Research Article

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# Request for confirmation sequences in Mandarin Chinese

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**Abstract:** As a social action, requesting confirmation involves presenting a proposition to be (dis)confirmed and seeking another's (dis)confirmation of the proposition. This article provides an overview of the lexico-syntactic and prosodic resources used by participants to perform requests for confirmation (RfCs) and to respond to RfCs in Mandarin face-to-face interactions. Drawing on statistical results of the frequencies of a variety of linguistic resources in RfC sequences, this study shows that declaratives are the most frequently used syntactic forms for RfCs in the Mandarin data. Tags, such as *shiba* 'right?', are also frequently used by the speaker to seek (dis)confirmation from the recipient. The RfCs in the data also exhibit one prominent prosodic pattern. That is, a larger number of RfC turns in Mandarin end with falling pitch movement with very moderate slope from mid (M) to low (L). This prosodic pattern stems from the interplay between tones and intonation in Mandarin. In the responses to RfCs, a majority of them are confirmations. Also, response tokens, such as *dui* 'right' and *en* 'en' with falling intonation, are used highly frequently in responses to RfCs in the Mandarin data. Findings in this study afford cross-linguistic research on RfC sequences.

**Keywords:** prosody, tags, declaratives, response tokens, Mandarin

## 1 Introduction

Requesting confirmation is a social action that people carry out in interactions. A request for confirmation (RfC) presents a proposition to be (dis)confirmed – the confirmable (König and Pfeiffer forthcoming). In this article, I provide an overview of the lexico-syntactic and prosodic resources used by participants to accomplish and to respond to requests for confirmation (RfCs) in Mandarin Chinese (henceforth Mandarin) interaction. Extract 1 illustrates a typical RfC sequence in my Mandarin data.

**Extract 1: BJ_R10_ZO01_1742**

| | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 01 | - > | Xia: | 走的 | 时候 | 是 | [大韩 | 是 | 吗. | |
| | | | zoude | shihou | shi | [dahan | shi | ma. | |
| | | | leave | time | COP | [Korean | COP. | Q | |
| | | | *The airline (you) flew with when leaving was Korean Air, right?* | | | | | | |
| 02 | -> | Lan: | | | | [对 | 走的 | 时候 | 是 | 大韩; |
| | | | | | | [dui | zoude | shihou | shi | dahan; |
| | | | | | | [right | leave | time | COP | Korean |
| | | | | | | *Right. The airline (I) flew with when leaving was Korean Air.* | | | | |

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Fei produces a declarative *zoude shihou shi dahan* 'The airline (you) flew with when leaving was Korean Air' and a tag *shi ma* 'right?' (line 1), forming a tag question in Mandarin, to seek Bai's confirmation of the statement. The proposition to be (dis)confirmed, that is the confirmable, is *zoude shihou shi dahan* 'The airline … flew with when leaving was Korean Air'. Bai uses a response token *dui* 'right' and a full repeat *zoude shihou shi dahan* 'The airline … flew with when leaving was Korean Air' (line 2) to confirm it. I return to a fuller version of this extract with a focus on the response to RfC in Section 5.6.

This article examines the lexico-syntactic and prosodic designs of RfCs and their responses in Mandarin. Tags and particles (including both question particle and other utterance-final particles) are commonly used lexico-syntactic resources used to perform RfCs in the Mandarin data (see details in Section 4). Particles (and particularly utterance-final particles) are a typological feature of Mandarin and highly relevant to the lexico-syntactic design of RfCs. Thus, it is necessary to clarify particles and tags as they are used in this study, before discussing how they are used to accomplish RfCs.

## 1.1 Mandarin particles

There are two types of Mandarin particles relevant to RfCs in this study: question particles such as *ma* (glossed as Q for Question), and utterance-final particles such as *ba, ha* (glossed as PRT for Particle). Although *ne* can also be used as a question particle when it is followed by an NP as a follow-up question (NP *ne*? 'How about NP'?), *ma* is the only full-fledged question particle (Li and Thompson 1981, 547). The other type of particles in Mandarin is referred to as utterance-final particles or sentence-final particles such as *ba, ha, a/ya,* and *ne*. They are a set of particles that occur in sentence-final positions without any denotative or referential meanings (Wu 2004, 25, Li and Thompson 1981, 238). They are primarily used to "convey emotive and/or epistemic nuances on the part of a speaker" in interaction (Wu 2004, 25). Although the question particle *ma* also appears at the end of an utterance, it is distinct from (other) utterance-final particles in that *ma* is a grammatical particle (with the grammatical function of marking the interrogative sentence type), whereas utterance-final particles have pragmatic functions rather than grammatical functions. See Extract 2 for the usages of the question particle *ma* and the utterance-final particle *ba*.

**Extract 2: BJ_R10_ZO01_0125**

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 01 | -> | Xia: | 要 | 试 | 一下 吗- |
| | | | yao | shi | yixia **ma**- |
| | | | will | test | a little **Q** |
| | | | *(Are we) going to test it?* | | |
| 02 | -> | Lan: | 不 需 | 要 | 吧; |
| | | | bu | xuyao | **ba**; |
| | | | NEG | need | **PRT** |
| | | | *There is no need **BA**.* | | |

The utterance in line 1 *yao shi yixia ma* '(Are we) going to test it?' is a polar interrogative marked by the question particle *ma* at the end of the utterance. Here, the function of the question particle *ma* is grammatical in that it marks the utterance as a polar interrogative sentence. In Lan's response in line 2, another particle *ba* is used at the end of the utterance. Distinct from *ma* in line 1, *ba* in line 2 does not have any grammatical functions in that no grammatical meanings or categories are altered because of *ba*. Instead, the particle *ba* has the pragmatic or interactional function of softening the assertiveness of the statement *bu xuyao* 'there is no need' and thus soliciting the approval/agreement of the hearer. Thus, although both appearing at the end of an utterance, *ma* in line 1 is a question particle (a *grammatical particle*), whereas *ba* in line 2 is referred to as utterance-final particle (a *pragmatic particle*).

In Mandarin, a tag question consists of a statement and a tag. According to Li and Thompson (1981, 546), the primary function of tag question is to "seek confirmation of the statement that occurs before the tag." Tags are a short lexico-syntactic form that change a statement they follow into a question, such as *shi ma* 'COP/be + question particle *ma*' or 'X *ma*' 'right?' in line 1 in Extract 1. Three lexico-syntactic forms are coded as tags in the data based on the pre-established categories in the project (cf. König et al. forthcoming): A-not-A question form, X *ma* question form, and utterance-final particles when used to seek confirmation. The three types of tags are illustrated in Extracts 3–5.

**Extract 3: TY_R03_0300**

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 01 | -> | Hong: | 没 | 电 了 | 是 不 是. |
| | | | mei | dian.le | shibushi. |
| | | | NEG | battery.CRS | COP-NEG-COP |
| | | | *There's no power left, right?* | | |
| 02 | | Bai: | 好像 | 是吧; | |
| | | | haoxiang | shiba; | |
| | | | seem | COP.PRT | |
| | | | *It seems so.* | | |

The tag in line 1 in Extract 3 is of the A-not-A form, specifically, the *shibushi* COPULA-not-COPULA or 'be-not-be' form, translated into idiomatic English as 'right?'

**Extract 4: BJ_R10_ZO01_1742**

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 01 | -> | Xia: | 走的 | 时候 | 是 | [大韩 | 是 | 吗. |
| | | | zoude | shihou | shi | [dahan | shi | ma. |
| | | | leave | time | COP | [Korean | COP.Q | |
| | | | *The airline (you) flew with when leaving was Korean Air, right?* | | | | | |
| 02 | | Lan: | | | | [对 | 走的 | 时候 是 大韩; |
| | | | | | | [dui | zoude | shihoushi dahan; |
| | | | | | | [right | leave | time COPKorean |
| | | | | | | *Right. The airline (I) flew with when leaving was Korean Air.* | | |

Extract 1 is reproduced here as Extract 4. At the end of line 1 in Extract 4, *shi ma* COPULA + *ma* or 'be + *ma*' (translated as 'right?') exemplifies the X *ma* tag form.

**Extract 5: BJ_R11_ ZO03_0640**

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 01 | -> | Hei: | 你 | 那 | 时候 | 在 | 洛杉矶 | 吧. |
| | | | *ni* | *nei* | *shihou* | *zai* | *luoshanji* | *ba.* |
| | | | At that time, you were in Los Angeles BA./At that time, you were in Los Angeles, right? | | | | | |
| 02 | | Nan: | 嗯::- | | | | | |
| | | | *En.* | | | | | |
| 03 | | | 洛杉矶 | 附近 | | | | |
| | | | *luoshanji* | *fujin*. | | | | |
| | | | 'Near Los Angeles.' | | | | | |

The *ba* at the end of the utterance in line 1 in Extract 5 is an utterance-final particle without inherent lexical meaning. It can be translated as 'right?' in line 1. It is the third form of tag used to seek confirmation in the Mandarin data.

To sum up, question particle *ma* and utterance-final particles are distinct types of particles, in that the former is the grammatical particle whereas the latter is the pragmatic particle. Utterance-final particles and other two lexico-syntactic forms – A-not-A and X *ma* – are three tag forms in the Mandarin data.

In the remainder of the article, I first provide an overview of the previous research on RfCs and RfC sequences in Mandarin (Section 2); then I describe the data used for this study (Section 3). The lexico-syntactic and prosodic resources used to perform RfCs and their responses are discussed in Sections 4 and 5, respectively. I summarize the findings in Section 6.

## 2 Literature review

To my knowledge, RfC sequences have not been the focus of studies in Chinese linguistics, because Chinese linguistic research is predominantly form oriented. As a function/action category, RfC has been described as a function of some better-researched grammatical structures in Mandarin such as tag questions, A-not-A questions, and declarative questions (Gao and Zhang 2009, Gao 2009, Xie 2018).

Requesting confirmation is commonly described as a function of tag questions in previous research studies (Zhang 1997, Shao 1990, Niu 2002, Gao and Zhang 2009, Gao 2009, Tsai 2019). For example, tags ending with the question particle *ma* such as *shi ma* and *dui ma* (both can be translated as 'right?') are predominantly used to request confirmation (Gao and Zhang 2009, Gao 2009, Shao 1990). A-not-A questions and particularly *shibushi* 'be-not-be' questions are another grammatical resource used to perform RfC in Mandarin (Shao 1990, Rong 2012, Shao and Zhu 2002). In addition, declarative questions are also documented to perform RfC in Mandarin. The term *declarative question* refers to declaratives with prosodic features that contextualize them as questions in Mandarin spoken discourse (Xie 2018, Wang 2021). According to Wang (2021), declarative questions are routinely used to accomplish RfCs in Mandarin conversation. Finally, utterance-final particles such as *ba* and *ha* (in Mandarin and other Chinese dialects) attached to a declarative can also be used to seek confirmation from the recipient (Lü 1942, Yin 1999, Gao and Zhang 2009, Gao 2009, Wang 2021).

In terms of responses to RfCs, three types of responses have been documented in Mandarin interaction. The first type is *shi* 'yes' and *bu* 'no', expressing confirmation and disconfirmation, respectively (Xiao 1994). The second type of response to RfCs involves a variety of response tokens other than *shi* 'yes' and *bu* 'no' that can display (dis)confirmation, such as *dui* 'correct', *en* displaying confirmation (a non-lexicalized response token with falling pitch movement), and *a* displaying confirmation (a non-lexicalized response token with falling pitch movement) (Xiao 1994, Xie 2018, 40). The third type of RfC response is repeats, including partial and full repeats (Xiao 1994, Zhu 2001, Xie 2018). Xie (2018, 43) describes that repeats and particularly partial repeats of the main verb in an RfC are a highly frequently used and canonical form of response to RfCs. Xie (2018) further argues that full repeats as responses to RfCs display the speaker's higher epistemic stance toward a reference event than the recipient (Stivers 2005).

To sum up, the previous research has documented that RfCs and response to RfCs are the functions of a variety of linguistic structures. Building on the previous research on various linguistic forms, this study is the first systematic study of RfCs in their own right by focusing on RfC sequences themselves. Specifically, the present study examines the lexico-syntactic and prosodic resources used by the participants to accomplish RfCs and to build responses to RfCs in Mandarin interactions.

## 3 Description of data sets

The data used for this study are approximately 22 hours of video and audio recordings of everyday Mandarin face-to-face interactions. Mandarin is the standard variety of Modern Chinese or Modern Standard Chinese. The data are 22 interactions (each lasting about 1 h), including 18 triadic and 4 dyadic interactions and altogether 62 speakers. The activities conducted by participants in these interactions vary, such as chit-chats,

cooking together, and chatting over board games. This study is part of a cross-linguistic comparative research project on RfCs across languages (Pfeiffer et al. forthcoming). Two hundred instances of RfC sequences were identified in the data. They were coded based on a number of pre-established categories across different languages in the project (cf. König et al. forthcoming). Some of these categories are discussed in Sections 4 and 5.

# 4 Designing RfCs in Mandarin

## 4.1 Syntactic design

Five general types of syntactic forms are used to perform RfCs in the Mandarin data. They are (1) declaratives, (2) tag questions, (3) negative rhetorical questions, (4) A-not-A questions, and (5) noun phrases (NPs). Their respective frequencies of occurrence are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 shows that tag questions and declaratives are the two most frequently used syntactic forms for RfCs, constituting altogether 81% ($n$ = 162) of the total number of RfCs in the data. In contrast, NPs are the least frequently used syntactic forms for RfCs, which is only 4.5% ($n$ = 9) of the total number of RfCs.

Tag question is the most frequently used syntactic form (57%, $n$ = 114) for RfCs in the data. The use of tag questions to request confirmation is illustrated in Extract 4. In Excerpt 4, the tag is *shi ma* 'right' (line 1), glossed as a copula *shi* followed by *ma*? Xia's turn in line 1 is in the form of tag question consisting of a statement *zoude shihou shi da han* 'The airline (you) flew with when leaving was Korean Air', followed by a tag *shi ma* 'right?'. The tag question is designed and treated as requesting confirmation, as can be seen through Lan's confirmation *dui zouede shihou shi dahan* 'Right, the airline (I) flew with when leaving was Korean Air' (line 2).

Declarative is the second most frequently used syntactic form (24%, $n$ = 48) for RfCs in the data. Extract 6 exemplifies the use of declaratives to request confirmation.

**Extract 6: TY_R03_ ZO01**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 01 | -> | Gon: | 你 俩 三 年 以前 才 认识. |
| | | | ni lia san nian yiqian cai renshi. |
| | | | 'You two didn't know each other until three years ago.' |
| 02 | | Zi: | 嗯. |
| | | | En. |

In line 1 in Excerpt 6, Gon's turn at talk is composed of a declarative with falling intonation. Zi's response in line 2 *en* with falling pitch movement confirms Gon's statement in line 1.

The third most frequently used syntactic form for RfCs in the data is negative rhetorical question (9%, $n$ = 18). Although it is generally considered in Chinese linguistics that rhetorical questions have the same syntactic structures as other types of interrogatives (Wang 1943, Lü 1980, Li 1990), negative rhetorical questions used in the data exhibit distinct syntactic features that warrant its being characterized as a separate syntactic form for

**Table 1:** Syntactic design of RfC turns in Mandarin

| Syntactic form | Frequency |
|---|---|
| Tag questions | 114 (57%) |
| Declaratives | 48 (24%) |
| Negative rhetorical questions | 18 (9%) |
| A-not-A questions | 11 (5.5%) |
| NPs | 9 (4.5%) |
| Total | 200 (100%) |

RfCs. Specifically, one particular type of negative rhetorical polar question is used to perform RfCs: *bu(shi)* X *ma* 'not X?', as in '*ni* ***bushi*** *yao fenxi jiaocai* ***ma***' (Weren't you going to analyze textbooks?). This format invites a confirming response. All 18 negative rhetorical questions for RfCs are of this structure. See Extract 7 for an example.

**Extract 7: BJ_R08_ ZO07**

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 01 | -> | Jin: | 那次 | 不是 | 咱们 | 去过 | 吗. |
| | | | neici | bushi | zanmen | quguo | ma. |
| | | | *Didn't we go (there) last time?* | | | | |
| 02 | | Nan: | 不是 | 那 | 家 | 还有 | 另外 | 一 | 家. |
| | | | *bushi* | *nei* | *jia* | *haiyou* | *lingwai* | *yi* | *jia.* |
| | | | *It was not that restaurant. It was another one (that we went to).* | | | | | | |

The two least frequently used syntactic forms for RfCs are A-not-A question (5.5%, $n$ = 11) and NPs (4.5%, $n$ = 9). Among the wide variety of specific forms of A-not-A questions (A being a VP or Adjective Phrase), only one specific type of A-not-A question is used to perform RfCs: *shibu(shi)* + clause (*shibu(shi)* in this syntactic context roughly translated as 'isn't it the case' followed by a statement in the subsequent clause).

Although the negative rhetorical question form *bu(shi)* X *ma* 'not X?' and the A-not-A question form *shibu (shi)*[1] + clause are both used as RfCs, they differ in the epistemic stance (Heritage 2012) that they convey. Specifically, the negative rhetorical question *bu(shi)* X *ma* 'not X?' displays the speaker's higher epistemic status over the referent event than that displayed through the A-not-A question form *shibu(shi)* + clause. Consider Extracts 7 (for negative rhetorical question) and 8 (for A-not-A question).

**Extract 8: BJ_R08_ ZO07**

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 01 | -> | Xia: | 是不 | 在 | 北美 | 都 | 够 | 租 | 一 | 礼拜 | 的 | 了. |
| | | | shibu | zai | beimei | dou | gou | zu | yi | leibai | de | le. |
| | | | *Isn't it the case that the (car) rental fees (for four days) would be enough to rent (a car) for a week in North America?* | | | | | | | | | |
| 02 | | Lan: | 到 不 了; | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | daobu liao. | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | *Not that much.* | | | | | | | | | |

Prior to the sequence in Extract 8, Lan tells Xia about her experience renting a car for 4 days in Europe. In line 1, Xia seeks confirmation from Lan about whether the 4-day car rental fees in Europe would be enough to rent a car for week in North America. In line 2, Lan produces disconfirmation that the 4-day rental fees in Europe would not be as much as rental fees for a week in North America.

In Extract 8, *shibu* 'isn't it the case [...]' structure in line 1 is used to request confirmation about an event in Lan's territory of knowledge, namely, Lan's car rental experience in Europe. *Shibu* 'isn't it the case [...]' marks that the RfC recipient has epistemic primacy over the referent event. In contrast, in Extract 7, the *bushi* X *ma* negative rhetorical structure in *neici bushi zanmen quguo ma* 'didn't we go (there) last time' in line 1 indicates that the speaker also has certain knowledge about the referent event. Thus, although both the negative rhetorical question form *bu(shi)* X *ma* 'not X?' and the A-not-A question form *shibu(shi)* + clause are used to seek confirmation, they differ in the epistemic stance toward the referent event they convey.

Finally, NPs are the least frequent form of RfCs in the data (4.5%, $n$ = 9). Due to the space limit, I will not provide the entire sequences for the two examples for A-not-A interrogative and NPs.

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**1** *Shibu(shi)* is the short form of *shibushi;* both can be translated as 'isn't it the case [...]?' In everyday conversation, the second *shi* in *shibushi* is sometimes not produced, forming the short form *shibu.*

## 4.2 Polarity

A majority of syntactic structures for RfCs in the Mandarin data are of positive polarity (82%, *n* = 164). Only 18% (*n* = 36) of the RfCs are of negative polarity. Three negative particles are observed in the RfCs designed in negative polarity: 不*bu* 'not', 不是 *bushi* 'not be' (in idiomatic translation 'It is not the case that [...]'), and 没 *mei* 'not'.

The three negative particles are used in distinctive semantic and pragmatic environments. Specifically, 不 *bu* 'not' expresses a 'neutral negation'; 不是 *bushi* 'not be' serves as a denial of what a prior speaker has said (and therefore translated as 'it is not the case that [...]'); and 没*mei* 'not' expresses a negation of the completion of an event (Li and Thompson 1981, 421–38). Their frequencies of occurrences are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 shows that the 'neutral negator' *bu* 'not' is used most frequently (50%, *n* = 18) among the three negative particles in RfCs. The following example from the data exemplifies the use of *bu* 'not' in RfCs.

**Extract 9: TY_R05_ZO05**

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 01 | -> | Hei: | 先 | 不 | 弄 | 高中 | 了 | 哈 |
| | | | xian | **bu** | nong | gaozhong | le | ha |
| | | | first | **NEG** | do | senior high | PRT | PRT |
| | | | *(He)* ***doesn't*** *do the (after-school programs for) senior high school, right?* | | | | | |
| 02 | | Wen: | 不弄; | | | | | |
| | | | bu nong. | | | | | |
| | | | *(He) doesn't do (it).* | | | | | |

*Bushi* 'not be' as a negator marks denial of a prior speaker's utterance. However, when used in RfCs, all *bushi* 'not be' instances occur in negative rhetorical questions. In this syntactic structure, *bushi* 'not be' is used to seek confirmation from the recipient. This syntactic environment and usage of *bushi* 'not be' are illustrated in Extract 11.

**Extract 10: WH_R02_0819**

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 01 | Wan: | 你 | 在 | 这里 | 说 | 这些= | | |
| | | ni | zai | zheli | shuo | zhexie= | | |
| | | *Don't talk about this here.* | | | | | | |
| 02 | Hong: | =没 | 事儿. | | | | | |
| | | =mei | shir. | | | | | |
| | | *It's OK.* | | | | | | |
| 03 | | 他 | 不是 | 说 | 我们(.) | 我们 | 可以 | 自由 | 聊 |
| | | ta | bushi | shuo | women(.) | women | keyi | ziyou | liao |
| | | 3SG | NEG | say | 1PL | 1PL | can | freely | chat |
| | | *Didn't he say that we can chat freely?* | | | | | | | |

**Table 2:** Negative polarity markers in RfCs in Mandarin

| Negative polarity marker | Frequency |
|---|---|
| *bu* ('not') | 18 (50%) |
| *bushi* ('not be') | 12 (30%) |
| *mei* ('not') | 7 (20%) |
| Total | 36 (100%) |

04 Wan: 是 啊;
shi a.
*Yes.*

05 是可以;
shi keyi.
*(We) can.*

In line 3 in Extract 10, Hong uses the negative rhetorical question with the negator *bushi* to request Wan's confirmation that they can chat freely.

Although the third negative particle *mei* 'not' is used less frequently than the other two negative particles, its approximately 20% ($n$ = 7) frequency of occurrence is not negligible. The use of *mei* 'not' to negate the completion of an event is shown in Extract 11.

**Extract 11**

| 你 | 那天 | 好像 | 没 | 去 | 啊 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ni | neitian | haoxiang | **mei** | qu | a |
| 2SG | that day | seem | **NEG** | go | PRT |

*You didn't seem to have gone (there) that day.*

The frequencies of occurrence and the semantic and pragmatic environments of the three negative particles in RfCs in the data show that the selection of the three negative particles is related to their distinct semantic and pragmatic functions. Specifically, as the neutral negator, *bu* negates the proposition (Extract 9). *Mei* negates the completion of the action or event in the proposition (Extract 11). *Bushi* 'not be' occurs in negative rhetorical questions. When being used to seek confirmation, the *bushi* structure displays the speaker's epistemic access to the referent event (Extract 10).

## 4.3 Modulation

Twenty-five percent ($n$ = 50) of RfC instances in the data contain modulation markers. According to the definition of modulation adopted in the project, these markers mitigate or reinforce the requester's commitment to the validity of the confirmable. One striking feature of modulation of RfCs in the Mandarin data is that almost all 50 modulations are performed through utterance-final particles (see the discussion of utterance-final particles in Section 1), except one instance of the epistemic expression *wo juede* 'I think' and one instance of the lexical device *haoxiang* 'seem'. The utterance-final particles used as modulation devices in the data include *la, ba, da, me*, and *a/ya.* The interactional functions of these utterance-final particles vary depending on their interactional-sequential environments. For example, when seeking confirmation, the final particle *a/ya* is used as a modulation marker to reduce the assertiveness and forcefulness of the requester's 'B-event' statement (Labov and Fanshel 1977) in relation to the recipient's past experience. See the use of *a* as a modulation marker in Extract 12.

**Extract 12: WH_R02_ TU01_0922**

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 01 | -> | Lin: | 你 | 还 | 想 | 当 | 一个 艺术家 | 啊. |
| | | | ni | hai | xiang | dang | yige yishujia | a. |
| | | | *You would still like to be an artist, right?* | | | | | |
| 02 | | Yin: | 对 | | | | | |
| | | | dui. | | | | | |
| | | | *Right.* | | | | | |

In line 1 in Extract 12, the final particle *a* is deployed to downgrade the assertiveness of the statement about the recipient's wish (becoming an artist).

In contrast to languages with developed morphological markings for epistemics, epistemic modulations in the Mandarin data are mainly implemented through utterance-final particles like *a*.

## 4.4 Inference marking

Among the 200 RfCs in Mandarin, only 27 (13%) are framed as having been inferred from prior talk through explicit lexical devices. These lexical items are all at the TCU-/turn-initial position, prefacing an RfC TCU/turn. Five lexical items are observed to mark inference in the data (Table 3).

Table 3 shows that the most frequently used lexical device marking inference in RfCs is *jiu(shi)* 'just' (37%, *n* = 10). *Jiu(shi)* is an adverb with a wide variety of uses in discourse. In the context of RfCs, it is used as an inference marker connecting prior talk to a conclusion drawn from it (Lü 1980, 316) and can be roughly translated as 'so it's just [...]'. Its usage as an inference marker in RfCs can be observed in Extract 13.

**Extract 13: BJ_R10_ ZO01**

01 Lan: 但是 我我我 没有 听 他们 明确 就 我 认识的 人 说 他 怎么.
danshi wowowo meiyou ting tamen mingque jiu wo renshide ren shuo ta zenme
*But I didn't hear from my friends about them (feeling unsafe).*

02 -> Xia: 就 总体 觉得 还 挺好 的 [啊.
**jiu** zongti juede hai tinghao de [a.
***So*** *they felt* ***it was just*** *good overall, right?*

03 Lan: [对 对.
[dui dui.
*Right, right.*

Prior to the sequence in Extract 13, Lan (woman) has told Xia (woman) about her friends' vacation in Morocco. Xia has asked Lan about her friends' impression of the public security in Morocco. Lan responds that she has not heard from her friends about feeling unsafe when in Morocco in line 1. Xia displays her understanding of Lan's utterance (line 1) with the turn-initial inference marker *jiu* 'So it's just [...]' in line 2.

Another lexical item, *na* 'then', is the second most frequently used (22%, *n* = 6) inference marker in the data. Its discourse function is similar to that of *jiu(shi)*. That is, *na* 'then' is also used to connect to prior talk, introducing a clause that shows results of prior talk (Lü 1980, 402). Extract 14 is a case in point.

**Extract 14: BJ_R10_ ZO01**

01 -> Xia: 那 他 现在 那个 点儿 就是 那 民塾 教育.
**na** ta xianzai nage dianr jiushi na minshu jiaoyu.
***Then*** *that school now does private tutoring?*

02 Lan: 啊
a.
Yes.

Prior to the sequence in Extract 14, Lan tells Xia about a private after-school academy. In line 1, Xia seeks confirmation from Lan about the private tutoring program that the school offers. Xia's RfC turn is prefaced with *na* 'then', a conjunction projecting the ensuing utterance as her inference drawn from Lan's previous telling.

## 4.5 Connectives

In the Mandarin data, only 20% ($n$ = 40) of the RfCs are prefaced with connectives. The main types of connectives are adverbs (such as *jiu* or *jiushi* 'just'), conjunctions (including temporal conjunction *ranhou* 'then', inferential conjunction *na/name* 'then', contrastive conjunction *danshi* 'but', and causal conjunctions *suoyi* 'so' and yinwei 'because'), and particles (including *ou* 'oh' and *a* 'ah'). The connectives observed in the data and their respective frequencies of occurrences are shown in Table 4.

Table 4 shows that the most frequently used connective in Mandarin is *jiu(shi)* 'just' which marks the RfC as inferred from prior talk (see the discussion of *jiushi* as inference marker in Section 4.4). It is worth noting that a majority of connectives in the Mandarin data (68%, or 27 out of 40) are used to mark inferences. Other connectives are to mark temporal relations between RfCs and prior talk such as *ranhou* 'then', and contrastive or causal relations such as *danshi* 'but' and *yinwei* 'because'.

## 4.6 Tags

Tags are used in about a third (31%, $n$ = 62) of the RfCs in the data. They form tag questions in Mandarin (see the discussion of tag interrogatives in Mandarin in Section 4.1). Six forms of question tags are observed. They are *duiba* 'right-PRT, right?', *shiba* 'be-PRT, right?', *shi ma* 'be-Question Particle, right?', *duibudui* 'right-not-right, right?', *and shibushi* 'be-not-be, right?'. All tags can be roughly translated as 'right?' in English. The frequencies of the five types of tags are listed in Table 5.

Extract 15 demonstrates how the most frequently used tag – *shiba* – is used in the data. *Shiba* is composed of a copula *shi* and a final particle *ba.*

**Table 3:** Inference-marking lexical items in RfCs in Mandarin

| Inference marker | Frequency |
|---|---|
| *jiu(shi)* ('just') | 10 (37%) |
| *na* ('then') | 6 (22%) |
| *ou* ('oh') | 5 (19%) |
| *suoyi* ('so') | 3 (11%) |
| *a* ('ah') | 3 (11%) |
| Total | 27 (100%) |

**Table 4:** Connectives in RfCs in Mandarin

| Connective | Frequency |
|---|---|
| *jiu(shi)* ('just') | 10 (25%) |
| *ranhou (*temporal 'then') | 6 (15%) |
| *na* (inferential 'then') | 6 (15%) |
| *ou* ('oh') | 5 (12.5%) |
| *danshi* ('but') | 5 (12.5%) |
| *suoyi* ('so') | 3 (7.5%) |
| *a* ('ah') | 3 (7.5%) |
| *yinwei* ('because') | 2 (5%) |
| Total | 40 (100%) |

**Table 5:** Tags in RfCs in Mandarin

| Tags | Frequency |
|---|---|
| *shiba* ('be-PRT') | 28 (46.5%) |
| *shi ma* ('be-Q?') | 19 (31.5%) |
| *duiba* ('correct-PRT?') | 7 (12%) |
| *shibushi* ('be-not-be?') | 5 (8%) |
| *duibudui* ('correct-not-correct') | 1 (2%) |
| Total | 60 (100%) |

**Extract 15: BJ_R08 _ZO02**

01 -> Jin: 你 是 搞的 建筑 设计 这 一块儿 是吧.
ni shi gaode jianzhu sheji zhe yikuar shiba.
*Your field of expertise is architecture design, right?*

02 Nan: 景观.
*Landscape.*

Here, the tag *shiba* (line 1) exemplifies the most-frequently-used tag form in requesting confirmation in the data.

## 4.7 Prosodic design

In the data, a majority of tags (73%, $n$ = 46) form an intonation unit (IU) with the confirmables, and 23% ($n$ = 14) of tags are prosodically non-integrated into the confirmables. In addition, one striking prosodic pattern of RfCs in the Mandarin data is that RfCs predominantly end with overall falling pitch movement (86%, $n$ = 172). Only 8.5% ($n$ = 17) of RfCs end with level final pitch movement and 5.5% ($n$ = 11) with rising final pitch movement. In addition, the RfCs with falling intonation exhibit a prominent feature; that is, the slope of their falling pitch movement tends to be very moderate and tends to fall from mid (M) to low (L).

This prominent prosodic pattern stems from two typological features of Mandarin. First, Mandarin is a tone language where pitch movement is primarily used to distinguish lexical meanings. For example, the syllable 妈 *mā*[2] with high-level pitch has the lexical meaning 'mother,' whereas the syllable 马 *mǎ* with the falling-rising pitch movement has the lexical meaning of 'horse'. The pitch movement of the final syllable is the result of a combined effect of both the lexical tone (inherent pitch movement) of the syllable and the overall global intonation forming the boundary tone (from its environment being the final syllable in an IU). Second, Mandarin has a developed set of utterance-final particles. As reported in Section 4.1, a large number of RfCs end with utterance-final particles. These final particles have 'neutral tones' (Chao 1968) with no inherent pitch movement shape. Consequently, their pitch movements are dependent on the lexical tone (inherent pitch movements) of their adjacent syllables and their position within an IU (Cao 2002). When occurring at the end of an IU of an RfC, the pitch movements of final particles are shaped by their immediately preceding syllables and the boundary tone effect. As a result, their pitch movements are predominantly slightly falling within a relatively low pitch ranging from mid to low. For RfCs that do not end with utterance-final particles, majority of them also end with slightly falling pitch movement due to the influence of boundary tones, regardless of their inherent lexical tones. Thus, the slightly falling intonation from mid to low seems to be the unmarked intonation pattern for RfCs in the Mandarin data. The falling pitch movement of utterance-final particles can be observed in Extract 16.

**2** The short line above the vowel 'a' in the syllable *mā* is the tone mark, representing the high-level tone. Similarly, the symbol above 'a' in the syllable *mǎ* is the tone mark for the falling-rising tone.

**Extract 16: WH_R02_FMF_20180529_A_TU01_1317**

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 01 | Dan: | → | 还 | 好 | 着 | 的 | 吧. |
| | | | hai | hao | zhe | de | ba. |
| | | | (*It's*) *OK, right?* | | | | |
| 02 | | | (2.0) | | | | |
| 03 | Tan: | | 没 | 事 | 没 | 事. | |
| | | | mei | shi | mei | shi. | |
| | | | *It's OK.* | | | | |

Immediately prior to the sequence in Extract 16, Tan's audio recorder has fallen to the ground. Dan seeks Tan's confirmation that the audio recorder is OK in line 1 in Extract 16. Dan's RfC turn in line 1 ends with the particle *ba*. The last three syllables including the final particle *ba* in line 1 all have the neutral tone with no inherent tone contours.

We can see from Figure 1 that the pitch movements of the last three syllables are all falling. The last particle *ba* has a falling pitch movement from the middle to low register of the speaker's pitch range (Figure 1). The final falling pitch movement of the IU in line 1 represents the unmarked intonation pattern for RfCs in the Mandarin data.

Only 14% of the RfCs ($n$ = 28) exhibit slightly rising (5.5%, $n$ = 11) and level (8.5%, $n$ = 17) final pitch movements. The slightly rising and level final intonations seem to be 'marked' intonation patterns in the data in that they display particular affective stance – such as unexpectedness or surprise – in addition to seeking confirmation. Also it is worth noting that about 59% ($n$ = 10) of the RfCs with final level intonation end with the question particle 吗 *ma*.

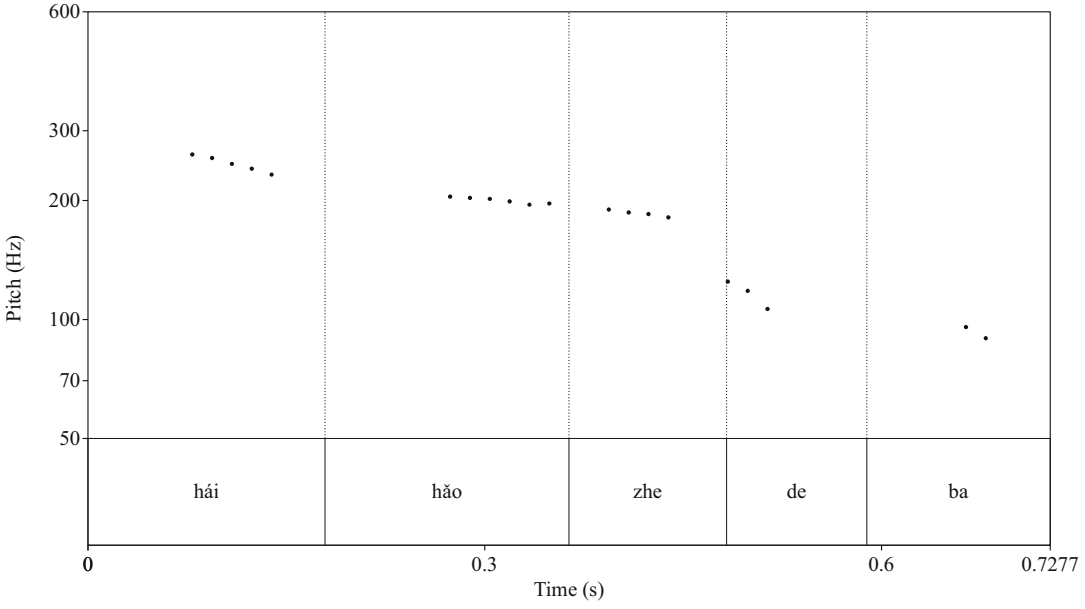


**Figure 1:** Pitch trace of line 1 in Extract 16.

# 5 Building responses to RfCs in Mandarin

## 5.1 Responsive actions

A majority of responses to RfCs in the Mandarin data are confirmations (73%, *n* = 146). The other 27% of the responses to RfCs are disconfirmations (10.2%, *n* = 19) and neither (11.8%, *n* = 22) (Table 6). Among the 19 disconfirmations, 18 (95%) are accomplished through negators such as *bushi* 'no' and *meiyou* 'no' and only 1 (5%) is through partial repeat. The responses labeled as 'neither' confirmations nor disconfirmations mainly include repair initiations (*n* = 5), providing further information (*n* = 5), claims of no knowledge about the confirmables (e.g., *wo bu zhidao* 'I don't know') (*n* = 6), transformative answers (Stivers and Hayashi 2010) (*n* = 6), and a lack of response (*n* = 13).

## 5.2 Response tokens

The use of response tokens is highly prominent in responses to RfCs in the data. Among the 187 responses (not including the 13 instances of RfC sequences where responses are absent), 121 of them (approximately 65%) contain response tokens. The types of response tokens in the RfC responses are also highly patterned. For confirming responses, four types of response tokens are observed: *dui* 'right' (and its cognates including *dui a/ya*, and multiple sayings of *dui*), *en* (no lexical meaning, with falling pitch movement), *shi* 'be' (and its cognates including *shia, shide*, and *shiba*), and *a* (with falling pitch movement). In contrast to the large number of confirming tokens, only two types of disconfirming tokens appear in the data: *bu* 'no/not' (and its cognates such as *bu shi* 'not be'), and *mei(you)* 'no/not'.

Among the six types of response tokens in the Mandarin data, four of them have lexical meanings. Specifically, *dui* 'right' and *shi* 'be' (when confirming a confirmable, can be translated into 'yes' or 'right') are confirmative, and *bu* 'no/not' and *mei(you)* 'no/not' are negative particles (see Section 4.2 for them being negative particles in Mandarin) and disconfirmative. The other two response tokens, *en* and *a*, are pragmatic particles with no lexical meanings or inherent tones. When functioning as response tokens, they both have falling pitch movements, expressing confirmation.

The most frequently used (confirmative) response tokens is *dui* 'right' (and its cognates) (Table 7). This is arguably because *dui* (with its lexical meaning of 'right/correct') is the lexical item that confirms the correctness of

**Table 6:** Responsive actions in Mandarin RfC sequences

| Responsive actions | Frequency |
|---|---|
| Confirmation | 146 (78.1%) |
| Disconfirmation | 19 (10.2%) |
| Neither | 22 (11.8%) |
| Total | 187 (100%) |

**Table 7:** Response tokens in Mandarin RfC sequences

| Token | Frequency | Variant |
|---|---|---|
| *dui 'right'* | 48 (40%) | *dui 37*, *dui a/ya 6*, *dui dui 5*, *dui dui dui 4*, *dui dui dui dui dui* 1 |
| *en (confirmation token)* | 44 (36%) | *en* 42, *en en* 2 |
| *a (confirmation token)* | 12 (10%) | |
| *shi 'yes'* | 11 (9%) | *shi* 2, *shi a* 1, *shi de* 5, *shi ba* 3 |
| *bu 'no'* | 3 (2.5%) | *bu* 2, *bu shi* 1 |
| *mei(you) 'no'* | 3 (2.5%) | |
| **Total** | 121 (100%) | |

the propositional content of the utterance produced by a prior speaker (Wang et al. 2010). Also, it is not uncommon that *dui* is repeated, forming multiple sayings of *dui* as confirmative response tokens, such as *dui dui, dui dui dui, and dui dui dui dui dui* (Table 7). The repeated *dui*s in response to RfCs display strong heightened confirmation and emphatic affect. Extract 17 demonstrates the use of multiple *dui*s as response to an RfC in the data.

**Extract 17: BJ_R10_ZO01_0410**

01 Lan: 就 晒得 我 脖子 上 全 都 起泡.
*jiu shaide wo bozi shang quan dou qipao.*
'My neck was full of blisters from the sun burn.'

02 我 现在 跟 我 妈 一样.
*wo xianzai gen wo ma yiyang.*
'I'm just like my mom now.'

03 Xia: [啊: 过敏;
[*a: guomin;*
'Ah, allergy.'

04 Lan: [就是
[*jiushi*
'Just...'

05 Xia: 紫外线 [过敏;
*ziwaixian [guomin;*
'Allergic to ultraviolet radiation?'

06 -> Lan: [对.
[*dui.*
'Right.'

07 -> 对 对 对.
*dui dui dui.*
'Right, right, right'

In Extract 17 after Lan tells Xia about the blisters on her neck from an exposure to intense sunlight and her similar skin reaction to the sun as her mother (lines 1–2), Xia registers her understanding of Lan's skin problem through the 'change-of-state' token *a* (Heritage 1984) (line 3). Then Xia seeks Lan's confirmation of her understanding that what Lan and Lan's mother have is an allergic reaction to ultraviolet (UV) radiation from the sun (lines 3 and 5). Lan's *dui* in line 6 and *dui dui dui* in line 7 display her strong confirmation of Xia's understanding.

*En* with falling pitch movement is another frequently used response token in the data. As mentioned before, *en* has no inherent lexical meaning or tone. It can be used to accomplish a variety of socio-interactional functions in Mandarin interaction, depending on its prosodic/phonetic design and sequential environment. When being used in responses to RfCs, *en* with falling pitch movement performs the action of confirmation. See Extract 11 as an example.

In the interaction in Extract 18, Wen is an administrative staff member working at the registration office at a tutoring school, and Jia is a mother who is registering her son for their after-school science tutoring program. Jia informs Wen that most other students in her son's class have already been in tutoring or advanced academic learning programs. So her registering her son for the science program at the tutoring school is already 'late' compared to other students in her son's class.

**Extract 18: TY_R05_ ZO02_0517**

01 Wen: 你 弄 得 晚 啦.
*ni nongde wan la.*
'You're doing it late?'

02 Jia: 嗯:.
*en:.*
'En.'

03 (3.0)

04 Jia: 就 这样 就 可以 吧;
*jiu zheyang jiu keyi ba;*
'It's OK just like this?'

05 Wen: 对.
*dui.*
'Right.'

Here, Wen displays her understanding of Jia's prior informing by requesting Jia's confirmation that Jia has registered her son for the after-school science program late (compared to other parents in her son's class) in line 1. In line 2, Jia immediately produces the response token *en* with lengthening and falling pitch movement, confirming Wen's statement in line 1. After a 3-s pause (line 3), Jia seeks Wen's confirmation about whether she has filled out the registration form correctly (line 4).

## 5.3 Clusters of response tokens

Compared to the total number of response tokens ($n$ = 121), the occurrences of response token clusters are relatively infrequent ($n$ = 13). Except for one response token cluster of *dui shide* 'right, yes' (with two different response tokens), the other 12 clusters are all multiple sayings of one response token, for example, *dui dui dui* 'right, right, right' in Extract 8. Multiple sayings of *dui*s are commonly observed in affirmative and confirmative responses in Mandarin conversation (Yang 2013).

## 5.4 Position of the first response token

It is striking that excerpt for two instances where the response tokens are post-positioned to the end of a response, all other response tokens (if present) are in turn-initial position or occupy the entire turn in responses to RfCs in the Mandarin data (see Extracts 6 and 15 as examples).

## 5.5 Minimal and non-minimal responses

In the Mandarin data, both minimal and non-minimal responses to RfCs are relatively common, though minimal responses are noticeably more frequent than non-minimal responses. Specifically, there are 76 instances of minimal responses (41% of all 187 responses) and 52 instances of non-minimal responses (28% of all 187 responses). See Extracts 13 and 15 for the uses of minimal responses to RfCs in the data.

Regarding non-minimal responses, two general turn design patterns are observed: (1) Confirmation token + Correction/Modification; and (2) Confirmation token + Extended agreement. The two patterns seem to differ in terms of the degree of the recipient's agreement with the prior speaker's statement. Specifically, the RfC recipient uses Confirmation token + Correction/Modification to correct details of the statement while still confirming the overall correctness of the statement (see Extract 19). The Confirmation token + Extended agreement is used to display the recipient's strong agreement with the prior statement (see Extract 20).

### 5.5.1 Confirmation token + Modification/correction

**Extract 19: TY_R05_ ZO02_0517**

01 Yi: 开学 以后 是不是 该 找(-) 该 找 工作 啦.
*kaixue yihou shibushi gai zhao(-) gai zhao gongzuo la.*
'You're going to look for a job after the start of the semester, right?'

02 -> Li: 对(.)开学之后先实习
*dui (.) kaixue zhihou xian shixi.*
'Right, (I'll) first do an internship after the start of the semester.'

In line 2 in Extract 19, Li's response to Yi's RfC is structured as a confirmation response token *dui* 'right' followed by further turn elements *kaixue zhihou xian shixi* '(I'll) first do an internship after the start of the semester'. The second TCU corrects Yi's statement *kaixue zhihou … gai zhao gongzuo le* 'look for a job after the start of the semester'.

### 5.5.2 Confirmation token + Extended agreement

**Extract 20: WH_R02_ TU01_2047**

01 Han: 所以 你 就是 想 看 纯粹的 恐怖 片儿 是吧.
*suoyi ni jiushi xiang kan chuncuide kongbu pianr shiba.*
'So you would just like to watch pure thrillers, right?'

02 -> Din: 是 的 呀
*shi de ya.*
'Yes.'

03 -> 你 说的 很 有 道理
*ni shuode hen you daoli.*
'What you said made a lot of sense.'

Here after a confirmation response token *shi de ya* 'yes' (line 2), Din continues to express her agreement with Han in line 3.

## 5.6 Full and expanded repeats

This section focuses on the full (*N* = 7) and expanded repeats (*N* = 9) found in response to RfCs in the Mandarin data. All full repeats are prefaced with response tokens (see Section 5.2 for response tokens in the Mandarin data). Two response tokens are particularly common as prefaces to full and expanded repeats: *en* with falling intonation (confirmation token), and *dui* 'right'. Except for one disconfirming full repeat, all other full and expanded repeats are confirming responses. The full repeats are used in RfC sequences where the RfC recipient has the absolute epistemic authority to (dis)confirm the confirmables, for example, regarding the RfC recipient's past experiences. See Extract 21 where Lan in line 5 responds to Xia's RfC (line 3) with a response token *dui* 'right' followed by a full repeat of Xia's turn excluding the tag in line 3.

**Extract 21: BJ_R10_ZO01_1742**

01 Lan: 我 要 给 你 扒了;
wo yao gei ni bale;
*I'd have to open up (the fillings in) your (teeth).*

02 全 都 重新 给 你 填 一 遍.
quan dou chongxin gei ni tian yibian.
*And re-do them all once again.*

03 Xia: 美国 [医生 是 吧.
meiguo [yisheng shi ba.
*(It was an) American dentist, right?*

04 Lan: [然后我;
[ranhou wo;
*Then I...*

05 -> Lan: 对 美国 医生;
dui meiguo yisheng;
*Right (it was an) American dentist.*

It should be noted that if an RfC is in the 'declarative + final particle' format (as in Extracts 22–23), the particle is not in the repeat.

Expanded repeats in the data exhibit two turn design patterns: (1) emphatic and qualifying expressions + full repeats (Excerpts 22–23) and (2) full repeat + elaboration (Extract 24). The emphatic and qualifying expressions in the first turn design pattern include universal quantifier such as *dou* 'all' (Extract 22), emphatic adverbs such as *jiushi* 'just be/indeed', and epistemic markers such as *wo juede* 'I think' (Extract 23). Extracts 22 and 23 demonstrate the uses of expanded repeats.

**Extract 22: TY_R05_ZO01_0022**

01 Hua: 不 影响 吧;
*bu yingxiang ba*;
'(My taking the phone call) won't affect (the recording), right?'

02 -> Xu: 啥 都 不 影响.
sha dou bu yingxiang.
'(It) won't affect anything at all.'

In line 1 in Extract 22, Hua asks Xu (the videographer) for his confirmation that her taking a phone call would not affect the ongoing recording. Xu's response in line 2 is composed of a universal quantifying expression *sha dou* 'anything at all', modifying the subsequent VP *bu yingxiang* 'not affect'. Xu's expanded repeat response confirms Hua's statement *bu yingxiang* 'not affect' in line 1 in an emphatic manner.

However, not all expanded repeats in the format of 'emphatic and qualifying expressions + full repeats' are used to display one's epistemic authority. Some qualifying expressions such as the epistemic marker *wo juede* 'I think' in expanded repeats are used to downgrade one's epistemic authority. See Extract 23.

**Extract 23: ED_R01_S01_5326**

01 Qun: 没 错 吧.
*mei cuo ba.*
'(This) is correct, right?'

02 -> Mao: 我 觉得 没 错.
wo juede mei cuo.
'I think (this) is correct.'

Extract 24 illustrates the second turn design pattern of extended repeats: 'full repeat + elaboration'.

**Extract 24: ED_R01_S01_5326**

01 Bai: 然后 我们 本科 的 时候;
ranhou women benke de shihou;
'Then when we were undergraduate students,'

02 我们: (.) 咱们专业.
women: (.) zanmen zhuanye
'our major,'

03 学前专业跟心理是一个.
xueqian zhuanye gen xinli shiyige
'pre-school education majors and psychology majors were one.'

04 An: 嗯 嗯.
en en

05 一个 学院 [是吧.
*yige xueyuan [shiba.*
'one College, right?'

06 -> Bai: [一个 学院 而且 老师们 还 共用.
[*yige xueyuan erqie laoshimen hai gongyong*
'One College and had the same faculty.'

In Extract 24, Bai's response (line 6) to An's RfC (line 5) consists of a full repeat of the confirmable *yige xueyuan* 'one College' and the additional information *laoshimen hai gongyong* 'have the same faculty' connected through a conjunction *erqie* 'and'. After confirming An's statement, Bai expands the response turn with an elaboration of additional information.

In this section, I have shown that minimal response tokens or interjections occur more frequently than (full and expanded) repeats as responses to RfCs in my data. This finding contributes to the research

on typological features of polar response types in Mandarin interaction. The previous research on the Mandarin polar response system has yielded conflicting results. Sadock and Zwicky (1985) argue that languages fall into three types based on the types of polar question responses: 'yes-no' system, 'agree-disagree' system, and 'echo' system. In the 'yes-no' system, polar questions are responded to through interjections such as *yes* or *no*. For the 'agree-disagree' system, interjections express agreement or disagreement with the questioner's proposition. In the 'echo' system, responses repeat the main verb in polar questions. Based on Sadock and Zwicky's (1985) response systems to polar questions, Chinese is considered a language embodying the 'echo' system (Holmberg 2016). However, Enfield et al. (2019) propose a two-way distinction: *interjection* and *repetition*. They also report that interjection is the preferred response-type cross-linguistically. Adopting Enfield et al.'s (2019) two-way distinction, Wang (2021) argues that interjection responses to polar questions are more frequent than repetition responses in Mandarin conversations. The findings in the current study that response tokens or interjections are used more frequently as responses to RfCs in the Mandarin interactional data align with Wang's (2021) observations also based on Mandarin interactional data.

The conflicting results between Holmberg's (2016) and the current study in terms of the frequencies of the repetition responses in Mandarin may be due to two reasons. First, Holmberg's (2016) study is based on invented sentences rather than naturalistic Mandarin interactions which are the data for the current study. Second, Holmberg (2016) investigates the response system to polar questions, whereas the section in this present study only focuses on the responses to RfCs. Polar questions can be used to accomplish a variety of actions, such as request for information and RfCs. Thus, the naturalistic interactional data and the specific focus on RfCs in contrast to all polar questions may account for the divergent results between the findings of the present study and the previous research on the prominence of repeats as responses to RfCs.

## 6 Conclusion

In this article, I have described the lexico-syntactic and prosodic resources used in building RfCs and their responses in the Mandarin data. Among the syntactic formats used to perform RfCs, declaratives (with and without final particles) and tag interrogatives are the two most frequently used syntactic forms. A majority of syntactic structures for RfCs in the Mandarin data are of positive polarity and are without modulation or inference markers. In terms of the prosodic features of RfCs, a majority of tags are prosodically integrated into the confirmables that they attach to. In addition, RfCs predominantly end with an overall falling pitch movement with a moderate slope that falls from mid (M) to low (L).

In the responses to RfCs in the data, a majority of them are confirming responses and contain response tokens. Further, confirming response tokens are often repeated to form multiple sayings, such as *dui dui dui dui dui* 'right, right, right, right, right', to express heightened confirmation. Repeats of confirmables, including full and expanded repeats, are also used in responses to RfCs in the data. Full repeats are used to display one's epistemic authority, whereas expanded repeats can be employed to display or to downgrade epistemic authority.

The findings on the lexico-syntactic and prosodic features of RfCs sequences in Mandarin are based on an observation of the frequencies and distributional patterns of those formal features in the data. They are intended to provide an overview of the lexico-syntactic and prosodic features of RfCs and their responses in Mandarin, which can be used for cross-linguistic comparisons. Qualitative analyses of the interactional and sequential environments as well as interactional functions of different lexico-syntactic and prosodic formats necessitate future research.

## Transcription conventions

The transcription system used for vocal elements in this article is GAT-2 (Couper-Kuhlen & Barth-Weingarten 2011) with minor modifications.

| | |
|---|---|
| [] | overlap |
| (.) | micro-pause |
| (-), (--), (---) | short, middle or long pauses of ca. 0.2–0.8 s, up to ca. 1 s |
| (1.0) | pauses of 1.0 s |
| hehehe | short and syllable-like laughter |
| ((laughing)) | description of laughter |
| :, ::, ::: | lengthening of ca. 0.2–0.8 s, up to ca. 1 s |
| ʔ | glottal stop |
| <<creaky>XX> | creaky voice |
| ? | final pitch movements: high rise |
| , | final pitch movements: mid-rise |
| - | final pitch movements: level pitch |
| ; | final pitch movements: mid-fall |
| . | final pitch movements: low fall |

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