences in everyday conversation in Egyptian Arabic. Through a quantitative analysis of 200 sequences excerpted from telephone calls, the analysis is concerned to identify the main design features of RfC sequences and their context-sensitive distribution and use. Analysis reveals that RfCs in Egyptian Arabic often do not bear special syntactic or prosodic marking. Lexical devices, such as inference markers, tag questions, and modulation markers, make explicit the specific epistemic position of the requesters. RfCs mostly attract confirmations. These can be accomplished by minimal responses; however, in most cases, a more elaborate format is used. Greater epistemic independence is suggested in confirmations in which no token is used. Non-minimal responses seem to be normative in the case of disconfirmations. Responders can also employ dedicated means for declining to provide a dis/confirmation. The findings of this study support the view of RfC sequences as a complex site for the display and negotiation of knowledge and social positioning.

Keywords: conversation analysis, interactional linguistics, Egyptian Arabic, requests, confirmation, epistemics, response tokens

1 Introduction

This article presents a description of request for confirmation (RfC) sequences in everyday conversation in Egyptian Arabic. In line with the approach outlined in König and Pfeiffer (forthcoming), RfCs are defined by reference to the main social action they implement, namely, to invite a co-participant to dis/confirm a proposition put forth by the speaker. RfCs are thus a practice for negotiating knowledge in conversation in which requesters claim certain knowledge, but position themselves as epistemically inferior to the responders. Under this view of RfCs, a range of more particularly definable actions is subsumed, including candidate understandings, formulations, and inference checks.¹ Through a quantitative analysis of 200 sequences excerpted from telephone calls in Egyptian Arabic, the present analysis is concerned to identify the main design features of RfCs and their responses and examine their distribution and use in particular interactional contexts.

To date, there is no research on RfC sequences in Egyptian Arabic (or in any other variety of Arabic). This may be explained by the little work that exists on discourse phenomena in Arabic in general. However, it may also have to do with the markedness of the object under focus. RfCs in Arabic bear no special morphosyntactic

¹ Excluded from this definition of RfCs are related practices such as repair-initiating repeats and newsmarks, which are not concerned with seeking dis/confirmation, but with inviting reconfirmation (Aldrup In press, Gipper et al. In press), or indexing the remarkability of the prior informing (Marmorstein and Reed 2023).

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marking that identifies them as such. In German, for instance, RfCs typically take the form of a declarative (verb-second) clause which makes them distinct from other interrogative (verb-first) formats (Deppermann et al., 2024). In Arabic, a special syntactic format of RfCs that marks them off as a separate category is not available.

Indeed, analysis reveals that RfCs in Arabic are for the most part unmarked, not only in terms of their syntactic structure but also considering the use of lexical devices that pre-frame or post-frame the RfC. These devices include inference markers and tag questions that index two basic components of RfCs, namely, the articulation of a new piece of information from second position (Thompson et al. 2015, 128) and the appeal to the other party for confirmation. In the studied collection, 42 (21%) RfCs were preceded by an inference marker, 34 (17%) followed by a tag question, and only 5 (2.5%) comprised both. A majority of 119 (59.5%) cases featured none of these devices. The next set of extracts provides a first illustration of a typically unmarked RfC (1), a RfC headed by the inference marker *yaʕni* (2), and a RfC accompanied by the tag question *walla ʔē* (3):

Extract (1): CALLHOME_5253 00:31-00:33

- 01 Fat: ʔinta gayy ʔimta?
NOM.PRON.2M.SG come.PTCP.M.SG when
when are you coming
- 02 Sām: gayy-
come.PTCP.M.SG
I'm coming
- 03 <<dim> gayy fi ʔāxir iṣ-šahr inšaʔallāh.>
come.PTCP.M.SG in end the-month God_willing
I'm coming at the end of the month God willing
- 04 → Fat: (---) <<h,f> ʔāxir šahrī ʔuktobar?>
end month October
at the end of October?
- 05 Sām: ʔaywa;;
exactly

Extract (2): CALLHOME_5595 01:53-02:02

- 01 Yeḥ: (--) huwwa rafīʔ gā-lak walla riffat?
NOM.PRON.3M.SG Rafīʔ come.PRF.3M.SG-DAT.PRON.2M.SG or Riffat
did Rafīʔ or Riffat come to you
- 02 Šaw: (1.1) ((click)) laʔ rafīʔ-
no Rafīʔ?
- 03 <<f> ʔiddā-ni tilifōn,
give.PRF.3M.SG-ACC.PRON.1C.SG telephone
he gave me a telephone call
- 04 Yeḥ: hmm
hm
- 05 Šaw: fa ruḥti-lu.
and go.PRF.1C.SG-DAT.PRON.3M.SG
so I went to him
- 06 Yeḥ: ʔāh,
oh
- 07 → yaʕni ma-ʔšufti-š riffat ʔinta;
it.means NEG-see.2M.SG-NEG Riffat NOM.PRON.2M.SG
so you didn't see Riffat

study focuses on its role as a minimal response within extended turns rather than as a second-pair part response. Ward and Al Bayyari (2007) present a similar concern with the ‘backchannel’ function of a group of response tokens, but make no reference to their use in other sequential positions.

The affirmative particle *ʔaywa* (‘indeed’, ‘exactly’) and the negative particle *laʔ ~ lā ~ laʔʔa* (‘no’) are described as counterparts in Woidich’s grammar (2006, 166). He distinguishes between two types of use of these particles: (i) as standalone interjections that serve to convey a positive or a negative ‘judgment’ (*Urteilsfunktion*); and (ii) as ‘cataphoric pro-forms’ that precede a clausal response. These clausal responses can extend from partial repetitions to expanded structures.

In a recent work, the use of the expression *waḷḷāhi* (lit. ‘by God’) in response to RfCs has been described (Marmorstein 2023). *Waḷḷāhi* is an epistemic marker that indicates the speaker’s commitment to the truth of the proposition it qualifies. In turn-initial position, *waḷḷāhi* serves to indicate a reserved commitment and is therefore used in non-type-conforming responses (Raymond 2003), i.e. in responses that are neither confirmatory nor disconfirmatory (Section 5.1). In utterance-final position, on the other hand, *waḷḷāhi* indicates absolute commitment and is thus used to reinforce a straightforward dis/confirmation.

3 Language and data

‘Egyptian Arabic’ broadly applies to the variety of dialects spoken in the geographical–political region of Egypt. The term is also commonly used to refer to Cairene Arabic, the capital’s dialect and the inter-regional variety in Egypt which, as a main culture language, is also widely understood in the whole Arab world (Woidich 2011).

The data for this study come from the Arabic segment of the CALLHOME corpus (Canavan et al. 1997, Gadalla et al. 1997), which records telephone conversations held in the 1990s between Egyptian Arabic speakers in the United States and their relatives and friends in Egypt. The data mostly record speakers of Cairene Arabic; 37 calls were selected for closer scrutiny, each lasting 30 minutes and involving between two and eight (changing) participants. About 200 examples of RfCs and their responses were collected from these data, transcribed, and coded. The prosodic transcription was done according to the GAT2 conventions (Couper-Kuhlen and Barth-Weingarten 2011) and the notation of wording followed the standard set by Woidich (2006). The coding followed the method outlined by König et al. (forthcoming).

4 Resources for requesting confirmation in Egyptian Arabic

4.1 Syntactic design

An overwhelming majority of 158 (79%) examples present a clausal structure. A smaller portion of 42 (21%) RfCs present different kinds of phrasal structures including nominal, adjectival, and adverbial phrases. Formally, these phrasal structures are closely tied to the prior speaker’s turn since they present a syntactic expansion or a retraction to a syntactic slot that was already opened (Auer 2009, 2014). Also in terms of their function, phrasal RfCs are closely linked to the prior turn as they mostly implement understanding checks or clarifications of local scope, mainly targeting the specific reference of a previously mentioned object, person, time, or place (cf. Deppermann et al., 2024 (this issue), for a similar observation in German). The following excerpt (reproducing (1)) illustrates a case of retraction and substitution. Faṭḥi asks Sāmīḥ when is he coming to Egypt for a visit:

Extract (4): CALLHOME_5253 00:31-00:33

01 Fat: ʔinta gayy ʔimta?
 NOM.PRON.2M.SG come.PTCP.M.SG when

- 02 Sām: *when are you coming*
 gayy-
 come.PTCP.M.SG
- 03 *I'm coming*
 <<dim> gayy fi ʔāxir iṣ-šahr inšāʔallāh.>
 come.PTCP.M.SG in end the-month God_willing
- 04 → Fat: (---) << h,f> ʔāxir šahrī ʔuktobar?>
 end month October
 at the end of October?
- 05 Sām: ʔaywa;
 exactly

Following Sāmiḥ's answer that he comes 'at the end of the month' (l. 3), Faṭḥi issues a RfC to check his understanding that the referred-to month is October (l. 4). The RfC presents a construct state chain ('end-of month-of October'), which retracts to the immediately preceding prepositional-phrase and proposes a specific nominal reference for 'the month' mentioned by the prior speaker.

4.2 Polarity

The majority of the RfCs in the collection are formatted with positive polarity ($n = 168$, 84%). A small number of 32 negatively formatted RfCs (16%) present a variety of negative polarity markers, as shown in Table 1.

An interesting observation concerns the correlation between the polarity of the RfC and its dis/confirmatory response: while positive polarity RfCs are confirmed in 70% (117/168) of the cases, negative polarity RfCs are confirmed in only 53% (17/32) of the cases. Heritage and Raymond (2021) have shown that negatively polarized questions are used to take an epistemic stance towards the probability of the question's underlying proposition and construct it as unlikely. A close inspection of negatively formatted RfCs will show if such a stance is also proposed in this subset of questions and what local tasks are implemented by these instances, which may explain the lower number of confirmations they attract (e.g. (18)).

4.3 Modulation

Epistemic modulation of RfCs is not common in the studied data: only 16 (8%) examples include an overt marker of modulation. Epistemic modulation is achieved by a variety of lexical and grammatical resources including particles, adverbs, prefabs, and fully inflected verb-phrases, as shown in Table 2. These devices foreground different aspects of the epistemic stance of the requesters, for instance, their prior expectations, source of knowledge, level of certainty, or the degree of accuracy they attribute to the confirmable.

Table 1: Negative polarity markers in RfCs in Egyptian Arabic

Negative polarity marker	Frequency (Total $n = 32$)
<i>mīš</i> ('not')	20 (63%)
<i>ma-V-š</i> ('do/did not')	9 (28%)
<i>mafiš</i> ('there isn't')	2 (6%)
<i>ġēr</i> ('not')	1 (3%)

Table 2: Markers of epistemic modulation in RfCs in Egyptian Arabic

Epistemic marker ^a	Frequency (Total <i>n</i> = 16)
<i>?ē da</i> ('what's that')	3
<i>huwwa</i> (lit. 'he'; 'is it really the case') ^b	2
<i>?aw ḥāga zayyi kida</i> ('or something like that')	2
<i>simišt</i> ('I heard')	1
<i>?azunn</i> ('I think')	1
<i>bāyin</i> ('apparently')	1
<i>?inšaʔallāh</i> ('God willing')	1
<i>kalām min da</i> ('that sort of thing')	1
<i>wi-kida</i> ('and so')	1
<i>fīʕlan</i> ('actually')	1
<i>masalan</i> ('for instance')	1
<i>ṭabʕan</i> ('obviously')	1

^aThe translations in brackets do not provide the literal sense of the marker, but rather an approximate English equivalent.

^bThird-person pronouns (*huwwa* 'he', *hiyya* 'she', and *humma* 'they') often head interrogative clauses and, when co-referential with the following subject, serve a topicalizing function (Woidich 2006, 361–2; e.g. (8), (27)). However, as a clause-initial particle signalling the speaker's epistemic stance, specifically their 'surprise or mild disbelief' (Hinds and Badawi 1986, 918), the form only occurs in the masculine singular.

Markers of modulation occupy different syntactic positions relative to the RfC: they can precede it, be embedded in it, or follow it. The next set of extracts illustrates these possibilities. In (5) the marker *?ē da* 'what's that' pre-frames the RfC. Amīna provides an account of why her voice sounds hoarse:

Extract (5): CALLHOME_4486 01:45-01:47

- 01 ʕAl: ?inti mā l-ṣōt-ik?
 NOM.PRON.2F.SG what to-voice-GEN.PRON.2F.SG
 what's wrong with your voice
- 02 Amī: ?ana-
 I
- 03 kān ʕand-i šwayyit bardī kida,
 be.PRF.3M.SG at-GEN.PRON.1C.SG a_little cold like.this
 I had a bit of a cold
- 04 min nahār faṛah eh;
 from day wedding uh
 since the wedding day of
- 05 (-)<<f> ḥanān wi hiba >
 Ḥanān and Hiba
- 06 → ʕAl: <<f> ?ē da;>
 what's that
- 07 iggawwizit ḥanān xalāš?
 marry.PRF.3F.SG Ḥanān that's_it
 Ḥanān got married that's it
- 08 Amī: ḥanān ?iggawwizit ilxamīs illi fāt;
 Ḥanān marry.PRF.3F.SG Thursday that pass.3M.SG
 Ḥanān got married last Thursday

Amīna's mention of Ḥanān and Hiba's wedding prompts ʕAlā to issue an RfC concerned with the earlier-than-expected occurrence of the event (l. 6-7). The RfC presents a marked V-S order which lays focus on the event and more specifically, modified by *xalāš* 'that's it', on its completion. Preceded by *?ē da*, it conveys ʕAlā's astonished stance towards the confirmable information (cf. Selting 1996). Noticeably, this RfC is answered with an expanded confirmation (l. 8) which might be occasioned by the display of an epistemically divergent stance.

In the next example the modulation is not making reference to the prior expectations of the requester, but to his level of certainty. The epistemic marker used in this case is the first-person verb-phrase ‘I think’:

Extract (6): CALLHOME_5595 08:38-08:47

- 01 Yeh: (--) ʃand-ak hiyya fi ʔamrīka.
at-GEN.PRON.2M.SG NOM.PRON.3F.SG in America
she is with you in America
- 02 Amg: <<f> ʔāh,
yes
- 03 ʃand-i; >
at-GEN.PRON.1C.SG
((she is)) with me
- 04 → Yeh: (1.1) w-maʃā-ha ʔaʒunn ʔibna-ha
and-with-GEN.PRON.3F.SG think.IMP.1C.SG son-GEN.PRON.3F.SG
Muḥi- M[uḥīb w]alla ʔēh?
Muḥī Muḥīb or what
and with her I think is her son Mu Muḥīb or what
- 05 Amg: [Muḥīb] ʔāh;
Muḥīb yes

Following Amgad’s confirmation that Amāni is staying with him in the US (l. 2-3), Yehya issues another RfC concerned with the location of her son. The verbal form *ʔaʒunn* ‘I think’ is embedded in the utterance, occupying a middle position between the prepositional predicate *maʃāha* ‘with her’ and the nominal subject *ibnaha* ‘her son’. By using a marker of epistemic mitigation such as ‘I think’ (Kärkkäinen 2003), the requester downgrades the level of certainty that he claims in proposing the confirmable.

In the next example, the modulation marker comes after the RfC and qualifies the accuracy of its content. Sāmīḥ enquires Faṭḥi about his plans to go on a honeymoon right after his wedding:

Extract (7): CALLHOME_5253 04:23-04:29

- 01 Sām: <<f> ʔinta ʔēh:ʔ>
you what
- 02 eh ʔa-tiʃmil honeymoon-
uh FUT-DO.IMP.2M.SG honeymoon
uh you will have a honeymoon
- 03 ʔimta yaʃni,
when like
- 04 baʃdi l-gawāz ʃala ʔūl?
after the wedding right away
- 05 Fat: (--) ʔāh,
yes
- 06 ʃala ʔūl;
right away
- 07 Sām: yaʃni f- yaʃni novambir-
like i- like November
- 08 itnēn w-ʃiʃrīn-
two and-twenty
twenty second
- 09 → <<creaky> kalām min da yaʃni, >
words of this it.means
that sort of thing

10 Fat: ʔāh;
yes

Fatḥi confirms that he and his wife are going on a honeymoon right after the wedding (l. 5-6). Sāmih pursues this with another RfC that suggests an exact date for their leave, November 22. This formulation is post-framed by the marker *kalām min da* ‘that sort of thing’ which downgrades the precision attempted in the RfC. Here as well, the requester orients to the asymmetry of knowledge between him and the responder by hedging his contribution and thus overtly indexing his inferior epistemic position.

4.4 Inference marking

RfCs introduced by an inference marker comprise 47 (23.5%) cases in the collection. The discourse marker *yaʕni* (lit. ‘it means’) is by far the most common device for marking inference (43/47, 91%). *Yaʕni* generally functions as a marker that initiates or invites the completion, repair, or elaboration of prior talk (Marmorstein 2016, 2021). It can either pre-frame or post-frame an RfC, and it is more commonly used with phrasal RfCs (14/42, 33%) than with clausal RfCs (29/158, 18%). Other markers, for which only one or two instances are recorded, are *baʔa* ‘then’, *ʔaʕl* ‘the fact is that’ and *ʔab* ‘well then’, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Inference markers in RfCs in Egyptian Arabic

Inference marker	Frequency (Total <i>n</i> = 47)
<i>yaʕni</i> (‘it means’)	43 (91%)
<i>ʔab</i> (‘well then’)	2 (4%)
<i>baʔa</i> (‘then’)	1 (2%)
<i>ʔaʕl</i> (‘the fact is that’)	1 (2%)

The following extract (reproducing (2)) illustrates the usual case in which inference is indicated by *yaʕni*. In response to Yehya’s question about whether Rafīʔ or Riffat have come to him, Šawki reports that it was Rafīʔ whom he met:

Extract (8): CALLHOME_5595 02:00

- 01 Yeh: (--) huwwa rafīʔ gā-lak walla riffat?
NOM.PRON.3M.SG Rafīʔ come.PRF.3M.SG-DAT.PRON.2M.SG or Riffat
did Rafīʔ or Riffat come to you
- 02 Šaw: (1.1)((click)) laʔ rafīʔ-
no Rafīʔ?
- 03 <<f> ʔiddā-ni tilifōn,
give.PRF.3M.SG-ACC.PRON.1C.SG telephone
he gave me a telephone call
- 04 Yeh: hmm
hm
- 05 Šaw: fa ruḥti-lu.
and go.PRF.1C.SG-DAT.PRON.3M.SG
so I went to him
- 06 Yeh: ʔāh,
oh
- 07 → yaʕni ma-ʔʕufti-š riffat ʔinta;
it.means NEG-see.2M.SG-NEG Riffat NOM.PRON.2M.SG
so you didn’t see Riffat

- 08 Šaw: (---) <<f> šuftī riffat,>
 see.1c.sg Riffat
I saw Riffat

Following the production of a news receipt at line 6, Yeḥya issues a *yaṣni*-prefaced RfC. By using *yaṣni* Yeḥya makes explicit that his upcoming proposition follows from – indeed, it is the *meaning* of – what has been said so far, namely, that in meeting Rafī? Šawki did not meet with Riffat since the option was initially presented as exclusive to either one of them (l. 2).

Unlike the ‘neutral’ or unmarked inference indicated by *yaṣni*, the marker *ṭab* ‘well then’ (a short variant of the form *ṭayyib* ‘good’, see (10)) is stance-laden and indicates the disagreement of the requester with some aspect(s) of the contents of the previous turn. Consider, for instance, the following excerpt. Nafīsa, who is invited to visit her sister Šafā, expresses concern that this will be complicated by the fact that she is babysitting for Ġina, another sister of theirs:

Extract (9): CALLHOME_5827 13:40-13:45

- 01 Naf: w-ʔawaddi il-wad fēn-
 and-send.IMPF.1c.sg the-boy where
and where will I send the boy
- 02 <<acc> ʔagīb-u baʔa,
 bring.IMPF.1c.sg-ACC.PRON.3M.sg then
((should I)) bring him
- 03 walla ʔaʕmil fi ʔēh>>
 or do.IMPF.1c.sg in-GEN.PRON.3M.sg what
or what should I do with him
- 04 mahu il-muškila il-wad;
for the problem is the boy
- 05 (---) ʔawaddi fēn,
 send.IMPF.1c.sg-ACC.PRON.3M.sg where
where will I send him
- 06 (.) ma ġina ḥa-tinzil iṣ-ṣuġl;
 PART Ġina fut-depart.3f.sg the-work
why, Ġina will go to work
- 07 → Šaf: ʔh ṭab-
well then
- 08 <<acc> w-hiyya ġina tiʔdar tistaġni
 and-NOM.PRON.3f.sg Ġina can.IMPF.3f.sg do_without.IMPF.3f.sg
 ʕann-u law ʔinti gibtī-h?>
 from-GEN.PRON.3M.sg if NOM.PRON.2f.sg bring.PRF.2f.sg-ACC.PRON.3M.sg
and Ġina indeed can be without him if you bring him
- 09 Naf: (---) ʔāh::,
yes
- 10 tiʔdar-
 can.IMPF.3f.sg
she can

In response to Nafīsa’s claim that she cannot come without the baby while Ġina, his mother, is at work, Šafā issues a RfC that takes issue with this claim, constructing the inference that Ġina can be separated from her baby as unlikely. The marker *ṭab* which prefaces this RfC is both retrospectively and prospectively oriented: it indexes Šafā’s disagreement with the prior turn’s contents while projecting the delivery of a proposition that contrasts it in some way.

Table 4: Connectives in RFCs in Egyptian Arabic

Connectives	Frequency (Total $n = 30$)
<i>wi</i> ('and')	26 (87%)
<i>ṭayyib</i> ('okay')	3 (10%)
<i>bass</i> ('but')	1 (3%)

4.5 Connectives

Connectives linking the RFC to prior discourse are attested in 30/200 (15%) of the cases. The additive particle *wi* 'and' is the most commonly used connective; the particles *bass* 'but' and *ṭayyib* 'okay' are also attested in a few cases, as summarized in Table 4.

The next example presents the use of the connective *ṭayyib* 'okay' (lit. 'good'). ṢAbla and her son Yusūf are discussing the prices of flight tickets from Egypt to the United States:

Extract (10): CALLHOME_4644 01:43-01:46

- 01 Yus: <<len> eh ʔinti kallifit kām-
uh NOM.PRON.2F.SG COST.PRF.3F.SG how_much
uh you how much did it cost
- 02 it-tazkara> min ʃand-ik?
the-ticket from at-GEN.PRON.2F.SG
the ticket from your end ((i.e. Egypt))
- 03 ṢAb: (---)<<f> ittazkara min hina ḥawāli;
the ticket from here is about
- 04 bi:-
for
- 05 miš ʃarfa ʔalli ʔalf wi: >
NEG know.PTCP.F.SG say.PRF.3M.SG-DAT.PRON.1C.SG thousand and
dunno he told me one thousand and
- 06 (.) ʔēh?
what
- 07 ʔarbaʃ talāf w-subṣumiyya,
four thousand and seven hundred
- 08 walla ḥāga zayyī kida.
or something like that
- 09 → Yus: (--) ṭayyib yaʃni ʔana ḥa-yibʔa ʔarxaṣ-
good it.means NOM.PRON.1C.SG FUT-be.IMP.F.3M.SG cheaper
okay so I it will be cheaper here
- 10 mitʃakkida?
be_certain.PTCP.F.SG
you are sure
- 11 ʃašān ma [ma-aʔʔaʃ-ʃ] wi-yiṭlaʃ ʔaḡla,
because NEG NEG-buy.IMP.F.1C.SG-NEG and-become.IMP.F.3M.SG more_expensive
because ((if)) I don't buy, it becomes more expensive
- 12 ṢAb: [ʔāh ʔāh;]
yes yes

ṢAbla provides an estimation of the ticket's price in Egypt, and in response, Yusūf seeks confirmation that the ticket will be cheaper if purchased in the United States. The connective *ṭayyib* prefaces the RFC at line 9.

Unlike its derivative *ʔab* which indexes disagreement (see above (9)), *ʔayyib* marks understanding and acceptance of what has been said so far and allows thus for transition to the subsequent action (cf. Betz and Deppermann 2021, Mondada and Sorjonen 2021). Noticeably, *ʔayyib* is compatible with the inference marker *ʔaʕni*, and while both link current talk to previous talk, their relative positioning presents an order of interactional tasks whereby displaying understanding and acceptance precedes the more progress-advancing proposal of an inference.

4.6 Tags

Tags are not a prominent design feature of RfCs in Egyptian Arabic. They are found in only a fifth of the cases ($n = 39, 19.5\%$). Formally, tags range from vocalizations to particles, adjectives, adverbs, and small clauses, as detailed in Table 5.

The two main types of question tags in the data are (i) *walla*-based tags, which consist of the alternative particle *walla* ‘or’ and an interrogative pronoun (*ʔē* ‘what’, *kām* ‘how much’), an indefinite pronoun (*ḥāga* ‘something’), or an interrogative clause (*ʔē il-mawdūʿ* ‘what is the matter’); and (ii) *miš kida*, which consists of the negation particle *miš* ‘not’ and the manner demonstrative *kida* ‘like this’. The choice between the two types of tags seems to be related to the epistemic stance they index: *miš kida* is used when requesters claim greater epistemic access or authority while *walla*-based tags indicate a less knowledgeable position. This difference is evidenced in the treatment of tagged-RfCs in the subsequent response: RfCs accompanied by *miš kida* nearly always invite a confirmation while *walla*-tagged RfCs are responded with confirmation only in about half of the cases.²

Consider the next two extracts in which *walla ?ē* and *miš kida* are used. In (11), Farū? enquires about the car which a mutual acquaintance is currently driving after selling her own car. He proposes for confirmation that she drives her brother's car, but this assumption is disconfirmed:

Table 5: Tags in RfCs in Egyptian Arabic

Tag	Frequency (Total <i>n</i> = 39)	Variants and combinations
<i>walla</i> ('or') + pron./cl. ^a	18	<i>walla ḥāga</i> ('or something') 3 <i>walla kām</i> ('or how much') 3 <i>walla ʔē il-mawḏūʃ</i> ('or what is the issue') 1 <i>walla ʔē</i> ('or what') 11
<i>miš kida</i> ('not like that')	8	
<i>ʔāh</i> ('yes')	5	
<i>ṣaḥḥ/ṣaḥīḥ</i> ('right')	5	
<i>ha</i> (interjection)	2	
<i>mitʔakkida</i> ('are you (f.) sure')	1	

^aThe listed combinations of *walla*-based tags were the ones attested in the corpus. However, *walla*-based tags are even more productive and include in addition such commonly occurring forms as *walla la?* 'or not' and *walla lissa* 'or not yet'.

Extract (11): CALLHOME 4778 10:00-10:02

01 Far: bi-tsū? ʃarabiyya ʔēh;
HAB.drive.IMPF.3F.SG car what

2 One example in the collection exhibits the co-occurrence of both types of tags: *miš kida walla ?eh* 'isn't it or what' (CALLH-OME_4299 18:55). Formally, this succession indexes an online decrease in the confident stance of the requester. However, *miš kida walla ?eh* may well have undergone further grammaticalization as an argumentative device. This topic awaits further investigation.

- 02→ *which car does she drive*
 bitaʃit eh ʔaxū-ha bāyin? =walla ʔeh,
 of uh brother-GEN.PRON.3F.SG apparently or what
 her brother's apparently or what
- 03 Maḥ: laʔ;
 no
- 04 ʔaggarit ʃarabiyya-
 rent.PRF.3F.SG car
 she rented a car
- 05 (-) bi-mīt ginēh f-šahr;
 for a hundred ((Egyptian)) pounds a month

Farūʔ's less confident stance is indexed by the adverb *bāyin* 'apparently' and by the appended tag *walla ʔeh* (l. 2-3). In using this tag, Farūʔ lifts the constraints set by the RfC, by making relevant a response that goes beyond a two-way, yes/no answer. Indeed, unlike *miš kida*, which reiterates the polarity-based format of the RfC, the alternative-based *walla ʔeh* acknowledges a greater number of response options. It is therefore more congruent with situations in which the requester presents less solid information which as such is more vulnerable to correction.³

In the next example, *miš kida* is used. Šafwat seeks confirmation about the death of a mutual acquaintance:

Extract (12): CALLHOME_5241 08:45-08:50

- 01 Šaf: ʔana kunti smiʃt-
 NOM.PRON.1C.SG be.PRF.1C.SG hear.PRF.1C.SG
 I have heard
- 02 kunti ʔarēt fi l-eh g-gurnāl ʔinnī
 be.PRF.1C.SG read.PRF.1C.SG in the-uh the-newspaper that
 waldit-u twaffit- =
 mother-GEN.PRON.3F.SG die.PRF.3F.SG
 I have read in the- the paper that his mother had passed away
- 03 → =miš kida,
 isn't that so
- 04 Mag: ʔāh,
 yes

The tag *miš kida* is appended to the RfC (l. 12), and while attributing epistemic primacy to the responder by making the appeal for confirmation explicit, it also serves to indicate the requester's high level of confidence. This confidence may be grounded in the reliable source of the information – a death notice published in the newspaper. The responder's minimal response makes apparent that he treats the confirmable information as unproblematic, that is, as accurate and comprehensive enough.

4.7 Prosodic design

The prosodic feature that was examined in the study was the final pitch movement of the RfC. In the Egyptian Arabic data, nearly half of the RfCs end with a rising pitch. When a tag question is not appended to the RfC, the

³ The tag *walla ʔeh* can also be appended to reproaches and other expressions of indignation, e.g. *ʔaḥḥēh ḥatxušši f-ʃibbi walla ʔeh* 'my, my! you think you can fool me or what?' (Hinds and Badawi 1986, 8). While formally similar to RfCs, these reproaches are not treated as genuine RfCs; i.e. they do not seek – and for the most part do not receive – a confirming response.

Table 6: Final intonation of the confirmable

	Final intonation confirmable (<i>N</i> = 200)	Final intonation confirmable without a tag (<i>n</i> = 161)	Final intonation confirmable with a tag (<i>n</i> = 39)
Rise	98 (49%)	86 (54%)	12 (31%)
Level	24 (12%)	7 (4%)	17 (43%)
Fall	78 (39%)	68 (42%)	10 (26%)

Table 7: Prosodic integration of tags into confirmable

	<i>walla</i> -tag (<i>n</i> = 17)	<i>miš kida</i> (<i>n</i> = 9)	<i>ʔāh</i> (<i>n</i> = 5)	<i>šaḥḥ/šaḥīḥ</i> (<i>n</i> = 5)	<i>ha</i> (<i>n</i> = 2)	<i>mitʔakkida</i> (<i>n</i> = 1)	Σ (<i>n</i> = 39)
Non-integrated	11 (65%)	6 (67%)	4 (80%)	5 (100%)	1 (50%)	1 (100%)	28 (72%)
Integrated	6 (0%)	3 (33%)	1 (20%)	0 (0%)	1 (50%)	0 (0%)	11 (28%)

Table 8: Final contour of tag (only non-integrated tags)

	<i>walla</i> -tag (<i>n</i> = 11)	<i>miš kida</i> (<i>n</i> = 6)	<i>ʔāh</i> (<i>n</i> = 4)	<i>šaḥḥ/šaḥīḥ</i> (<i>n</i> = 5)	<i>ha</i> (<i>n</i> = 1)	<i>mitʔakkida</i> (<i>n</i> = 1)	Σ (<i>n</i> = 28)
Rise	5 (45.5%)	5 (83%)	4 (100%)	5 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	21 (75%)
Level	1 (9%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (3.5%)
Fall	5 (45.5%)	1 (17%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	6 (21.5%)

numbers are even higher and slightly over half of the cases present a final rising pitch. When a tag question does follow, a larger group of cases presents the final level pitch (Table 6). This tendency may evidence the fact that, even when not clearly integrated into the same unit, the prosodic boundary between the tag and the preceding RfC is for the most part fairly weak or ‘insufficiently marked’ (Auer 2010, 15).

In the majority of cases, tag questions are not integrated into the preceding RfC unit, as shown in Table 7. As for their pitch movement, non-integrated tags mostly present a final rising pitch (Table 8). All in all then, the predominant prosodic pattern of RfCs in the studied data – whether tagged or not – is finally rising. These findings align with previous observations about the rising intonation of polar interrogatives in Egyptian Arabic (Woidich 2006, 358). However, the fact that a considerable number of RfCs in the data present a final falling pitch suggests that: (i) final rising pitch is a typical but not an essential design feature of (what is treated as) a question in Egyptian Arabic; (ii) the falling pitch is a formal feature that distinguishes (a subset of) RfCs from other actions accomplished through polar questions, such as information-seeking questions, requests for action, and offers.

5 Resources for responses to RfCs in Egyptian Arabic

5.1 Responsive actions

The main responsive action made relevant by RfCs is dis/confirmation. Responses in which dis/confirmation was not explicitly stated were classified accordingly as ‘neither’ (cf. König et al. forthcoming). In the Egyptian Arabic data, most of the RfCs receive a confirming response (*n* = 134, 67%); however, the confirmation may be modified later in the turn (27). Disconfirming responses are less common (*n* = 36, 18%), and even less so are responses that neither confirm nor disconfirm (*n* = 30, 15%). The latter is a heterogeneous group of cases

including other initiations of repair, other corrections, transformative answers (Stivers and Hayashi 2010), no-knowledge answers (Keevallik 2011), religious invocations expressing thankfulness, wish or hope (e.g. *il-ḥamdu li-llāh* ‘praise be to God’, *bi-zni llāh* ‘with God’s permission’), and noncommittal responses.

Responses that decline to commit to a straightforward confirmation or disconfirmation of the prior speaker’s proposal pertain to two types. The first type consists of the response token *yaʕni* ‘sort-of’. Formally, this token is identical to the discourse marker *yaʕni* that indicates inference (Section 4.4).⁴ However, *yaʕni* has an additional use as a noncommittal response ‘with implied reservation’ (Hinds and Badawi 1986, 606). The following extract provides an illustration. After trying to chat in Arabic with her granddaughter in America, Faiza goes back to speak with Ḥātim, her son/father. In line 10, Faiza presents for confirmation the assumption that, despite her apparent weak ability to speak in Arabic, the granddaughter does understand Arabic. Ḥātim’s minimal response via *yaʕni* conveys the stance that while he does not deny this assumption, he is also not subscribing to its truth.

Extract (13): CALLHOME_4194 13:22-13:24

- 01 Ḥāt: ʔalo, hahaha
hello
- 02 Fai: haha hi;
hi
- 03 Ḥāt: ʔaywa hahahaha
yes
- 04 Fai: hahahahahaha
05 lissa ʕuḡayyara ʕiwayya;
still young.F.SG a_little
she is still a little young
- 06 miš eh-
NEG uh
((she)) doesn’t uh
- 07 mm-
mm
- 08 <<all> bi-titkisif;>
HAB-be_shy.IMPF.3F.SG
she is shy
- 09 bassī,
but
- 10 ↑bi-tifham ʕarabi;
HAB-understand.IMPF.3F.SG Arabic
she understands Arabic
- 11 → Ḥāt: (–) ya:ʕni;
sort of

Responders can also indicate reserved commitment through the turn-initial marker *waʕlāhi* lit. ‘by God’. While *waʕlāhi* originates in an oath expression, in turn-initial position it serves to project commitment that is relativized to the speaker’s limited access or rights to knowledge and which is therefore more restrained (Marmorstein 2023). Consider, for instance, the next example. Following Saʕīd’s report about a programming course he is about to take, ʕAzmi seeks confirmation about the specific programming languages that the course will cover:

⁴ Morphologically, the discourse marker *yaʕni* and the noncommittal response token *yaʕni* present the same form. Prosodically, they are distinct in that the first syllable of the response token is delivered with higher pitch and the second syllable is not lengthened, as opposed to the common lengthening of the marker.

Extract (14): CALLHOME_4455 00:20-00:26

- 01 ʕAz: eh kombyutar ʔēh-
 uh computer what
 uh what programming ((languages))
- 02 dos?=
- 03 **Dos**
 =walla:-
- 04 → Saʕ: wallā [hi hu]
 by God
- 05 ʕAz: [ḡava?]
 Java
- 06 Saʕ: huw[wa fi]
 NOM.PRON.3M.SG there_is
 there are
- 07 ʕAz: [(xxx xxx) wal]la ʔēh
 or what
- 08 Saʕ: (-) fi ba[rāmig]
 there are programing
- 09 ʕAz: [ʔēh?]
 what
- 10 Saʕ: fi barāmig kitīr-
 there_is programs many
 there are many programming ((languages))

Saʕid declines to provide a type-conforming, yes-or-no response to ʕAzmi's enquiry. Instead, he uses *wallāhi* to assert his commitment to what is evident to him and makes a less constraining proposition, namely, that there exist many programming languages that might be the subject of the course. Thus, a *wallāhi*-prefaced response circumvents the difficulty of answering the question as formulated by claiming certainty of a more limited scope.

5.2 Response tokens

Responses that include tokens of dis/confirmation constitute the majority of the cases in the studied collection ($n = 155$, 77.5%). No-token responses which only include repetition comprise a small number of 7 (3.5%) cases. No-token and no-repetition formats amount to 38/200 (19%) of the cases.

Response tokens in Egyptian Arabic range from non-lexical vocalizations (*ʔmm*) to particles and adverbial forms. While mostly singly produced, particles can be repeated or reinforced by adverbs. Affirmative tokens constitute the largest and most varied group; the negative particle *laʔ* ~ *la* presents a variation of glottalized and non-glottalized forms; the noncommittal *yaʕni* is attested twice and presents no variation.

The basic affirmative particle *ʔāh* 'yes' is the most common response token in the data (Table 9). It is used in confirmations, either singly or in a token cluster. Typically, *ʔāh* is singly produced when the confirmation is

Table 9: Response tokens in Egyptian Arabic

Token	Frequency (Total $n = 155$)	Variants and combinations
<i>ʔāh</i> ('yes')	96	<i>ʔāh</i> 78, <i>ʔāh ʔāh</i> 5, <i>ʔāh ʔabʕan</i> 4, <i>ʔāh ... ʔāh</i> 3, <i>ʔāh biʕzabʕ</i> 2, <i>ʔāh ʔaywa</i> 2, <i>ʔāh wallāhi</i> 1, <i>biʕzabʕ ʔāh</i> 1
<i>la</i> ~ <i>laʔ</i> ('no')	39	<i>la</i> 18, <i>laʔ</i> 14, <i>la la</i> 3, <i>laʔa</i> 1, <i>la laʔ</i> 1, <i>laʔ laʔ</i> 1, <i>la la la laʔ</i> 1
<i>ʔaywa</i> ('indeed, exactly')	15	<i>ʔaywa</i> 14, <i>ʔay ʔay</i> 1
<i>ʔabʕan</i> ('of course')	2	
<i>yaʕni</i> ('sort-of')	2	
<i>ʔmm</i> ('mm')	1	

straightforward and unproblematic, often referring to simple factual information. For instance, in (15), a minimal confirmation via *ʔāh* is provided in response to a RfC concerned with the time gap between Egypt and the United States:

Extract (15): CALLHOME_5006 01:40-01:43

- 01 Sām: intu baʕdī-na bi ʕašar saʕāt-
NOM.PRON.2C.PL after-GEN.PRON.1C.PL in ten hours
you are ten hours ahead of us
- 02 miš kida;
isn't that so
- 03 → Nag: (---) ʔāh,
yes

Responders can go beyond mere confirmation and display a more nuanced epistemic stance or orientation through specific lexical devices. In the next example (reproducing (1) above), Sāmiḥ confirms Faṭḥi's suggestion that his visit to Egypt will take place in October. In using *ʔaywa* 'indeed, exactly', he treats the confirmable not just as true but as accurate, thereby acknowledging the high level of epistemic congruence displayed by Faṭḥi:

Extract (16): CALLHOME_5253 00:31-00:33

- 01 Fat: ʔinta gayy ʔimta?
NOM.PRON.2M.SG come.PTCP.M.SG when
when are you coming
- 02 Sām: gayy-
come.PTCP.M.SG
I'm coming
- 03 <<dim> gayy fi ʔāxir iš-šahr inšāʔallāh. >
come.PTCP.M.SG in end the-month God_willing
I'm coming at the end of the month God willing
- 04 Fat: (---) <<h,f> ʔāxir šahrī ʔuktobar?>
end month October
at the end of October?
- 05 → Sām: ʔaywa;
exactly

The adverb *ṭabʕan* 'of course' can cluster with the simple affirmative *ʔāh* or be used as a standalone confirmatory token. In the following example, Sāmiḥ seeks confirmation that a debtor has paid Faṭḥi less than he should have:

Extract (17): CALLHOME_5253 05:45-05:51

- 01 Sām: bassī raggaʕ ʔaʔall min il-mafrūd- =šahḥ,
but return.PRF.3M.SG less of the-proper_thing right
but he returned less than he should have right
- 02 ʔaw hāga zayyī kida,
or something like that
- 03 → Fat: ṭabʕan;
of course
- 04 Sām: ʔā:h;
yes

- 05 → Fat: ʔabʕan;
 of course
 06 ktīr.
 a lot ((less))

Faṭḥi uses *ʔabʕan* to confirm that the assumption made by Sāmīḥ is not simply true but beyond question. Notice that in this affiliative context, *ʔabʕan* is not used to index a problem with the askability of the question (Stivers 2011), but to upgrade the confirmation by rejecting any alternative, thus making the complaint about the debtor stronger.

The negative particle *laʔ* ~ *la* ‘no’ is used both as a disconfirmatory token and as confirmation of negatively polarized RfCs. For instance, in the excerpt below Aḥmad seeks confirmation that his father in Egypt is not in need of anything that he can send him from the US. This RfC thus also serves to implement an offer. However, the two actions set up different preferences for the upcoming response (cf. Schegloff 2007, 76–8): as a negatively formatted question, the RfC is optimized for a ‘no’ answer, while as an offer it should be preferably met with acceptance. The father’s response, initiated by *la*, is evidently oriented to the negative design of the RfC and confirms the assumption it puts forth while declining the offer:⁵

Extract (18): CALLHOME_5203 21:49-21:51

- 01 Aḥm: w-inta miš ʕāwiz ḥāga min hina, =ya bāba?
 and-NOM.PRON.2M.SG NEG want.PTCP.M.SG thing from here voc dad
 you don't want anything from here dad
 02 → Sal: la;
 no
 03 ʕawiz-ku bass tibʔu kuwayyisīn-
 want.PTCP.M.SG-ACC.PRON.2C.PL just be.IMPF.2C.PL well.C.PL
 I just want you to be well
 04 ya ḥabībī;
 my dear

5.3 Clusters of response tokens

Clusters of response tokens, in which two or more tokens of similar or different types occur in the same prosodic unit, are rare in the Egyptian Arabic data (7 out of 155 token-including responses). The next excerpt (reproducing (10)) provides an illustration. Yusūf seeks confirmation that ʕAbla’s flying ticket from Egypt to the US will be cheaper if purchased in the US:

Extract (19): CALLHOME_4644 01:43-01:46

- 01 Yus: <<len> eh ʔinti kallifit kāṁ-
 uh NOM.PRON.2F.SG COST.PRF.3F.SG how_much
 uh you how much did it cost
 02 it-tazkara> min ʕand-ik?
 the-ticket from at-GEN.PRON.2F.SG
 the ticket from your end ((i.e. Egypt))

⁵ The preceding conversational context does not exhibit an observable motivation for the negative formatting of the RfC. This design choice (and the epistemic stance it indexes) may have to do with the longer interactional history of the participants (i.e. previous rejections of such offers) or with more subtle considerations of face in making this type of offers.

- 03 ʕAb: (---) <<f>ittazkara min hina ḥawāli;
 the ticket from here is about
- 04 bi:-
 for
- 05 miš ʕarfa ʔalli ʔalf wi:>
 NEG know.PTCP.F.SG say.PRF.3M.SG-DAT.PRON.1C.SG thousand and
 dunno he told me one thousand and
- 06 (.) ʔəh?
 what
- 07 ʔarbaʕ talāf w-subʕumiyya,
 four thousand and seven hundred
- 08 walla ḥāga zayyī kida.
 or something like that
- 09 Yus: (--) ṭayyib yaʕniʔana ḥa-yibʔa ʔarxaš-
 good it.means NOM.PRON.1C.SG FUT-be.IMP.F.3M.SG cheaper
 okay so I it will be cheaper here
- 10 mitʕakkida?
 be_certain.PTCP.F.SG
 you are sure
- 11 ʕašān ma [ma-aʔʔaʕ-š] wi-yiʔlaʕ ʔaḡla,
 because NEG NEG-buy.IMP.F.1C.SG-NEG and-become.IMP.F.3M.SG more_expensive
 because ((if)) I don't buy, it becomes more expensive
- 12→ ʕAb: [ʔāh ʔāh:]
 yes yes
- 13 la,
 no
- 14 ʔinta ʔarxaš ya māma
 NOM.PRON.2M.SG cheaper VOC mom
 ((at)) your ((end)) is cheaper my love

ʕAbla delivers a strong confirmation consisting of a repetition of the affirmative token *ʔāh* (l. 12). In producing a ‘multiple saying’ (Stivers 2004), ʕAbla seems to convey the stance that further contemplation of this topic is unnecessary as she is completely certain of the fact that the ticket is best purchased in the United States. This stance is made explicit in ʕAbla’s following reassertion that the ticket will be cheaper in the United States (l. 14).

5.4 Position of the first response token

Typically, a confirmation token is placed at the beginning of the responsive turn. Thus, in 52 out of 68 (76%) instances of non-minimal confirmations, the token is turn-initial. This strong tendency can be explained by the fact that, even if more complex work is accomplished by the responsive turn, confirmation is prioritized as the ‘official business’ made relevant by the RFC.

However, in a small subset of cases, the confirmation token is placed at the end of the responsive turn (13/68, 19%) or is repeated twice, at the beginning and the closing of the turn (3/68, 5%). In the next example, the confirmation token occurs in turn-final position. Calling from the United States, Šarīf seeks confirmation that the current time in Egypt is 7 a.m:

Extract (20): CALLHOME_4345 00:24-00:29

- 01 Šar: <<all> dilwaʔti s-sāʕa sabʕa is-subḥ ʕand-ukum-
 now the-hour seven the-morning at-GEN.PRON.2C.PL

- the time now is seven in the morning for you*
- 02 walla kām,
 or what
- 03 Sal: <<rall> dilwaʔti ssāʕa:->
 the time now
- 04 sabʕa-
 is seven
- 05 → ʔāh;
 yes

Salmān is not immediately confirming: he initiates his response with a repetition of the first segment of the confirmable and only then produces the affirmative ʔāh ‘yes’. It is quite plausible that Salmān is producing this response while simultaneously checking the time (observably, line 3 is delivered with decreasing speed and stretch of the final syllable). Thus, the provision of a straightforward confirmation becomes possible only after the action of verifying the time has been completed.

In the next example, the confirming turn is enclosed by an initial and a final token of the affirmative ʔāh. Yehya seeks confirmation about the death of a mutual acquaintance:

Extract (21): CALLHOME_5595 02:13-02:18

- 01 Yeh: baʔa-
 then
- 02 gōz uxtī rafiʔ;
 husband sister Rafīʔ
 Rafīʔ's brother-in-law
- 03 illi mawgūd hina-
 who is here
- 04 itwaffa-
 die.PRF.3M.SG
 died
- 05 → Šaw: (1.3) ʔāh,
 yes
- 06 itwaffa-
 die.PRF.3M.SG
 he died
- 07 → ʔāh;
 yes

The confirming turn unfolds in three intonation units: the first production of the affirmative ʔāh is followed by a repetition of the confirmable ‘he died’ to which another token of ʔāh is appended. In using repetition, the responder in this case underscores his epistemic primacy (Schegloff 1996, Heritage and Raymond 2005, Enfield et al. 2019). Flanked on both sides by ʔāh, this epistemic work is marked off as separate from the plain action of confirmation.

5.5 Minimal and non-minimal responses

Minimal responses to RfCs consist of a freestanding response token. In the studied data, they comprise 58/200 (29%) of the cases. While minimal responses can implement a confirmation and ‘nothing more’ (Enfield et al. 2019; see (15)), they can also serve a more nuanced interactional work. Specifically, in selecting a particular token, the responder is able to communicate a certain stance or orientation towards the confirmable and/or the requester which is interactionally meaningful and consequential ((16) and (17)).

Non-minimal responses, which besides a response token also include repetitions and/or other expansions, are more common than minimal responses and comprise 93/200 (46.5%) of the cases. Other formats of response, which do not include a response token, but can involve a repetition, make the smallest group with 49/200 (24.5%) of the cases. Non-minimal and other formats of confirmation are discussed in the next subsection (5.6). The remainder of this subsection is concerned with minimal and non-minimal formats of disconfirmation.

The great majority of disconfirmations (25/36, 69%) present a non-minimal format initiated by the negative response particle *la?* ~ *la*. Typically, non-minimal disconfirmations include a correction, an account, or some other form of elaboration. In the next example, ṢAlā seeks confirmation that Muṣṭazz has a day off ‘today’. The disconfirmatory response consists of a long glottalized variant of the negative particle, *la??a*, and a subsequent correction ‘tomorrow’:

Extract (22): CALLHOME_4486 06:11-06:14

- 01 ṢAl: <<all> innaharda-
 today
- 02 Ṣand-uku ʔagāza, >
 at-GEN.PRON.2C.PL holiday
 you have a holiday
- 03 Muṣ: (-) la??a;
 no
- 04 bukra;
 tomorrow

Minimal disconfirmations are rare in the data (4/36, 11%) and present as a rule the glottalized form *la?*. In the next excerpt, Hāni, who is calling from the US, seeks confirmation that a soccer game in Egypt is taking place ‘today’. After Raffat disconfirms (l. 5), Hāni issues a negatively formatted reconfirmation request which is plainly responded with *la?*:

Extract (23): CALLHOME_4864 02:17-02:19

- 01 Hān: fi nnahārdamatš il-
 there_is today match the
 there is a match today of
- 02 ʔismaṣīli bāyin,
 Ismāṣīli apparently
 the Ismailia club apparently
- 03 Raf: ʔh <<f>> innahārda? >
 today
- 04 Hān: ʔāh;
 yes
- 05 Raf: la mafīš.
 no there isn't
- 06 Hān: miš innahārda matšī kōṛa,
 neg today match ball
 isn't there a soccer game today?
- 07 → Raf: la?
 no
- 08 Hān: miš innahārda,
 not today
- 09 ʔā:h-

- 10 Raf: *oh*
bukra bāyin.
tomorrow apparently

Noticeably, in his next turn, Hāni produces a repetition of the confirmable information before acknowledging its receipt via ‘oh’ (l. 8-9). This elaborate way of response is not treated as a closure of the topic, but as an invitation to pursue it further, as indicated by Rafīat’s subsequent (and perhaps forced) speculation about the time of the match. This form of sequence expansion and the overall low frequency of the minimal format suggests that minimal disconfirmations are generally treated as insufficient responses to RfCs.

5.6 Full and expanded repeats

Full repeats occur in 35 out of 134 (26%) of the confirmatory responses. While a repeat can constitute by itself a confirmation, in the great majority of cases (28/35, 80%), it is combined with a response token, often placed subsequent to it (20/28, 71%). The repeat can present a partial or full reproduction of the confirmable.

Responding by a full repeat is syntactically determined when the confirmable itself is phrasal or consists of a minimal clause (i.e., an inflected verb). In cases where the response reproduces ‘omittable’ material, other motivations may be at play. In the next example, Mariam is a participant in the CALLHOME project calling from the US. Muna, her relative, seeks confirmation that all her family members were similarly granted a free telephone call:

Extract (24): CALLHOME_5047 02:26-02:36

- 01 Mun: <<all> huwwa kull wāḥid bi-yiṣraf yitkallim
NOM.PRON.3M.SG all one HAB-know-IMPF.3M.SG speak.IMPF.3M.SG
ṣarabi b-yiddū-lu nuṣṣī sāfa?>
Arabic HAB-give.IMPF.3C.PL-DAT.RPON.3M.SG half hour
everyone who knows to speak Arabic they really give him half an hour
- 02 Mar: ʔāh;
yes
- 03 ʔana ʔana lli ṣamalti-lhum kida.
NOM.PRON.1C.SG NOM.PRON.1C.SG that do.PR.1C.SG-DAT.PRON.3CPL like.that
I ((it is)) I who organized that for them
- 04 Mun: (---) [li-kulli wāḥid ṣand-ukum] fi l-bēt?
to-all one at-GEN.PRON.2C.PL in the-house
to everyone at your house
- 05 Mar: [ṣuftī ʔana kuwayyisa ʔizzāy?]
see.PR.2F.SG NOM.PRON.1C.SG good.F.SG how
you see how good I am
- 06 naṣam?
excuse me
- 07 Mun: li-kulli wāḥid ṣand-ukum fi l-bēt?
to-all one at-gen.PRON.2C.PL in the-house
to everyone at your house
- 08 Mar: ʔāh,
yes
- 09 → kulli wāḥid ṣand-ina fi l-bēt.
all one at-GEN.PRON.1C.PL in the-house
everyone at our house

By not simply confirming but also fully repeating the proposition (with necessary indexical shift) ‘everyone at our house’ (l. 9), Mariam can be heard to orient to two things. First, the unconvinced stance displayed by Muna, who keeps interrogating her about the terms of the recording. In articulating the confirmation in full, Mariam can express commitment to each of its parts and thus respond to the doubt implied by Muna’s questioning. Second, since her response comes after a repair sequence that she has initiated (l. 6-7), Mariam can display her understanding by repeating in full the trouble source.

Repetitional responses can also go beyond a verbatim reproduction and expand the confirmable information. As with other types of repeats, an expanded repeat can be combined with a response token or satisfy as a confirmation in itself. While both token-including and token-less formats go beyond the confirmable proposition, they seem to display a different orientation towards it; specifically, when no token is produced, the expansion lends itself to interpretation as corrective rather than additive. Consider the following two excerpts. In (25), Layla is telling Muṣṭafa about the funeral of a mutual acquaintance and the group of people who attended it. Muṣṭafa seeks confirmation that this group included all of the deceased’s friends:

Extract (25): CALLHOME_4213 21:03-21:09

- 01 Lay: kānu šaylīn-u;
be.PRF.3C.PL carry.PTCP.C.PL-ACC.PRON.3M.SG
they carried him
- 02 šaylīn sandū?-u;
carry.PTCP.C.PL coffin-GEN.PRON.3M.SG
carried his coffin
- 03 wi:::-
and
- 04 ḥaḍrīn dafn-u,
attend.PTCP.C.PL burial-GEN.PRON.3M.SG
attended his burial
- 05 Mus: ?mm;
?mm
- 06 Lay: (---) wi:: eh-
and uh
- 07 yu[qāl ya]ṣni yi
say.IMPF.PASS.3M.SG it.means
like it is said
- 08 Mus: [ʔaṣḥāb-u baʔa ku]
friends-GEN.PRON.3M.SG then
his friends then a
- 09 ʔaṣḥāb-u ku[ll-uhum];
friends-GEN.PRON.3M.SG all-GEN.PRON.3M.PL
all of his friends ((attended))
- 10 → Lay: [ʔāh],
yes
- 11 → ʔaṣḥāb-u;
his friends
- 12 → <<f,dim> ʔaṣḥāb-u;
his friends
- 13 → ḥabayb-u;
his loved ones
- 14 → ʔarayb-u;
his relatives
- 15 → kida,>>
like this

Layla's response is initiated with the affirmative token *ʔāh* 'yes' and a repetition of the confirmable 'friends' which is incrementally expanded to additional categories of attendants. Notice that this list is prosodically constructed as an open one, with each item packaged in its own intonation unit and showing a similar pitch movement pattern (Couper-Kuhlen 1986, 150, Sánchez-Ayala 2003). Moreover, the list is concluded with the manner demonstrative *kida* 'like this' which indicates that the enumerated items are not exhaustive but illustrative of the possible categories that make up the set.

In the next example, the response consists of an expanded repetition with no confirmatory token. Šadia tells Hišām about the entertaining tour she had organized for relatives who came to visit her in the United States. Hišām's RfC at line 5 is concerned to clarify the specific identity of the participants in this tour:

Extract (26): CALLHOME_4826 11:59-12:01

- 01 Šad: n- nazzilt-uhum;
make_depart.PRF.1C.SG-ACC.PRON.3C.PL
I took them
- 02 fassaḥt-uhum
take_for_outing.PRF.1C.SG-ACC.PRON.3C.PL
I took them for a walk
- 03 fi *third* street;
in third street
- 04 mi- ša[riʃ]-
street
- 05 Hiš: [hu]wwa wi mrāt-u?
he and his wife
- 06 → Šad: <<h> huwwa wi mrāt-u wi l-bint wi kullu;>
he and his wife and the daughter and everyone

Šadia's response goes beyond 'him and his wife' to include 'the daughter' and 'everyone'. This expanded repeat is packaged in a single intonation unit and constructed as an exhaustive description of the entire class of participants. This design suggests a more independent version which resists the implications of the original proposal, namely, that the group of participants was selective or small. While not a downright disconfirmation, the lack of an explicit confirmatory token and the formulation of the expansion propose greater epistemic incongruence between the requester and the responder.

Interestingly, departures from the confirmable can also follow after a straightforward confirmation. The next extract (reproducing (3)) is another example in which the participants are concerned with the time gap between them. ʕAzmi seeks confirmation that the time in Egypt is a quarter to six:

Extract (27): CALLHOME_4455 00:34-00:39

- 01 ʕAz: <<acc> hiyya is-sāʕa miš sitta illa rubʕ,
NOM.PRON.3F.SG the-time NEG six except quarter
isn't it quarter to six
- 02 ʕand-ak dilwaʔti, >
for you now
- 03 walla ʔēh;
or what
- 04 → Saʕ: (--) biẓẓabt ʔāh,
exactly yes
- 05 → sitta illa:: ʕašar daʔāyi?,
six except ten minutes
uh ten minutes to six

Saʿīd's response is initiated with a strong confirmation: the affirmative *ʔāh* is reinforced by the adverb *bizzabt* 'exactly' which indicates the accuracy of ʕAzmi's proposal. However, as he goes on to produce a repetition of the confirmable, and apparently while checking the actual time (as the noticeably stretched production of *illa* 'except' in line 5 appears to indicate), Saʿīd replaces 'quarter' with 'ten minutes'. Compared to the 'conclusive' confirmation in (20), this example shows the possible 'premature' delivery of confirmations in real-time conversation which seems to underscore the widely observed preference for agreement in interaction (Sacks 1987, Pomerantz 1984, Raymond 2003).

6 Conclusion

This article presented the first study of RfCs and their responses in an Arabic variety. The inspection of this particular actional–sequential environment made it possible to assess the conformity of interactional practices in Egyptian Arabic to generally observed trends and to examine the extent to which these practices are shaped by the specific resources of the language and the type of data examined.

A main observation concerned the formal markedness of RfCs in Egyptian Arabic. There is no special syntactic structure of RfC utterances, and explicit lexical framing of RfCs is attested in only part of the cases. The prosodic design of RfCs is also not sufficiently distinctive, with over half of the cases presenting the rising contour typical of polar questions in general. Thus, an analysis of a turn as RfC is dependent first and foremost on contextual evidence for a relatively shallow epistemic asymmetry between the requester and the responder. The use of lexical devices, such as particular inference markers, tag questions, and modulation markers, makes explicit the specific epistemic position of the requesters by referring to their prior expectations, sources of knowledge, level of confidence, and the accuracy they attribute to the confirmable.

As for responses to RfCs, the Egyptian Arabic data present the expected tendency for confirmation which is substantially more frequent than disconfirmation. The analysis also shows the use of dedicated means for declining to provide a dis/confirmation, for instance, via the response token *yaʕni* or the prefacing marker *waʕlāhi*. Responders can do more than merely dis/confirm by deploying response tokens that indicate a specific epistemic stance or orientation or by using more elaborate response formats. The clear tendency to initiate a non-minimal response with a token suggests that dis/confirmation is prioritized as the main action made relevant by the RfC, even if later mitigated. A delayed provision of a confirmatory token seems to be related to local contingencies (e.g., a problem of access to knowledge) or to epistemic positioning that foregrounds the responder's agency and authority. Greater epistemic independence is suggested in cases where the responder declines to provide a confirmatory token at all. Non-minimal responses seem to be normative in the case of disconfirmations. This is suggested both by the low number of minimal disconfirmations and by the subsequent treatment of standalone disconfirmatory tokens.

The findings of this study support the view of RfCs sequences as a complex site for the display and negotiation of knowledge and social positioning. The design of both the RfC and its response is found to be indexical of fine nuances that constitute the epistemic and relational stance of the participants: beyond 'confirming' and 'disconfirming', participants indicate their orientation to prior expectations, the implications of the confirmable information, their rights and authority to know, and their affiliation with the other party. The present study overviewed a wide range of lexico-syntactic and prosodic features that are mobilized for this interactional work in Egyptian Arabic. Further research of each of these features will show in greater precision what is their specific import and how typical and distinctive it is for RfC sequences.

Transcription conventions

Sequential structure

One line	one intonation unit
→	refers to a line of transcript relevant in the argument
[]	overlap and simultaneous talk
=	fast, immediate continuation with a new turn

Breaths

°h/h°	in-/outbreaths of appr. 0.2–0.5 s
°hh/hh°	in-/outbreaths of appr. 0.5–0.8 s
°hhh/hhh°	in-/outbreaths of appr. 0.8–1.0 s

Pauses

(.)	micro pause, estimated, up to 0.2 s
(-)	estimated pause of 0.2–0.5 s
(–)	estimated pause of appr. 0.5–0.8 s
(—)	estimated pause of appr. 0.8–1.0 s
(1.5)	measured pause of 1.5 s

Lengthening

:	lengthening, by about 0.2–0.5 s
::	lengthening, by about 0.5–0.8 s
:::	lengthening, by about 0.8–1.0 s

Final pitch movement

?	rising to high
,	rising to mid
–	level
;	falling to mid
.	falling to low

Intra-linear notation of accented syllables

ˆsyll	high rise-fall pitch accent
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Laughter

haha hehe	syllabic laughter
<<laughing> text>	laughter accompanying speech with indication of scope
<<:-)> text>	smile voice with indication of scope

Loudness and tempo changes, with indication of scope

<<len>text>	lento, slow
<<f>text>	forte, loud
<<all>text>	allegro, fast
<<cresc>text>	crescendo, becoming louder
<<dim>text>	diminuendo, becoming softer
<<acc>text>	accelerando, becoming faster
<<rall>text>	rallentando, becoming slower

Transcriber comments and unintelligible speech

((text))	inferred but unexpressed elements (in translation line)
(xxx) (xxx xxx)	unintelligible part with indication of syllable number

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