Research Article

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Request for confirmation sequences in British and American English

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Abstract: This article presents the quantitative findings from a comparative study of request for confirmation (RfC) sequences in British English (BE) and American English (AE). The study is part of a large-scale cross-linguistic research project on RfCs in ten languages. RfCs put forward a proposition about which the speaker claims some knowledge but for which they seek (dis)confirmation from an informed co-participant. The article examines linguistic resources for building RfCs and their responses in the two English varieties. RfCs are analyzed with regard to their syntactic design, polarity, modulation, inference marking, connectives, question tags, and the prosodic design of confirmables and potential question tags. Responses to RfCs are analyzed with regard to response type, the use, type and position of response tokens, (non-)minimal responses in turns with a response token, response prefacing, and repeat responses. BE and AE are found to resemble each other closely in most categories. A major exception is their prosodic design, however. Specifically, the preference for the final pitch pattern of RfCs differs markedly in the two varieties: BE shows a strong preference for final falling pitch; AE shows a preference for final rising pitch. This suggests that the two varieties have routinized distinct intonation patterns for expressing epistemic (un)certainty in RfCs.

Keywords: polar questions, requests for confirmation, question tags, pitch, intonation, epistemics, uncertainty, interactional linguistics, regional variability

1 Introduction

This article presents a quantitative overview of request for confirmation sequences in British English (BE) and American English (AE). Requests for confirmation (RfCs) are essentially a type of polar (*yes/no*) question (Stivers 2010, 2776–7, Enfield et al. 2019, 288).[1] They are defined here as turns/actions that forward a proposition about which the speaker claims partial (or tentative) knowledge but for which s/he seeks to solicit (dis)confirmation from an authoritatively informed co-participant (Schegloff 1996, 180, König and Pfeiffer, forthcoming, as well as König et al. forthcoming). RfCs, as understood here, therefore differ from newsmarks (Jefferson 1981, Heritage 1984, Maynard 1997), such as *really?* or *did she?,* and questioning repeats (Jefferson 1972, Robinson and Kevoe-Feldman 2010, Robinson 2013), sometimes also called echo-questions (Quirk et al. 1985, 385ff., Biber et al. 1999, 1101). While both of these also make (dis)confirmation relevant as next actions (Stivers and Enfield 2010, Raymond and Stivers 2016), they do not request the confirmation of inferential or

1 Prior research has not systematically distinguished between polar questions that implement requests for confirmation and those that implement requests for (new) information, although some findings do suggest that they behave/are treated differently (e.g., Enfield et al. 2019, 290–1, Stivers 2022, 150).

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presumptive knowledge, introduce no propositional content to the interaction (Marmorstein and Szczepek Reed 2024), and essentially request *re*-confirmation of what the prior speaker has just said (Aldrup 2024, Gipper et al. 2024). RfCs are polyfunctional interactional objects which can be used to implement a wide variety of conversational actions (Zinken and Küttner 2022). Among other things, we found them to be used as other-initiations of repair (e.g., in the form of understanding checks), as clause-level responses to informings, as candidate answers, as challenges, as understanding displays, as account solicitations, as upshot or gist formulations, but also as topic-proffers or topic-resumptions.

Existing research on polar questions rarely distinguishes between BE and AE, often lumping data from both varieties together (e.g., Stivers 2022, Heritage and Raymond 2021, 2012, but cf. Stivers 2010, Couper-Kuhlen 2012, Enfield et al. 2019). The present study is part of a cross-linguistic research project (König and Pfeiffer 2024, König and Pfeiffer forthcoming, König et al. forthcoming, Pfeiffer et al. forthcoming) which includes English as one of ten languages but keeps its two major varieties analytically separate. The findings show close similarities between them, while also revealing some intriguing differences, especially with respect to lexical choices in the use of tags and confirmation tokens as well as with regard to intonational patterns on the confirmable turn and – where present – the tag.

Extract (1) shows an RfC from the BE corpus (refer to the Appendix for an overview of the transcription conventions). Felicity has recently entered the room where her housemate Beth and Beth's partner Matthew are having dinner. Beth and Matthew are being filmed for research purposes.

(1) Recording 1 Beth and Matthew (BE #06)

01		Fel:	well whO's this CAMera (o:f) and stuff;
02			(0.3)
03		Beth:	it's for some REsEArch,
04			(0.5)
05		Fel:	AH;
06			(0.2)
07		Mat:	that's how we gOt this FOOD;
08			(0.6)
09	**->**	**Fel:**	**sO: i- the REsearch is: (0.2) FRIED FOOD,**
10			**(0.1)**
11	**=>**	**Beth:**	**N:O it's;**
12	**=>**		**CONversAtion.**

The extract shows an RfC sequence with a number of common features for BE and AE. Felicity's RfC (line 09) is a simple declarative clause with positive polarity, no modulation, and no tag. A less common feature is the presence of the inference-marking connective *so*. The final pitch of the confirmable turn is rising. This is rare in BE but frequently found in AE. Beth's response (lines 11–12), like the majority of responses in the two collections, is done with a turn-initial token and continues beyond the token itself. It does not involve repetition of the prior turn. Unlike most responses, the turn disconfirms the proposition put forward by the RfC.

In the following, we first review the existing literature on polar questions in English, giving special emphasis to (a) interactional research and (b) what it has to say about requests for confirmation, before we introduce our two data sets. The article then presents a quantitative overview of the characteristic properties of RfCs and their responses in both varieties, highlighting similarities and differences between them.

2 Literature review

2.1 Requests for confirmation in BE and AE

Dedicated research on RfCs in English is limited, and much of the existing literature emphasizes their interactional role rather than aspects of their linguistic form. As stated in the introduction, RfCs are essentially a

functional subtype of polar (*yes/no*) questions (Stivers 2010, 2776–7, Stivers and Enfield 2010, Enfield et al. 2019, 288). The grammatical formats that have been described for RfCs are declarative questions, [declarative + tag]-constructions, interrogatives with negative polarity, polar interrogatives, freestanding phrases, partial as well as full other-repetitions (Couper-Kuhlen 2020), and freestanding particles (so-called 'newsmarks', Thompson et al. 2015, Jefferson 1981, Heritage 1984). The latter two have been excluded from consideration here. Stivers (2010), following Stivers and Enfield (2010), contrasts confirmation requests with information requests, other-initiations of repair, and assessments. In her analysis of AE question–response sequences, 21% of all question turns and 30% of all polar questions are RfCs. The clear majority are formatted as syntactic declaratives (77%), and a small number are [declarative + tag]-constructions (14%) or syntactic interrogatives (9%). Similarly, Weber (1993) reports that the majority of declarative questions (63%) in her AE conversational data are RfCs.

One aspect that has received considerable attention from interactional researchers is the epistemic underpinnings of RfCs and the epistemic work that participants accomplish through them. RfCs claim partial access and/or lesser rights to knowledge that belongs within the epistemic domain of the addressee, who is assumed to be authoritatively informed about the referenced state-of-affairs (Schegloff 1996, 180, Stivers et al. 2011, 3, Heritage 2012, Labov and Fanshel 1977). Therefore, by producing an RfC, a speaker proposes a flat, recipient-tilted epistemic gradient between them and their interlocutor (Heritage and Raymond 2012, König and Pfeiffer forthcoming). This also applies to RfCs that are produced as formulations of the upshot or gist of a prior speaker's talk, the accuracy of which is for the recipient to decide (Heritage and Watson 1979, 1980). Such RfCs may be prefaced by *so* (Raymond 2004), or they may include other inference markers, such as *then* (Heritage 2012, Drew 2018). As Bolden (2010) has shown, formulations of others' talk can also be prefaced with *and* to indicate that they explicate something on behalf of the co-participant that was inferable from their prior talk but has so far been left unsaid. In cases like these, RfCs serve to manage and/or secure mutual understanding through the intersubjective verification of inferential or presumptive, and thus essentially tentative, understandings that are publicly offered up for (dis)confirmation (see also Heritage 1984, Antaki 2012, cf. Zinken and Küttner 2022).

Another feature of the turn design of polar questions (including RfCs) that has been shown to matter for the epistemic and interactional work they accomplish is their syntactic polarity. First, prior research has shown that negative interrogatives (e.g., *Didn't you/Wouldn't you say that…*) strongly invite affirmative answers, so much so that they are sometimes treated as making agreement (rather than (dis)confirming answers) relevant next and are routinely used for challenging co-participants and their claims or positions (Heritage 2002, see also Keisanen 2007, as well as Küttner and Ehmer 2024).[2] Second, Heritage and Raymond (2021), using BE and AE data, have argued that a question's polarity indexes its speaker's stance toward the (im)probability of the referenced state-of-affairs (see also Robinson 2020b, Pomerantz 1988), with negatively polarized questions conveying the questioner's stance that the question's underlying proposition is unlikely and positive polarity questions conveying the questioner's stance that it is likely. They further argue that taking such a stance is unavoidable (since every question involves a choice between positive/negative polarity) and that it operates above and beyond other features of question design (e.g., its syntactic format).

Interestingly, Couper-Kuhlen (2012) has put forward a similar argument with respect to the intonational design, specifically the final pitch movement (rising vs falling), of polar questions in BE conversation (radio phone-ins). She argues that, within specific conversational activities (e.g., proffering topics, pursuing topics, responding to news, initiating repair), falling vs rising final pitch patterns on polar questions index different degrees of epistemic certainty about the likelihood of the question's underlying proposition being true, as locally established by verbal and behavioral cues in the context of the question.[3] Given the relatively shallow epistemic gradient that RfCs establish between the speaker and the recipient, one would therefore perhaps expect RfCs (and RfC-based actions, such as offering candidate understandings or upshot formulations), to exhibit a preference for intonation contours with final falling pitch movements rather than rising ones. On the other hand, Thompson et al. (2015) have observed that, in responses to informings, the difference between rising and falling final intonation appears to be less consequential on (RfC-like) turns that draw out inferences

2 Note that Keisanen's (2007) study also considers declaratives with negatively polarized tag-questions.

3 In an earlier study, Holmes (1983) has forwarded a similar argument for the intonational design of tag-questions.

from the preceding informing. In their AE data, this appears to be true for non-repeating phrasal responses (i.e., reformulations and paraphrases; pp. 88–9) as well as clausal ones (pp. 128–34), both of which generally attract further responses that engage with the sequential relevance of (dis)confirmation of the proffered inference as next actions regardless of their final intonation.[4] In terms of its relevance for response-mobilization (Stivers and Rossano 2010), Thompson et al. (2015) therefore conclude that the action of "drawing an inference from what the informer has just said trumps prosody" (p. 89).

As we will see below, BE and AE exhibit different preferences for the intonational design of RfCs, calling for a more differentiated, and possibly variety-specific, view on the role that rising vs falling pitch contours play (e.g., for the management of epistemic stance) in the two varieties.

2.2 Question tags in BE and AE RfCs

The canonical English tag question involves an anchor clause and an interrogative tag, consisting of an auxiliary and a personal pronoun that is co-referential with the subject of the anchor. The polarity of the tag may either be reversed or held constant relative to the polarity of the anchor (Quirk et al. 1985, 810ff.). In addition, there are so-called 'invariant' tag-questions. These include both lexical tags, such as *right?* or *huh?,* as well as clausal ones, such as *don't you think?* (Quirk et al. 1985, 814) or the British *innit*?, which has been derived from the canonical question tag *isn't it* but seems to be on its way to developing into an invariant tag (Biber et al. 1999, 210).

Algeo (1990, 445–6) identifies 'confirmatory tags' amongst other types, a classification maintained by Tottie and Hoffmann (2006, 2009) and Gómez González and Dehé (2020). In their comparison of tags in BE and AE, Tottie and Hoffmann (2006) find that 'confirmatory tags' ("the speaker is not sure of what s/he says, wants confirmation," p. 300) are the most frequent tag type in BE (37%), but only the second most frequent type in AE (30%) after 'facilitating tags' ("the speaker is sure of the truth of what s/he says but wants to involve the listener," p. 301). With regard to polarity, both varieties heavily favor reverse polarity tags with positive polarity in the anchor clause and negative polarity in the question tag (BE: 75%; AE: 69%). However, AE shows a larger proportion of reverse polarity tags with negative-positive polarity (BE: 17%; AE: 27%), whereas in BE constant polarity tags, with both the anchor and the tag featuring positive polarity, are more frequent (BE: 8%; AE: 4%) (p. 289). The authors find no correlation between pragmatic use and polarity type, though. Overall, Tottie and Hoffmann find nine times as many tags in BE than in AE (2,376 vs 455 per million words, p. 287).

In their study of tag questions in BE, Kimps et al. (2014) find that 46% of tag questions are followed by confirmation. In a subset of the data comprising only information-seeking tag questions (in contrast to 'offers', 'commands', and 'statements', pp. 74–5), where "the speaker is a secondary knower who turns to the co-participant as a primary knower of the information s/he is seeking, and they exchange a B-event" (p. 75), 59% are followed by confirmation and 18% by disconfirmation (see also Kimps 2018). The study also confirms that, in BE, positive–negative polarity is most frequent (67%), followed by negative–positive (18%) and positive–positive (15%). Kimps et al. (2014) also investigate intonation and show that 77% of tags are delivered as a separate intonation unit (p. 72). Tags are predominantly produced with falls (68%). Rises make up approximately a fifth of cases (21%). This finding is interesting in relation to Quirk et al.'s (1985) contention that only reverse polarity tags with rising pitch on the tag actually convey the speaker's uncertainty and invite the "hearer to decide the truth of the proposition in the statement" (p. 811), while reverse polarity tags with falling pitch on the tag are presumed to invite agreement with, or acknowledgment of, a proposition the speaker already knows to be true (i.e., they are said to have the force of exclamations or assertions) (see also Huddleston and Pullum 2002, 894, Holmes 1983).[5]

4 They do note, however, that all their instances of clausal responses to informings that are done with final falling intonation involve declarative syntax and propose a relatively flat epistemic gradient (Thompson et al. 2015, 132, fn. 92).

5 Note that Quirk et al.'s (1985) terminology differs from that employed here: they refer to the former use as inviting *verification* and the latter, agreeing or acknowledging use, as inviting *confirmation*.

In interactional studies, tag questions are generally said to propose a flatter epistemic gradient than polar interrogative questions but a steeper one than declarative questions without tags (Heritage and Raymond 2012, Heritage 2013). As mentioned in Section 1, these studies rarely distinguish systematically between BE and AE. It is remarkable, however, that, more often than not, particularly clear examples to illustrate the use of tag-questions as features of turn design appear to come from BE data sets. As Heritage and Raymond (2005) speculate in a footnote (in relation to the design of assessments and their responses), the use of tags "as a means to downgrade epistemic claims may be much more prominent among speakers of British English than among their U.S. counterparts" (p. 25, fn. 8). While this may be true when tags are used to invite agreement with claims, assertions, and assessments (Hepburn and Potter 2011), it is unclear whether regional variability is also a factor when tags are used to construct RfCs.

2.3 Response tokens and other response types in BE and AE

As their name suggests, RfCs make confirmation/disconfirmation relevant as next actions. These actions can be implemented with a variety of response formats. Chief among them are, of course, the response tokens *yes/yeah* (or phonetic variants thereof, such as *yep, yah, yo, yay*) and *no* (or phonetic variants thereof, such as *nope* or *nay*).[6] These have been referred to as 'type-conforming responses' (Raymond 2003, 2013, Heritage and Raymond 2012), because they do fulfill not only the action-based sequential but also the grammatical constraints imposed by (interrogatively formatted) polar questions. Similarly, when used to respond to requests for confirmation (and other polar questions), non-lexical forms (such as *uh huh*, *hm hm*, *mhm*, but also the negative *ʔhmʔhm* or *ʔuhʔuh*) can likewise be used to implement (dis)confirming actions (Schegloff 1982, Raymond 2003). It has been argued that – unless they are prosodically marked (Raymond 2010) – these *yes/no*-type responses represent the default, pragmatically unmarked way of answering polar questions (Raymond 2003, Stivers 2010, 2019, 2022, Heritage and Raymond 2012). They satisfy the sequential relevancies and pragmatic constraints established by the question, fully accept the terms and the design of the question, and align with the interpersonal asymmetries established by the very act of asking a polar question (Heritage and Raymond 2012, Stivers 2019, 2022, Enfield et al. 2019). This is also said to hold for their embodied equivalents, namely head nods and lateral head shakes (Schegloff 1987, Kendon 2002, Stivers 2019, Enfield et al. 2019, but see Deppermann et al. 2024).

Corresponding to their 'unmarked' status, *yes/no*-type responses represent the most frequent way of responding to polar questions and overwhelmingly occur as the first item in a response (Raymond 2003, Stivers 2010, 2779, Stivers and Hayashi 2010, 7, Heritage and Raymond 2012, 182, Stivers 2022, 93–4). All of the cited studies found them to be used somewhere between 75 and 80% of the time. Enfield et al. (2019) report that their proportion appears to be even greater in response to polar questions that implement RfCs than in response to polar questions that request new information (see also Stivers 2022, 150), which they attribute to the fact that RfCs tend to occur in 'subordinate lines of action' and that – being pragmatically unmarked and acquiescent – (minimal) *yes/no*-type responses maximally promote progressivity and facilitate a quick return to the main line of action (Enfield et al. 2019, 290–1).

In addition to these unmarked *yes/no*-type responses, English offers its speakers a range of other response tokens for confirmation. These appear to be pragmatically marked and are generally understood as "doing *more* than just confirming" (Stivers 2019, 197). Stivers (2019, 2022) distinguishes between what she calls (a)

6 English is traditionally considered a language with a 'yes/no'-system, in which confirmatory token-based answers are supposed to match the question's polarity, i.e., the negative particle *no* is used to *confirm* negatively formatted polar questions, such as *You don't want to see them?* or *Do you not see them?* (Sadock and Zwicky 1985). Enfield et al. (2019) offer a useful, critical discussion of this typological classification from an empirical and interactional vantage point. Moreover, as noted above, negative interrogatives, such as *Don't you think it's nice outside?*, tend to strongly invite affirmative ('positive') answers, quite independently of whether these confirm or disconfirm the underlying proposition, where this appears to have a pragmatic/interactional and an epistemic basis (Heritage 2002, 2012, see also Bolinger 1957).

upgraded interjections (*of course, certainly, absolutely, definitely, totally, right*), which propose a problem with the asking of a question (see also Stivers 2011),[7] (b) downgraded interjections (*probably, possibly, maybe*), which propose a problem with answering the question as put, and (c) acquiescent interjections (*alright, sure, okay,* and *fine*), which propose a problem with the question's action agenda. Corresponding to their pragmatic markedness, these response tokens are relatively infrequent, being used to confirm polar questions only about 5% of the time in a mixed sample of BE and AE (Stivers 2019, 2022, see also Stivers 2010 for similar findings based on a smaller sample of AE data).

However, at least with respect to the response token *right*, prior research suggests differences in use between BE/Australian English and AE, specifically with regard to the particular epistemic stances conveyed with it in the two varieties (Gardner 2001, 46–52, 2007, Bolden et al. 2023). While, in AE, *right* appears to convey a knowing stance and can thus be used to confirm requests for confirmation, this use is remarkably absent (or at least uncommon) in BE data, where it is typically used as an information receipt that conveys a speaker's recognition of the information as relevant to the ongoing activity (Bolden et al. 2023, see also Gardner 2007).

With respect to its differential distribution across sequential contexts in the two major varieties of English, the opposite has been observed for *right*'s syntactically clausal cousin *that's right*, a form that is widely believed to virtually lend itself to doing confirmation (Schegloff 1996, 175). While *that's right* has indeed been shown to be used quite regularly as a confirmation token in BE/Australian English (Gardner 2007, Barnes 2011a,b, 2012), this confirmatory use appears to be much less common in AE (Küttner 2016). This suggests that there is some regional variation between BE/Australian English and AE with respect to their inventories of confirmation tokens, or at least the confirmatory use of these different forms (see also Jefferson 2002, McCarthy 2002, O'Keeffe and Adolphs 2008 for similar observations with regard to other kinds of response tokens).

Another format for doing (dis)confirmation in English is repetitional responses. Compared to token-based responses, these are generally pragmatically marked in English: Using repeats to (dis)confirm polar questions enables speakers to exert some degree of (thematic) agency over the proposition expressed in the question and to thereby assert some prior or independent claim to 'ownership' of it (Heritage and Raymond 2012, Enfield and Sidnell 2015, see also Schegloff 1996, Stivers 2005, Heritage and Raymond 2005, as well as Enfield et al. 2019). Repetitional responses are used much less frequently to answer polar questions than *yes/no*-type responses. In fact, they appear to be the least frequent response type in English, being used only somewhere between 5 and 10% of the time (Stivers 2010, 2779, Stivers and Hayashi 2010, 7, Stivers 2022, 123).

Combinations of response tokens and repetitions (e.g., *Yes, he is* or *He is, yes*) are fairly uncommon as answers to polar questions, occurring about 10–15% of the time, depending on the sampling procedure being used (Stivers 2010, 2779, 2019, 195, 2022, 94, 123, 138). And although such composite responses are apparently less frequent in English than one might intuitively expect, they are relatively common when English is placed in the context of other languages (Enfield et al. 2019, 289 who report them to occur less than 4% of the time across all languages).[8] Moreover, at least as far as confirmations are concerned, neither token-responses nor repetitions tend to attract turn-prefaces very much. Stivers (2022) reports that this only happens in about 6% of the cases in each group. However, when they *are* prefaced, token-based confirmations appear to exhibit a strong tendency (77% of the time) to be prefaced with *oh* (Stivers 2022, 94, see also Heritage 1998), whereas repetitional confirmations exhibit no such collocational preference (Stivers 2022, 123).

In addition to these different formats for (dis)confirming, there are also responses that do not (dis)confirm directly, but may be understood to do so indirectly (or to confirm 'as best as possible').[9] While forming a very heterogeneous class of linguistic and interactional objects, such responses typically take issue with features of the question as put, for instance with aspects of its design (the wording of the question and thus the

7 Also note Jefferson's (1978) study of what appear to be designedly in-between versions of the regular *yes/no*-tokens, such as *mnyeah, nyuh,* or *nyem*, in this regard. She argues that these may likewise be used to push back against the askability of a question.
8 See Enfield and Sidnell (2015), Raymond (2003, 2013), Heritage and Raymond (2005) as well as Raymond and Heritage (2006) for more elaborate treatments of the interactional work that may be implicated in the use of such composite formats in different action environments in English.
9 This is why they are considered 'answer'-responses, rather than 'non-answer' responses (on which, see below).

confirmable proposition), its underlying presuppositions, or its agenda (Stivers and Hayashi 2010, Walker et al. 2011, Pomerantz 2017, Stivers 2022). Such responses typically operate back on the question, either by adjusting its terms or by engaging with its agenda (e.g., by speaking to its inferred underlying purpose). Because they therefore essentially answer a different question than had originally been asked, they have been collectively referred to as 'transformative' or 'transformational' answers (Stivers and Hayashi 2010, Stivers 2022). Being used to answer polar questions about 12% of the time, they have been found to be slightly more common than repetitional answers in ordinary conversation (Stivers and Hayashi 2010, 6, Stivers 2022, 149). Stivers (2022) also reports that they exhibit a stronger tendency to be prefaced than other answer types – most commonly with *well* (see also Heritage 2015) – and that they are more likely to be produced in response to polar questions that are asked from a weaker, less presumptive knowledge base, i.e., in response to requests for *information* (59%) rather than requests for *confirmation* (25% [p. 150]).

Finally, there are non-answer responses with which respondents go on-record as either not being able to or (less commonly) refusing to answer the question (Stivers 2022, chap. 3). Respondents typically go to great lengths to answer their co-participants' questions (as best as possible) and so non-answer responses have been found to be fairly infrequent (about 15% of polar questions in Stivers's 2010 AE sample received non-answer responses). Inasmuch as non-answer responses still engage with the sequential relevancies established by the question that has been asked, they are different from fully non-responsive behavior, which has been found to be even less frequent (about 5% in Stivers's 2010 sample).

Overall, then, polar questions receive answers about 80% of the time, with affirmations/confirmations outnumbering disaffirmations/disconfirmations at a ratio of about 3:1 (Stivers 2019, 194, 2022, 24–5). Stivers (2010) reports that, among those polar questions that received an answer in her AE sample, 72% were met with confirmations, whereas only 28% ended up being disconfirmed (p. 2779). It has been argued that these frequencies and distributions reflect a multi-layered underlying organization of preference for responsive behavior to polar questions in English (Stivers 2010, 2022, on the notion of preference, see Pomerantz and Heritage 2013), with

- answers being preferred over non-answers (Stivers and Robinson 2006),
- confirmations being preferred over other answer-types, namely disconfirmations and transformative answers (Stivers and Hayashi 2010),[10]
- and simple, unmarked *yes/no*-type responses being preferred over other response formats for doing confirmation (Stivers 2019, 2022, see also Enfield et al. 2019).

3 Description of data sets

The BE collection holds 182 extracts from a private corpus of twelve recordings of mundane everyday interactions. Each recording is approximately 1 h in length. Recordings were made in the spring of 2012 and are mostly of two-party interactions. The participants are university students who were recorded over dinner in their own homes (six recordings) or over lunch in a dedicated room on university premises (six recordings). The students are speakers of Southern BE except for one speaker of Yorkshire English. Recordings were made without the researcher present and on separate audio and video channels, with one camera typically positioned in the corner of the room, and one audio recording device placed on the table. All participants have given their consent for the use and dissemination of their anonymized recordings for research purposes.

The AE collection consists of 208 RfC sequences sampled from a diverse set of audio- and video-recorded informal face-to-face and telephone interactions among friends and family members. This set included some

10 But see Robinson (2020a) who argues that, in response to information-seeking polar questions, unconditional affirmation and unconditional disaffirmation do not appear to be dispreferred relative to each other but relative to conditional affirmations.

'classic CA' video data (Hoey and Raymond 2022), randomly selected phone calls from the publicly available CallFriend and CallHome corpora (MacWhinney 2007, retrieved from http://talkbank.org), as well as some newer video-recordings of face-to-face interactions gathered for various research purposes; 82 out of the 208 sequences come from face-to-face interactions, most of which are multi-party mealtime interactions, while 126 instances come from (mostly dyadic) telephone interactions. All extracts were collected and coded according to the coding manual set out in König et al. (forthcoming). For the purposes of the project, RfCs were identified mainly on the basis of the following criteria: (1) they introduce and express a confirmable proposition (thus excluding questioning repeats and newsmarks, such as *really?)*, (2) they are characterized by a relatively flat, recipient-tilted epistemic gradient with respect to the confirmable matter (i.e., the recipient is treated as having epistemic authority, or at least primacy, in this matter), and (3) they make a (dis)confirming response the relevant next action. RfCs were coded for their syntactic formats, their polarity, and a range of other candidate features of turn design, such as (epistemic) modulation, inference marking, connectives, tag questions, and the final pitch of the confirmable and – where present – the question tag. Responses to RfCs were coded for the responsive action they implemented (confirmation/disconfirmation/neither), whether they came in the form of minimal (token-only) or non-minimal turn shapes, and whether they involved repetition. Codes for responses also included the form and positioning of response tokens as well as the use of turn-initial prefaces. The following sections compare our findings for AE and BE with regard to individual codes.

Where we provide examples, transcripts follow the GAT 2 conventions for English (Couper-Kuhlen and Barth-Weingarten 2011), a summary of which can be found in the Appendix. For convenience, focal sequences are boldfaced, and the RfC turns are marked with single-lined arrows (->), while the response turns are marked with double-lined arrows (=>).

4 Designing requests for confirmation in BE and AE

This section provides a quantitative overview of the formal, turn-constructional resources used for building and designing RfCs in BE and AE. For the most part, the two varieties show parallel frequency trends and distributions, suggesting that they behave rather similarly overall. However, the data also reveal differences between the two varieties, especially with regard to the formal inventories of tags and the prosodic/intonational design of RfCs.

4.1 Syntactic design

Table 1 provides an overview of the syntactic formats of the RfCs in our collections. More than half of the RfCs in both varieties are formatted as syntactic declaratives (BE: 110/182, 60.4%; AE: 115/208, 55.3%). Over a quarter of all declaratively formatted RfCs include a canonical clausal or lexical tag (BE: 33/110, 30%; AE: 32/115, 27.8%) (Section 4.6). Roughly two-fifths of RfCs (BE: 77/182, 42.3%; AE: 83/208, 39.9%), therefore, come in the form of plain declarative clauses. The other most common formats are syntactic interrogatives (BE: 35/182, 19.2%; AE: 33/208, 15.9%) and various kinds of phrases (BE: 34/182, 18.7%; AE: 48/208, 23.1%). While there is some minor variability (<5%) in terms of the relative frequency of interrogative and phrasal RfCs between our samples, taken together, they account for nearly another 40% of all RfCs in our respective collections (BE: 38.5%; AE: 39%). These distributions roughly align with those observed for polar questions in general in AE, but they are less heavily skewed toward declaratives as the main format for doing confirmation requests (Stivers 2010, 2776, Table 3). While declaratives (with and without tags) are also the main syntactic format for bringing off RfCs in our samples, interrogatively formatted RfCs do not appear to be *as* uncommon in English as previously suggested in the literature.

Table 1: Absolute and relative frequencies of different syntactic formats of BE and AE RfCs

Syntactic format	Frequency BE (Total *n* = 182)	Frequency AE (Total *n* = 208)
Declarative clause	110 (60.4%)	115 (55.3%)
of which [declarative + tag]	33 (18.1%)	32 (15.4%)
Polar interrogative clause	35 (19.2%)	33 (15.9%)
of which negative interrogatives	4 (2.2%)	7 (3.4%)
Phrase	34 (18.7%)	48 (23.1%)
Subordinate clause	3 (1.6%)	7 (3.4%)
Other/Misc	—	5 (2.4%)

As far as phrasal RfCs are concerned, Table 2 shows that they are heavily skewed by type, with noun phrases and prepositional phrases far outweighing other syntactic phrase types.

Table 2: Absolute and relative frequencies of phrase types among phrasal RfCs

Phrase	Frequency BE (Total *n* = 34)	Frequency AE (Total *n* = 48)
Noun phrase	16 (47.1%)	20 (41.7%)
Prepositional phrase	12 (35.3%)	16 (33.3%)
Verb phrase[11]	3 (8.8%)	5 (10.4%)
Adjective phrase	3 (8.8%)	5 (10.4%)
References to clock time/numerals	—	2 (4.2%)

Most of these are produced as candidate understandings or understanding checks in other-initiated repair sequences (Schegloff et al. 1977, Schegloff 1997, Antaki 2012, Kendrick 2015). Their syntactic design as (non-repetitional) phrases minimizes the disruption to sequential progressivity that such other-initiations of repair embody and makes them recognizable as lexical replacements or paraphrases, insertions, or continuations of the prior turn (Kendrick 2015, 174–6). The following extract from the AE collection illustrates the use of a phrasal RfC to initiate repair. Here, Matthew reports what his statistics professor replied to an e-mail he sent, asking about the details of his grade.

(2) CH-En-6521 (AE #186)

01		MAT:	he goes yeah [you go (.)]
02		JHV:	[A:ND?]
03		MAT:	you gotta ↑Eight outta tEn on your PROject,
04			(0.4)
05		MAT:	°h which i guess is pretty
06			<<h> it's DE>cent. (i mean)
07	**->**	**JHV:**	**at the PAper?**
08	=>	**MAT:**	**YEAH,**
09			(0.4)
10		JHV:	[uh_huh,]
11		MAT:	°h[h a:]:nd_uh– hehh°
12			°h i gotta One oh TWO out of one SIXty on my (.) ^F:Inal.

11 It may be intransparent what non-clausal verb phrases might look like in English. We used this code for cases that consist of a verb phrase or predicate but lack a corresponding subject NP. Two examples from the AE data are *LIKE it?* (AE #13) and *gotta diGEST;=don't you?* (AE #76). While some analysts would perhaps prefer to analyze them as elliptical clauses, we find the notion of ellipsis problematic from an interactional point of view (Selting 1997, Raymond et al. 2021).

In line 07, and at some distance from the trouble source, Joheved produces the prepositional phrase *at the PAper?* with a final pitch movement rising to high to initiate repair on Matthew's prior turn. With its syntactic formatting as a prepositional phrase, this candidate understanding is recognizable as a possible replacement of Matthew's *on your PROject* (line 03). The candidate replacement substitutes Matthew's original reference with a form that has the status of a recognitional reference for Joheved (note the definiteness in *the PAper*) and works to clarify its referent. Once Matthew has minimally confirmed this candidate understanding as adequate (line 08), both participants orient toward the resumption of his telling as a relevant next action (Joheved by re-aligning as a recipient through her *uh_huh* in line 10 and Matthew by starting to resume his telling with *a: nd_uh* in line 11).

In addition, phrasal RfCs are also common as candidate answers to turns that are initiated with open questions/*wh*-interrogatives, both in the context of repair (e.g., *WHO.=ROB?* (AE #17)) and in non-repair environments (see extract (4)).

4.2 Polarity

A clear majority of RfCs in both collections exhibit positive polarity (BE: 167/182, 91.8%; AE: 161/208, 77.4%, Table 3). This is unsurprising and seems to bespeak their presumptive character: With RfCs speakers generally seek confirmation for what they presume to likely be the case (Heritage and Raymond 2021, see also Pomerantz 1988, Robinson 2020b), rather than what they presume not to be the case (unless, of course, they have reasons to believe that something is actually not the case or did not happen).

Curiously, however, there appears to be a rather strong disparity between our samples with respect to the proportions of RfCs with positive vs negative polarity. Whereas the BE sample shows a ratio of more than 9:1, the AE sample shows a ratio of only about 3:1. In fact, the BE and the AE samples appear to fall on opposite ends of the spectrum of all ten languages considered in the project (Pfeiffer et al. forthcoming). Given that the two samples correspond rather closely in most other categories, this difference is remarkable and somewhat puzzling. One possible source of this divergence lies in the diversity of interaction types and the associated activity types represented in our two samples. The BE collection was sampled from a comparatively homogeneous corpus of dinner table conversations amongst young people in their early twenties who are well-acquainted peer students or romantic partners. In contrast, the AE collection holds a more diverse range of face-to-face and telephone interactions amongst a wider range of social relationships. A number of them involve participants who have not seen or heard each other in a while, such that activities like soliciting updates about things that did or did not happen (e.g., *how are YOU doing;=you didn't (0.5) End up going to I:taly:–* or *you didn't get HOMEwork done though.=did you?)* as well as joint remembering or recalling/re-activating information presumed to be in the common ground (e.g., *the SWEdish au pair;=didn't she DO that?*) are more prevalent in the AE data than in the BE data, which may contribute to the higher proportion of negatively polarized RfCs in AE. Another possible, though considerably more speculative explanation concerns different politeness practices in the two varieties (Brown and Levinson 1987). As has been shown, negatively polarized RfCs can also be deployed as vehicles for bringing off interactional challenges (Keisanen 2007), and this may simply be something the participants in the BE sample do less often than those in the AE sample. Note in this respect that negative interrogatives – a common format used for challenging actions (Heritage 2002, Keisanen 2007) – are somewhat less common in BE (4/36, 11.1% of all interrogatively formatted RfCs) than in AE (7/33, 21.2% of all interrogatively formatted RfCs).

Table 3: Absolute and relative frequencies of positively vs negatively polarized RfCs in BE and AE and distribution of the means of negation used in negatively polarized RfCs

Polarity	Frequency BE (Total *n* = 182)	Frequency AE (Total *n* = 208)
Positive	167 (91.8%)	161 (77.4%)
Negative	15 (8.2%)	47 (22.6%)
Negation with 'not'	14 (7.7%)	43 (20.7%)
Other means of negation	1 (0.5%)	4 (1.9%)

Unsurprisingly, negative polarity is overwhelmingly accomplished by means of the negation particle *not*, while other means of negation, such as negative determiners (*no X*), negative adverbs (*never*), or negative indefinite pronouns (*nothing*), are highly uncommon.

4.3 Modulation

Given that about three-quarters of the RfCs in our samples are formatted as syntactic declaratives or phrases (BE: 78.6%; AE: 78.4%, Table 1), one would expect epistemic modulations, for example with devices such as approximators, epistemic adverbs, epistemically hedging mental predicate phrases like *I think/I guess*, as well as some modal verbs, to play an important role in making these turns recognizable as proffering 'confirmable' (i.e., uncertain, tentative, presumptive) candidates, and to mobilize a (dis)confirming response from the co-participant (see also Weber 1993, Stivers 2010, Stivers and Rossano 2010).

As Table 4 shows, however, epistemic modulation is less common in RfCs than one might intuitively expect. Less than one-fifth of all RfCs in our collections feature some kind of epistemic modulation (BE: 35/182, 19.2%; AE: 39/208, 18.7%). In the BE collection, just over two-thirds of these modulated RfCs consist of syntactic declaratives (24/35, 68.6%), whereas in the AE collection, only about half of them do (20/39, 51.3%). Overall, then, epistemically modulated declaratives merely account for around 10% of all the RfCs in our respective collections (BE: 13.2%; AE: 9.6%).

Table 5 summarizes the frequencies of different modulation markers and their distributions across the two varieties. Although the two samples show some minor variability in terms of the specific forms being

Table 4: Absolute and relative frequencies of RfCs with and without modulation in BE and AE

RfCs...	Frequency BE (Total *n* = 182)	Frequency AE (Total *n* = 208)
with modulation	35 (19.2%)	39 (18.7%)
without modulation	147 (80.8%)	169 (81.3%)

Table 5: Absolute and relative frequencies of different modulation markers in BE and AE

Modulation markers	Frequency BE (Total *n* = 41)	Frequency AE (Total *n* = 47)
Approximators and epistemic adverbs	**29 (70.7%)**	**24 (51.1%)**
like	20 (48.8%)	12 (25.5%)
or something	1 (2.4%)	5 (10.6%)
or whatever	—	2 (4.3%)
kind of/kinda, sort of/sorta	4 (9.8%)	4 (8.5%)
perhaps, probably	2 (4.9%)	1 (2.1%)
and stuff	2 (4.9%)	—
Mental predicate phrases	**2 (4.9%)**	**5 (10.6%)**
I think/thought	2 (4.9%)	3 (6.4%)
I guess	—	1 (2.1%)
I hope	—	1 (2.1%)
Modal auxiliaries	**5 (12.2%)**	**4 (8.5%)**
can/could	2 (4.9%)	1 (2.1%)
might	2 (4.9%)	—
would	1 (2.4%)	3 (6.4%)
Hearsay marking	—	**3 (6.4%)**
Negative interrogatives	**4 (9.8%)**	**7 (14.9%)**
Other	**1 (2.4%)**	**4 (8.5%)**

Note: Some RfCs feature more than one modulation marker, wherefore the overall number of markers is greater than the number of instances that feature modulation in Table 4.

used for epistemic modulation, it is striking that approximators and epistemic adverbs account for the clear majority of markers in both varieties (BE: 29/41, 70.7%; AE: 24/47, 51.1%). Epistemic uses of mental predicate phrases appear to play a less central role as a mark-up strategy for RfCs (BE: 2/41, 4.9%; AE: 5/47, 10.6%), suggesting that their epistemic stance-marking function is primarily put to different interactional uses (e.g., Kärkkäinen 2006, 2007, 2012). Equally uncommon are epistemic modulations with modal auxiliaries, as are hearsay markings (e.g., via quotatives such as *Deb said…*, *My Dad said…*). Because of their strong bias toward affirmative responses and their associated capacity to convey a greater degree of certainty about the likelihood of the confirmable proposition being true (see especially Heritage 2002), negative interrogatives (e.g., *dIdn't you use to SMOKE?, the SWEdish au pair;=didn't she DO that?)* were also coded as a type of modulation. As noted above, they are slightly less common in the BE sample than in the AE sample, where they actually constitute the second most frequent modulation type.

The approximator *like* appears to be particularly common as a modulation marker in RfCs, accounting for over half of all markers in the BE sample (20/41, 48.8%) and about a quarter of all markers in the AE sample (12/47, 25.5%). The following extract from the BE collection shows such a modulation with *like* in line 09. The participants are talking about Felicity's mother. Prior to the transcribed excerpt, Felicity mentioned that her mother is dating someone from 'a Yorkshire farm'.

(3) Recording 9 Carolyn and Felicity (BE #91)

01		Fel:	he's like sIxty but like (0.3) or fIfty: <<p> FIVE or someth>
02			(0.4)
03			but like he [clImbed e- Everest and stUff and; °hh
04		Car:	[<<p> ↑mm;>
05		Fel:	all this exCITing stUff; hh°
06		Car:	THAT sounds gOOd,
07		Fel:	°hu: h
08			(0.3)
09	**->**	**Car:**	**so he LIVES like in yOrkshire;**
10	**=>**	**Fel:**	**((swallows)) YEAH;**
11		Car:	and she SEES him when she comes (0.3) bAck;

Interestingly, in both varieties, the approximator *like* appears to be particularly prominent as a modulator in RfCs that are *not* formatted as declarative clauses. In one fairly recurrent use, it combines with time or place references as well as other kinds of NPs, when they are offered as candidate answers to open questions (e.g., *whEre is THAT;=like bUck's COUNty or sOmething?* (AE #139)). The following extract from the AE collection illustrates this use. Following a display of schadenfreude from Marie that Jodie has a class at 5 o'clock in the afternoon, to which Jodie has responded with an other-correction, stating that it is an 'extra credit class thing' rather than a regular class, Jodie now elaborates on what it entails.

(4) CH-En-6474 (AE #200)

01		Jod:	i get to go parTIcipate;=
02			=and be a guinea pig for a psychOlogy exPEriment.
03			(.)
04	**->**	**Mar:**	**what IS it;** =
05	**->**		**=like sEx ED?**
06			**(0.3)**
07	**->**	**Mar:**	**((voiceless chuckle))**
08	**=>**	**Jod:**	**NO:;**=
09	**=>**		**=it's like (.) they're doing some kind of <<:-)> psychology experiment.>**

In lines 04–05, Marie responds to the informing that Jodie is going to participate in a psychology experiment with an RfC in the [open question + *like* phrasal candidate answer]-format: *what IS it;=like sEx ED?*. While this is recognizably offered as a non-serious candidate, deployed to tease Jodie (note Marie's chuckle in line 07 and Jodie's shift to smile voice during her response), it nonetheless receives a disconfirming response and a correction from Jodie (Pomerantz 1988) as a way of disattending the tease (cf. Drew 1987).

In connection with our previous observations concerning the syntactic design and polarity of RfCs, it is noteworthy that RfCs are very rarely modulated in our collections when they are syntactically formatted as positively polarized interrogatives. This suggests that 'standard' syntactic interrogativity and epistemic modulation constitute somewhat complementary turn-constructional resources for designing RfCs.

4.4 Inference marking

RfCs are commonly used to solicit confirmation for the accuracy of inferences speakers have drawn from prior talk (Heritage 1984, Bolden 2010, Antaki 2012, see also Zinken and Küttner 2022), and their inferential character can be signaled linguistically. Inference-marking is present in about 25% of the cases in each of our samples (Table 6).

As Table 7 shows, *so* is by far the most frequent single inference marker used in RfCs (see extract (3) for a case in point), accounting for more than half of all inference markers in both varieties (BE: 29/50, 58%; AE: 29/50, 58%). It also figures prominently when multiple inference markers are strung together to form more complex combinations. Change-of-state tokens like *oh* or *ah* (Heritage 1984) are the second most frequent inference marker in both varieties (if combinations with other markers are included), though they seem to be fairly more common in the BE sample than in the AE sample.[12] Other inference markers are either relatively infrequent or entirely absent from our samples. In light of the attention *then* has received as a prototypical

Table 6: Absolute and relative frequencies of RfCs with and without inference-marking in BE and AE

RfCs…	Frequency BE (Total *n* = 182)	Frequency AE (Total *n* = 208)
with inference marking	50 (27.5%)	48 (23.1%)
without inference marking	132 (72.5%)	160 (76.9%)

Table 7: Absolute and relative frequencies of different inference marking devices in BE and AE

Inference marking devices	Frequency BE (Total *n* = 50)	Frequency AE (Total *n* = 50)
so	29 (58.0%)	29 (58.0%)
oh/ah	11 (22.0%)	4 (8.0%)
you mean…	—	3 (6.0%)
then	—	3 (6.0%)
must	2 (4.0%)	1 (2.0%)
Composites (e.g., *oh so*, *oh you mean*, *so then, so that means*, *oh does that mean*)	7 (14.0%)	5 (10.0%)
Other	1 (2.0%)	5 (10.0%)

Note: Some RfCs feature more than one inference marker, wherefore the overall number of markers can be greater than the number of instances that feature inference marking in Table 6. Composites were counted as singular instances (individual markers), not as multiple tokens.

12 This should not be taken to suggest that change-of-state tokens like *oh* or *ah* invariably act as inference markers (or do so to a similar extent as *so* does). Prototypically, change-of-state tokens are used as free-standing news receipts (Heritage 1984). However, it needs to be borne in mind that they were only coded here if they were used as design features of RfCs. As such, all of our instances are followed by further talk (the RfC itself) and serve to mark the RfC as inferentially derived from prior talk.

inference marker in the literature (Heritage 2012, Drew 2018), this may be somewhat surprising. Across our two collections, we only found four instances of its use, three of which happened to include *so* as a co-occurring inference marker (one composite *so then…*, two instances of combined use with *so* in RfCs that feature both as independent markers, i.e., *so…then*) and only one in which *then* was used as the sole inference marking device.

4.5 Connectives

Connectives are turn/TCU-initial items that indicate the RfC's sequential and/or semantic-pragmatic relation to preceding utterances. This category therefore includes turn/TCU-initial inference markers, which have been double-coded and reappear in Table 9, but also (non-inference marking) conjunctions and other kinds of turn/TCU-initial sequential or pragmatic markers (e.g., *wait* or *in other words …*). Consequently, the absolute and relative frequencies for the use of connectives in RfCs are higher than, and almost double, those for inference marking (BE: 72/182, 39.6%; AE: 86/208, 41.3%, Table 8). An overwhelming majority occur with clausal RfCs (BE: 62/72, 86.1%; AE: 76/86, 88.4%).

As far as different kinds of connectives and their relative distributions are concerned, the AE and BE samples behave similarly (Table 9).

Table 8: Absolute and relative frequencies of RfCs with and without connectives in BE and AE

RfCs…	Frequency BE (Total *n* = 182)	Frequency AE (Total *n* = 208)
with connectives	72 (39.6%)	86 (41.3%)
without connectives	110 (60.4%)	122 (58.7%)

Table 9: Absolute and relative frequencies of different connectives in BE and AE

Connectives	Frequency BE (Total *n* = 72)	Frequency AE (Total *n* = 86)
so	26 (36.1%)	32 (37.2%)
and	13 (18.1%)	14 (16.3%)
but	6 (8.3%)	8 (9.3%)
(be)cause	3 (4.2%)	5 (5.8%)
or	—	4 (4.7%)
change-of-state tokens (incl. *ah* & *oh*)	11 (15.3%)	6 (7.0%)
well	1 (1.4%)	1 (1.2%)
Composites (e.g., *and so*, *oh okay*, *oh you mean*, *oh so*, *okay so*)	8 (11.1%)	6 (7.0%)
Others	4 (5.6%)	10 (11.6%)

Note: Composites were counted as singular instances (individual markers), not as multiple tokens.

So accounts for a little more than a third of all connectives (BE: 36.1%; AE: 37.2%) and is by far the most frequent one. The vast majority of these are inference- or upshot-marking uses of *so* (Section 4.4, see also Heritage and Watson 1979, 1980, Raymond 2004), testifying to the central role RfCs play for the intersubjective verification of inferential understandings in the management of mutual understanding (Heritage 1984, Zinken and Küttner 2022). In addition, *so* is sometimes (though considerably less often) used with topic-proffering or resumptive RfCs, to mark their status as items that have been on the speaker's agenda or previously been put 'on hold' (Bolden 2006, 2008, 2009).

The second most frequent connective in both our samples is *and* (BE: 13/72, 18.1%; AE: 14/86, 16.3%), suggesting that (clausal) RfCs are quite regularly used to continue a previous line of talk, either by explicating something that was inferable but previously left unsaid (Bolden 2010), or by following up on a specific aspect

or theme mentioned in, or related to the current business of, the co-participants' talk. This raises questions about the claim that RfCs are primarily used in subordinate lines of action (Enfield et al. 2019, 290–1). While this appears to hold for a great majority of phrasal RfCs, which are commonly implicated in (other-initiated) repair (Kendrick 2015, see Section 4.1) and sequentially instantiate insertion sequences (Schegloff 2007, 100–6), thus making them recognizable as 'subordinate' lines of action *qua* their sequential placement, it seems less clear for clausal RfCs, especially when they are formally marked as relating to or following from, as explicating, elaborating, or continuing a previous line of talk (see also Section 5.4). In the following example from the BE collection, for instance, the causal connective *(be)cause* (line 14) prefaces a clausal RfC that introduces a new referent (Katie) and proffers a candidate observation about her working in the same place as Carol ('she' in lines 01, 03, and 09) as an account for the inquiry in line 05. This matter is then elaborated further (line 17), shifting the focus of the talk from Carol to Katie.

(5) Recording 5 Amy and Hannah (BE #48)

01		Han:	does she WORK there MUCH;
02		Amy:	not REALly;
03			(0.5)
04		Amy:	[°hh she hAs been more LATEly.
05		Han:	[is thAt the one you can CHOO:SE;
06			(0.6)
07		Amy:	prEtty MUCH;
08			YEAH;
09			she'll (.) TELL them when she can WORK-
10			(1.4)
11			[<<p> mm;>
12		Han:	[<<p> mm;>
13			(0.8)
14	**->**	**Han:**	**cause KAtie works there as wEll doesn't she;**
15	**=>**	**Amy:**	**mhh:. (0.3) YEAH.**
16			(2.8)
17		Amy:	uh:m yeah she's been dOing quite a few shifts LATEly i think;

4.6 Tags

The vast majority of RfCs are designed without question tags in both varieties. Tags are used in only about one-fifth of our cases (BE: 34/182, 18.7%; AE: 42/208, 20.2%, Table 10). However, compared to the 6% tags Stivers (2010) reports to have found among polar questions more generally, their proportion is about three times as high. This suggests that tags do play a special role when designing RfCs.[13] As mentioned in Section 4.1, where tags occur, they most often combine with declaratives. In the BE collection, 91.2% of tags follow declarative confirmables (31/34); in the AE collection, 76.2% follow declaratives (32/42), with most others attached to phrases (e.g., *no more SNOW;=huh?* (AE #125)).

Overall, our data do not support the idea that the use of tags as a turn-constructional resource for RfCs is more widespread in one or the other variety.[14] However, the collections vary in the type of tags that are being used (Table 11). The BE corpus holds a clear majority of canonical tag questions (29/34, 85.3%), with only five

13 At the same time, the observed frequencies are fairly low and remarkably uniform across both varieties when compared to Tottie and Hoffmann's (2006) observations concerning the prevalence of tags in British English (Section 2.2). This would suggest that regional differences in the use of tags between BE and AE primarily pertain to other action environments (e.g., when inviting agreement with assessments or seeking support for claims and assertions). We thank the editors for bringing this to our attention.
14 To be clear, we would like to confine the scope of this claim as pertaining only to the construction and design of RfCs. As mentioned in Note 13, the situation may look very different with respect to what Schegloff has called 'the British tag', whereby

Table 10: Absolute and relative frequencies of RfCs with and without tags in BE and AE

RfCs...	Frequency BE (Total *n* = 182)	Frequency AE (Total *n* = 208)
with tags	34 (18.7%)	42 (20.2%)
without tags	148 (81.3%)	166 (79.8%)

invariant tags (4× *right*, 1× *or*). In contrast, only just over a third of tags in the AE corpus are canonical tag questions (15/42, 35.7%). The majority (24/42, 57.1%), though clearly less than the 77% share reported by Stivers (2010), are invariant tags, most commonly *right* (17/42, 40.5%). The AE collection also contains four cases of *huh*, which is not present in the BE collection.

Table 11: Absolute and relative frequencies of different tag-types in BE and AE RfCs

Tag types	Frequency BE (Total *n* = 34)	Frequency AE (Total *n* = 42)
Canonical tag questions	**29 (85.3%)**	**15 (35.7%)**
Invariant tags	**5 (14.7%)**	**24 (57.1%)**
right	4 (11.8%)	17 (40.5%)
huh	—	4 (9.5%)
or	1 (2.9%)	3 (7.1%)
Other tag-positioned elements	—	**3 (7.1%)**

One of the few instances of *right* in the BE collection is the following, in which Felicity and Carol are talking about a friend of Felicity's. As it happens, this friend is half-American.

(6) Recording 9 Carolyn and Felicity (BE #85)

01		Fel:	MAYbe he's going to aMErica next year.
02		Car:	<<h> OH YE[AH; >
03		Fel:	[did he TELL [you;
04	**->**	**Car:**	**[he's HALF amErican;=<<p> rIght,>**
05		**(0.4)**	
06	=>	**Fel:**	**YEAH;**

4.7 Prosodic design

It is in the intonational design of RfCs where the two collections show the most significant variation. While intonation contours with final falling pitch are by far the most frequent pattern for confirmables in BE (166/182, 91.2%), in AE intonation contours with final rising pitch are dominant (127/208, 61.1%). Moreover, about half of the instances with final falling intonation on the confirmable in the AE sample have tags attached to them (34/73, 46%), the clear majority of which are done with a separate rising contour (27/34, 79%). These turns therefore also end in a final rise, adding another 12% to the overall share of AE RfCs that end with final rising pitch (raising it to about 73%) and further increasing the disparity between the BE and the AE sample (Table 12).

This strong disparity between the two varieties, with BE's strong preference for falls and AE's somewhat less uniform preference for rises, is reminiscent of similar differences in intonational design that Couper-

speakers invite agreement with assertions they have epistemic authority over, rather than soliciting confirmation for a tentative or presumptive 'confirmable'.

Table 12: Final pitch on the confirmable in BE and AE RfCs

Final pitch confirmable	Frequency BE (Total *n* = 182)	Frequency AE (Total *n* = 208)
Fall	166 (91.2%)	73 (35.1%)
Rise	10 (5.5%)	127 (61.1%)
Level	6 (3.3%)	8 (3.8%)

Kuhlen (2020) has observed in other-repetitions in AE and BE. She, too, found that "rising contours appear more frequently overall in North American English than in British English other-repetitions[,... whereas] falling contours are more frequent overall in British English than in North American English other-repetitions" (p. 547). Notably, these distinct preferences are particularly clear for the following two other-repetition actions: (1) seeking clarification or specification for a problem of hearing or understanding and (2) seeking (dis)confirmation from a position of minimal epistemic uncertainty (pp. 527–35). While other-repetitions have been excluded from the present investigation, we can note that these other-repetition actions functionally overlap with some of those of the non-repetitional RfCs considered here.[15]

A similar difference can be observed in the intonational design of tags in the two varieties. As Tables 13 and 14 show, tags are mostly not prosodically integrated with the confirmable proposition and have their own, independent pitch contour (BE: 27/34, 79.4%; AE: 39/42, 92.9%). This separate pitch contour is mostly falling in BE (21/27, 77.8%) but mostly rising in AE (31/39, 79.5%).

Table 13: Prosodic (non-)integration of tags with the confirmable in BE and AE RfCs

RfCs with tags...	Frequency BE (Total *n* = 34)	Frequency AE (Total *n* = 42)
that are prosodically integrated	7 (20.6%)	3 (7.1%)
that are not prosodically integrated	27 (79.4%)	39 (92.9%)

Table 14: Final pitch on tags that are not prosodically integrated with the confirmable and have their own, independent pitch contour in BE and AE RfCs

Final pitch tag	Frequency BE (Total *n* = 27)	Frequency AE (Total *n* = 39)
Fall	21 (77.8%)	6 (15.4%)
Rise	4 (14.8%)	31 (79.5%)
Level	2 (7.4%)	2 (5.1%)

These tendencies allow for the identification of variety-specific canonical intonation patterns for [confirmable + tag]-formatted RfCs: Cases from BE predominantly consist of declarative confirmables with final falling pitch, followed by a pitch reset and an added tag with another falling pitch contour, whereas comparable AE RfCs predominantly consist of declarative confirmables with final falling pitch, followed by a tag with a separate rising contour.[16] The following cases exemplify these different canonical intonation patterns.

15 The preference for falls we see in the BE sample is also consistent with Couper-Kuhlen's (2012) finding that about 90% of declarative questions in her BE radio phone-in data were done with falling contours. While many of these appear to have been news-receipting pro-term repeats (*you did*, *it has*), our data suggest that this tendency also holds when other RfC-actions are considered: 99/109 declarative RfCs in our BE sample are done with final falling pitch contours (90.8%).

16 Cases that depart from this intonational pattern in the AE data are ones with turn-final *or* being used as a tag (in which the confirmable is done with a rise and the *or*-tag is done with a fall; cf. Drake 2015), ones with other, non-canonical tag-positioned elements (where both the confirmable and the tag-positioned element end in a rise) and a few confirmables with canonical tags

Extract (7) from the BE collection shows a declarative confirmable in line 4, delivered with falling final pitch, followed by a non-integrated tag which also has falling pitch (line 5).

(7) Recording 3 Melissa and Zack (BE #18)

01		Zack:	yeah but hOw many WEEKS;=
02			=is it OUT of the Out of you:r (.) tIme at Uni.
03			cause you WON'T be at (.)
04	**->**		**<<all> you wOn't be in lEEds for> ALL of it;=WILL you;**
05	**=>**	**Mel:**	**NO::; (.) uhm:-**
06			(2.8)
07		Zack:	you might Only be in lEEds for HALF of it;=
08			=it MIGHT be:-
09		Mel:	i AM;=
11			=i'm not in LEeds for very ˇLO:NG,

Extract (8) from the AE sample shows a series of three RfCs produced by the same speaker (Lydia) and addressed to the same recipient (Pablo) in lines 02, 06, and 14. All three of them have falling pitch on the confirmable element, one of which is phrasal (line 02), the other two of which are clausal (lines 06 and 14). Each of them is followed by a non-integrated *right*-tag with a separate rising contour.

(8) P-Des1a (AE #63-65)
(Lydia has just asked Pablo how his practice is going. Placenames have been changed.)

01		PAB:	there's FIVE doctors in my GROUP.
02	**a->**	**LYD:**	**in reHAB;=rIght?**
03	**a=>**	**PAB:**	**YEAH;**
04	**a=>**		**(in) rEhab ME:dicine-**
05			i'm [in (fitz-)]
06	**b->**	**LYD:**	**[and you're emPLOY]ED;=rIght?**
07	**b=>**	**PAB:**	**NO.**
08		LYD:	[NO.]
09	**b=>**	**PAB:**	**[i'm in] the grAce in the grAce system priMArily.**
10			grace FITZ-
11			grace HOSpital-
12			grace s (.) a lIttle bit is grace subURban.
13			i'm also [( )]
14	**c->**	**LYD:**	**[and grA]ce is in the CIty;=rIght?**
15	**c=>**	**PAB:**	**(it's) SE:Lby;=**
16	**c=>**		**=in hIllsborough COUNty.**
17			(-)
18		LYD:	OH.
19			hillsborough COUNty.=
20			=oKAY,

Overall then, the two varieties exhibit distinct preferences for the intonational design of RfCs. But how are we to make sense of them? Specifically, how can they be reconciled with the idea that the intonational design

where both have falls (n = 3). Of the four rising tags in the BE sample, only one is a canonical tag question, while the other three are instances of *right*, which is generally infrequent as a tag in BE RfCs (Section 4.6).

of polar questions is systematically linked to the speaker's degree of epistemic certainty about the likelihood of the underlying proposition being true (with falls indexing a greater degree of certainty than rises, see Couper-Kuhlen 2012, Holmes 1983)?

In this connection, it is remarkable that our AE and BE samples converge rather clearly in their preference for falls in the case of upshot formulations. These tend to be positioned late sequentially (toward the end of the sequences whose upshot they formulate) and therefore commonly allow its speakers to claim a relatively high degree of epistemic certainty about their likely adequacy *as* upshots of the preceding sequence. It is here, in this 'high certainty' context, that the AE sample also exhibits a relatively clear preference for falling intonation contours on RfCs (unless they convey additional affective stances like surprise or incredulity). Example (9) from an AE dinner conversation is a case in point. It shows the end of an extended sequence in which Lara, Soren, and Dianne (Lara's mother-in-law) are jointly trying to figure out which year Soren last went back to Denmark for Christmas to see his grandchildren. In lines 01–08, Lara offers another public recollection in the service of this endeavor. Her observation that 2 years ago she and her family had gone to Florida and that the year before Lydia (Soren's partner) was paying them a Christmas visit by herself, which Soren emphatically seconds in lines 09 and 11, strongly suggests that it must have been this year that Soren had last gone back to Denmark. This is what Dianne formulates as a concluding upshot of their discussion in lines 12–13.

(9) P-DinMain1a (AE #71)

01		LAR:	RIGHT; =
02			='cause two year uh? (.) two YEARS ago–=
03			=we were in <<creaky> FLOrida. >
04			(0.3)
05			for CHRISTmas,=
06			=and yOu weren't HERE,
07			°h and the year PRIor to that–=
08			=she +was hEre by herSELF.
			+pointing at Lydia
09		SOR:	yEah;=that's [RIGHT.]
10		LAR:	[YES.]
11		SOR:	exACTly.
12	**->**	**DIA:**	**so it'd be THREE years ago.**=
13	**->**		**=CH[RISTmas.]**
14	**=>**	**SOR:**	**[YAH.]**
15	**=>**		**YEAH.**
16	**=>**		**(YEAH/YES.)**
17			(0.3)
18		SOR:	so THIS christmas i've seen them thrEe years ago.
19		DIA:	RIGHT.
20		SOR:	YAH.

Given the time references in Lara's reconstructive recount, it is extremely likely that Dianne's upshot formulation will turn out to be correct, and the final falling pitch with which it is delivered can be seen to betoken a corresponding epistemic stance, viz. a high degree of confidence in, or certainty about, its likely correctness. Cases like these would seem to lend further support to, and speak against a wholesale dismissal of, the idea that the intonational design of an RfC can convey its speaker's epistemic stance toward the likelihood of the truth of the confirmable proposition. But in light of the observed regional variability in intonational design between our samples, it does not seem to hold up equally well in many other contexts of RfC use, where AE and BE preferences for intonational design clearly diverge. Consider the following sets of somewhat parallel examples from the AE and BE collections.

In this first BE case, Amy is telling Hannah about her youngest sister's upcoming birthday party, to which the sister has invited two boys she likes.

(10a) Recording 5 Amy and Hannah (BE #35)

01		Amy:	the TWO GUYS that; (.)
02			she's INto at the minute;
03			are BOTH GOing- (.)
04			and they don't KNOW about EAch Other-
05			(0.3)
06			apPARently (.) or-
07	**->**	**Han:**	**she's seeing ↑BOTH [of them;**
08	**=>**	**Amy:**	**[°hh**
09	**=>**		**she Isn't SEEing (.) them;**
10			(0.7)
11			uhm (.) One of them-
12			oh no no sorry LAST time i spOke to her;
13			One of them had got a GIRLfriend now;

In a rather similar case from the AE collection, Valerie recounts how she recently met up with her ex-partner Cindy and Cindy's new girlfriend Penny.

(10b) CH-En-6625 (AE #183)

01		Val:	so (.) we ↑MEET at this ^{v}mA:ll, (.) in ASHville,
02		Lis:	[m_hm,]
03		Val:	°h [a::nd]^{h} (.) and my pArents're there and SHE'S there,=
04			=she didn't bring PENny in.
05			(0.4)
06		Val:	penny stAyed in the VA:N. (.) [((throat clear))]
07	**->**	**Lis:**	**[your] pArents met**
	->		**↓ALso with hEr,**
08			(.)
09	**=>**	**Val:**	**nO <<h> no no no NO;>=**
10	**=>**		**=thEy [went off to] the mall and SHOPping;=**
11		Lis:	[oh I s\ ]
12	**=>**	**Val:**	**=and then °h cindy and I went to the VAN–=**
13	**=>**		**=I met PENny–=**
14	**=>**		**=then we went out te (.) to LUNCH.**
			((telling continues))

In both of these examples, a speaker offers an inferential understanding derived from their co-participant's prior reporting up for (dis)confirmation. Hannah in extract (10a) infers from Amy's report of her younger sister being into two guys at the minute (lines 01–02) that she is seeing both of them (line 07), and Lisa in extract (10b) infers from Valerie's scene-setting description which mentions that both her parents and Cindy were present at the mall in Ashville (lines 01 and 03) that Valerie's parents actually met Cindy as well (line 07). Both of these inferential understandings target the meaning of potentially ambiguous descriptive items in the preceding reports: Amy's formulation of her sister *being into two guys at the minute* in extract (10a), and the import of Valerie's mentioning of her parents' simultaneous co-presence at the mall where she met Cindy in extract (10b), i.e., of them *being there*. So both of these inferential understandings appear to be licensed by the preceding reports, though interestingly both of them end up getting disconfirmed and

corrected (lines 08–09 in extract (10a), lines 09–10, 12–14 in extract (10b)). From what we can see in the data, there is thus no reason to believe that one of them was uttered from a position of greater or lesser epistemic certainty about its likely correctness than the other. Still, British Hannah's RfC is done with a step-up in pitch on the accented syllable (*BOTH*) and a subsequent falling intonation contour, whereas American Lisa's RfC is done with a step-down in pitch on the accented syllable (*ALso*) and a subsequent rising intonation contour.

Something similar can be observed in the following two cases. In contrast to the preceding two examples, where the RfCs were syntactically formatted as declaratives, the following two instances feature RfCs formatted as negative interrogatives. In the BE case, Dan is telling Kat about one of his teachers at school who completed a doctoral degree while he was her student. He relates how he and his classmates interpreted her previous use of the honorific title 'Ms' (transcribed as *miz* in lines 03, 05, 15, and 16 of Extract (11a)). Dan's talk contains a homophobic reference delivered in the form of reported speech of his younger self in line 08.

(11a) Recording 6 Kat and Dan (BE #56)

01		Dan:	bUt EVEryone used to JOKE that um– (.)
02			°hh she: Only got a DOCtorate;
03			so she didn't have to wrEstle with MIZ anymore?
04			(0.6)
05			cause she was like a MIZ (.) cOnnoly;
06			(0.5)
07			and (0.4) being.hh Immature at the TI:ME;
08			we didn't really appreciate WHY other than that she was a (.) <<f> a LESbian BITCH; >
09			(0.2)
10		Dan:	[you KNOW;
11		Kat:	[ha: h hah
12			(0.2)
13		Kat:	div- (.) diVO:RCED.
14			(0.7)
15	**->**	**Kat:**	**<<h> isn't MIZ diVO:RCED.** >
16	**=>**	**Dan:**	**<<h> no mu- no MIZ is > where you DON'T want t-**
17	**=>**		**where you think it's WRONG that a woman should have to**
	=>		**deCLA:RE;**
18			(0.5)
19	**=>**	**Dan:**	**HER-**
20		Kat:	<<h> Oh cOO:[:l; >
21	**=>**	**Dan:**	**[mArital STAtus.**

In a similar case from the AE collection, Beth and John are hosting Anne and Don for a joint meal, when Beth begins to solicit an update about Anne and Don's phone situation.

(11b) Chinese Dinner (AE #26)

01		Bet:	did you ever getcher PHONE fixed?
02			(0.3)
03	**->**	**Bet:**	**wasn'[yer phone BROken fer awhile?**=
04		Don:	[well,
05	**->**	**Bet:**	**='n doing strange THINGS,**
06			(0.2)
07	**(=>)**	**Don:**	**^m: h.**
08			(1.0)

09 => **Ann:** **YEA:H;**
10 (1.0)
11 ???: ((sniff))
12 (1.4)
13 Joh: mm[m
14 => **Don:** **[but Anyway it's fixed NO:W.**

In both cases, the speakers who end up producing the RfC produce prior turns that exhibit their current understandings and beliefs about the matter at hand. Kat's *div- (.) diVO:RCED* in line 13 of extract (11a) displays her current belief of what the form of address 'Ms' refers to, whereas Beth's question *did you ever getcher PHONE fixed* (line 01 in extract (11b)) presupposes that there have previously been issues with Anne and Don's phone. In both cases, these turns do not receive immediate uptake (note the 0.7 s silence in line 14 in extract (11a) and the 0.3 s silence in line 02 in extract (11b)), whereupon the same speakers put those very understandings up for (dis)confirmation (line 15 in extract (11a), lines 03 and 05 in extract (11b)). Matching their previous displays of what their current beliefs and understandings are, both speakers syntactically format their RfCs as negative interrogatives, a format that is strongly biased toward receiving confirmation (Heritage 2002, Bolinger 1957). Both RfCs can therefore be understood to be issued from similar positions of epistemic certainty about the truth or correctness of the confirmable propositions. If anything, unless Beth misremembers or confuses Don and Anne with somebody else, Kat's RfC in extract (11a) is slightly more prone to error than Beth's in extract (11b). And yet, it is Kat's RfC which is done with a falling intonation contour, while Beth's is done with two rising contours. Note also that Kat's RfC ends up getting disconfirmed and corrected (lines 16–19, 21 in extract (11a)), whereas Beth's ends up getting confirmed before her original question is answered with the informing that the phone has been fixed (lines 07, 09, and 14 in extract (11b)). Here too, then, RfCs that are produced in comparable sequential environments are being delivered with different final intonation contours in AE and BE, respectively.

So if we are to retain the idea that the intonational design of RfCs is somehow bound up with its speaker's epistemic (un)certainty about the likelihood of the truth of the underlying proposition, then these rather distinct preferences in AE and BE suggest that, in many (or at least some) contexts, the two varieties have routinized distinct pitch patterns for the intonational packaging of RfCs and the marking of epistemic stance. Two alternative possibilities appear plausible here. The first would account for the observable differences in intonational packaging between the two varieties in terms of distinct, variety-specific design logics for the intonational packaging of RfCs. BE, with its strong preference for falling intonation, could be understood to more strongly foreground the speaker's relative certainty about the RfC's proposition and the shallowness of the epistemic gradient between the RfC-speaker and the would-be confirmer. AE, on the other hand, with its overall preference for rises, could be understood to more strongly foreground an element of *un*certainty or tentativeness in the intonational design of RfCs. The other plausible possibility is that the two varieties draw on different intonational means for marking epistemic (un)certainty in RfCs. While AE may be seen to primarily draw on final pitch movements as described in the existing literature (with falling final pitch movements indexing greater epistemic certainty than rising ones), BE may primarily rely on other intonational means to accomplish this (e.g., high pitch elsewhere in the turn, as has been suggested by Couper-Kuhlen 2020 with respect to similar regional variability in the prosodic design of other-repetitions).[17]

Future research will have to assess these proposals and a more fine-grained, action-type specific analysis is needed to unpack the role of final pitch (as well as its possible relation to other intonational means) in the two varieties. At any rate, the observed differences in intonational design between AE and BE call for more caution in data choice, especially when prosodic phenomena are investigated, and a greater sensitivity for variational differences between AE and BE when claims about the interactional function(s) of prosodic design features are being made.

17 Note the upwards pitch jump on ↑*BOTH* in Hannah's RfC in line 07 of extract (10a) and the switch to a higher pitch register in Kat's RfC in line 15 of extract (11a) (marked by <<*h*>> in the transcript) in this regard. We are highly indebted to an anonymous reviewer for bringing this to our attention.

4.8 Interim summary: Resources for designing RfCs in BE and AE

In summary, common features of RfCs in BE and AE are declarative syntax, positive polarity, no connective or question tag, and no modulation or inference marking. A significant difference between the two varieties exists in the pitch configuration of the confirmable and of potential question tags. For both components, final falling pitch is the dominant pattern in BE, and final rising pitch is most frequent in the AE collection. While these features show clear distributional tendencies if looked at individually, very few RfCs show all of them together (BE: 20/182, 10.1%; AE: 13/208, 6.25%). So the most common features in quantitative terms constitute an aggregate that is rarely ever found in this exact combination in actual instances in our collections (Schegloff 2009) and which, therefore, clearly cannot be considered prototypical for RfCs in either variety. In fact, our results suggest that there is no single most common turn design for RfCs. Instead, speakers evidently combine these features variably and flexibly to fit their RfCs to the local action context. Still, the epistemic gradient between the speaker and the would-be confirmer is given expression in most RfC designs. That is to say, despite the individual minority occurrences of modulation, inference marking, tags, and (syntactic or prosodic) interrogative marking, most RfCs convey the speaker's epistemic uncertainty in one way or another. There are only 18 instances in each collection (BE: 9.9%; AE: 8.7%) that contain *none* of these features. Overall, our results show that speakers have an array of turn-constructional resources for building RfCs at their disposal and can flexibly combine them in multifarious ways. Moreover, while AE and BE RfCs exhibit many cross-varietal commonalities, the analyses also revealed differences between the two varieties, especially with regard to the formal inventories of tags that are being used and the intonational design of RfCs.

5 Building responses to requests for confirmation in BE and AE

This section provides a quantitative overview of features of responses to RfCs in BE and AE. Here, too, the two varieties mostly show parallel frequency trends and distributions and behave rather similarly overall. They appear to differ mainly in their formal inventories of response tokens. However, both varieties exhibit response patterns that raise questions about the purportedly rather limited sequential implicativeness of RfCs.

5.1 Responsive actions

The overwhelming majority of RfCs receive a response, both in the BE (180/182, 98.9%) and in the AE (203/208, 97.6%) collection (Table 15). Fully non-responsive behavior is even less frequent following RfCs than after polar questions more generally (BE: 2/182, 1.1%; AE: 5/208, 2.4% vs 5% of non-responses to AE polar questions reported in Stivers 2010, 2778), suggesting that RfCs are particularly 'successful' in mobilizing responses (Stivers and Rossano 2010, see also Thompson et al. 2015, 89). Most responses involve the use of talk. Only about one-tenth of responses in the AE collection are fully embodied (n = 7/68, 10.3%), consisting of either head nods or lateral headshakes, while the BE collection holds only one such case (0.6%).

In line with known preference patterns, a significant majority of responses to RfCs are confirmations (BE: 134/180, 74.4%; AE: 158/203, 77.8%). Disconfirmations as well as responses that neither confirm nor disconfirm each account for approximately a tenth of cases in both collections, amounting to a total of 20–25% of non-confirming responses in both samples (Table 16).

Table 15: Absolute and relative frequencies of RfCs receiving a response or not receiving a response in BE and AE

Response slot	Frequency BE (Total n = 182)	Frequency AE (Total n = 208)
Response	180 (98.9%)	203 (97.6%)
No response	2 (1.1%)	5 (2.4%)

Table 16: Types of RfC responses in BE and AE

Response type	Frequency BE (Total *n* = 180)	Frequency AE (Total *n* = 203)
Confirmation	136 (75.6%)	158 (77.8%)
Disconfirmation	23 (12.8%)	25 (12.3%)
Neither	21 (11.7%)	20 (9.9%)

5.2 Response tokens: Forms and their positioning

Responses to RfCs typically contain, and indeed start with, a response token. In BE, 134/179 verbal responses contain a response token (74.9%); similarly, this is the case for 146/196 verbal responses in AE (74.5%). As Table 17 shows, the most frequent token in both collections is *yeah* (BE: 88/134, 65.7%; AE: 72/146, 49.3%). *No* is the second most frequent token in AE (30/146, 20.5%), but only occurs half as often in BE (15/134, 11.2%). This difference appears to be related to the divergence we have observed with respect to the polarity of RfCs in our two samples (Section 4.2), since negatively polarized RfCs would typically be confirmed with negative response tokens (Sadock and Zwicky 1985, but recall Note 6 above and the exceptional status of negative interrogatives in this regard).

Table 17: Types of response tokens used in responses to BE and AE RfCs

Response tokens	Frequency BE (Total *n* = 134)	Frequency AE (Total *n* = 146)
Lexical tokens	**104 (77.6%)**	**118 (80.8%)**
yeah/yes/yep/yup	89 (66.4%)	79 (54.1%)
right	–	6 (4.1%)
correct	–	1 (0.7%)
upgraded interjections (as per Stivers 2019)	–	2 (1.4%) (1× each: *exactly*, *totally*)
no/nope/nah	15 (11.2%)	30 (20.5%)
Non-lexical tokens	**24 (17.9%)**	**19 (13.0%)**
mhm, uh huh	7 (5.2%)	15 (10.3%)
mm	17 (12.7%)	2 (1.4%)
mnyah	—	1 (0.7%)
ʔhm ʔhm	—	1 (0.7%)
Complex forms	**6 (4.5%)**	**9 (6.2%)**
Clusters/multiple sayings: *yeah yeah (yeah), no no (no)*	4 (3.0%)	4 (2.8%)
Combinations	2 (1.5%)	5 (3.4%)

As Table 17 also shows, the overall number of lexical forms far outweighs that of non-lexical forms (with and without bi-labial closure). Inasmuch as the lexical forms may be understood to pre-index speakership incipiency, while the non-lexical forms may be understood to pre-index a more 'passive' mode of doing (dis)confirmation, whereby the respondent passes up on the opportunity to take a more substantial turn (Jefferson 1984, 1993, Schegloff 1982), this distribution seems to be consistent with the observation that a considerable share of responses to RfCs is continued past the initial token response (Section 5.4).

An intriguing difference between the two varieties lies in the frequency of the monosyllabic *mm*, which occurs 17 times in the BE collection but only twice in the AE collection; 16 of the 17 BE *mms* implement confirmations, and 14 of them do so as minimal responses; 15 of the 16 confirming *mms* are delivered with falling pitch; one with level pitch. In 2 cases, there is rising–falling pitch, but in the remaining 14 instances, the pitch onset is low and falling only minimally. Nine are lengthened; ten are accompanied by nodding. This affirmative and confirmatory use of falling *mm* in BE complements Gardner's (1997) findings for Australian English where he found falling *mm* to mainly function as a weak acknowledgment token, typically followed by more same-speaker talk, alongside less frequent uses of *mm* as a continuer (with (falling-)rising pitch) and as a

positive assessment (with rising-falling pitch). Extract (12) is an example of BE *mm* being employed as a minimal confirming token, in combination with nodding. Meg is talking about her application for postgraduate study at an art college for which she needs to achieve a certain overall grade for her undergraduate degree. Her confirmation of Beth's RfC in line 07 is delivered in terminal overlap and her nodding continues through a silent period and into Beth's next turn-at-talk (lines 08–10).

(12) Recording 10 Beth and Megan (BE #108)

01		Meg:	the COURTauld is stIll; (.)
02			dePENdent upon this sixty FIVE.
03			mhh and that's why i'm MEga s- like;
04			i'm STRESSED about these ESsays and [stuff (.) it's like;
05		Beth:	[mm:;
06			(1.7)
07	**->**	**Beth:**	**an OverALL mArk of sixty [+five.**
08	**=>**	**Meg:**	**[+mm;**
		Meg	+ nodding–>l. 10
09			(1.8)
10		Beth:	what's your+ Overall MARK then?
		Meg	nodding—— +

As far as the lexical inventories of confirmation tokens in our two samples are concerned, it is remarkable that *that's right* – a form which is often mentioned as a prototypical confirmation token, especially in BE/Australian English (Schegloff 1996, 175, Gardner 2007, Barnes 2011b, 2012) – is absent from both samples. This suggests that, if *that's right* is used as a confirmation token in (one of) the two varieties, then its home environment clearly lies outside RfC sequences. In addition, the uneven distribution of *right* across our two samples – it being somewhat prevalent in the AE sample, but unattested in the BE sample – seems to lend mild support to previous qualitative studies arguing that its use as a confirmation token is subject to regional variability (Bolden et al. 2023, Gardner 2001, 2007). Note also that this asymmetrical distribution mirrors the one observed for the use of *right* as a lexical tag in RfCs (Section 4.6), suggesting a distinct pragmaticalization process for *right* uses in AE.

Finally, both collections also contain small numbers of double and multiple sayings of the same token (*yeah yeah, no no no*) (Stivers 2004) as well as combinations of different tokens (e.g., *uh huh yup*, *mhm yeah*, and *yeah no*).

As alluded to previously, and in line with what is stated in the existing literature (e.g., Heritage and Raymond 2012), if response tokens are used, they are overwhelmingly positioned turn-initially (BE: 128/134, 95.5%; AE: 137/146, 93.8%). Mid-turn and final response tokens are rare in both collections (Table 18).

Table 18: Position of the first response token (if any) in responses to BE and AE RfCs

Position of first response token	Frequency BE (Total *n* = 134)	Frequency AE (Total *n* = 146)
Initial	128 (95.5%)	137 (93.8%)
Middle	1 (0.7%)	5 (3.4%)
Final	5 (3.7%)	4 (2.7%)

5.3 Response prefacing

Response prefacing is not very common in responses to RfCs. Only 20/179 (11.2%) verbal responses in the BE sample and 26/196 (13%) in the AE sample featured a turn-initial preface. These numbers are about twice as

Table 19: Absolute and relative frequencies of response prefacing by response type in BE and AE responses to RfCs

Response prefacing by response type	Frequency BE (Total *n* = 20)	Frequency AE (Total *n* = 26)
confirmation	7 (35%)	10 (38.5%)
disconfirmation	2 (10%)	7 (26.9%)
neither	11 (55%)	9 (34.6%)

high as those reported by Stivers (2022), but our samples also include non-confirmatory responses, whereas Stivers looked exclusively at confirmations. Indeed, as Table 19 shows, the inclusion of non-confirmatory responses appears to account for the doubling up of the proportion of response prefaces in our samples.

In the AE collection, the majority of prefaced confirmations are indeed token-responses that are prefaced with *oh* (*oh yeah*, *oh totally*; Heritage 1998, Stivers 2022). In the BE collection, such *oh*-prefaces are completely unattested, though. *Well*-prefaces, on the other hand, are attested in both collections and tend to precede confirmations that are subsequently qualified, or done indirectly (Heritage 2015). Non-confirmatory responses (including both disconfirmations and turns that neither confirm nor disconfirm) are almost exclusively prefaced with *well* or *uh(m)* in both collections.

5.4 Minimal and non-minimal responses

Responses to RfCs can be minimal and consist of response tokens only. But they can also be non-minimal, when the token response is accompanied by further confirmation-relevant talk from the respondent (Szczepek Reed and Persson 2016). Out of the 134 BE and the 146 AE responses that include response tokens in our samples, the majority includes further confirmation-relevant talk from the respondent (BE: 76/134, 56.7%; AE: 99/146, 67.8%) (Table 20).

Table 21 shows the distribution of minimal and non-minimal responses by response type. As one would expect, minimal (token only) responses are almost invariably confirmatory. Non-minimal responses, on the other hand, show a more diverse distribution. Interestingly, it is not the case that they are strongly (or even clearly) associated with disconfirming responses (BE: 15/76, 19.7%; AE: 12/99, 12.1%), which one would expect to be accompanied by elaborations, accounts, explanations, or the like (e.g., Heritage 1988, Ford 2001). Instead, the vast majority of non-minimal responses are also confirmatory (BE: 60/76, 78.9%; AE: 86/99, 86.9%). Put differently, token-implemented confirmations are commonly expanded or followed up with additional talk beyond the initial response token itself.[18]

Table 20: Absolute and relative frequencies of minimal and non-minimal token-implemented responses to RfCs in BE and AE

Responses with a response token	Frequency BE (Total *n* = 134)	Frequency AE (Total *n* = 146)
Minimal	58 (43.3%)	47 (32.2%)
Non-minimal	76 (56.7%)	99 (67.8%)

But why are so many token-implemented confirmations expanded beyond the initial token? There is no simple answer to this, as the types of turn-continuations vary greatly. On the one hand, there are cases in which the token is followed by elements that primarily work to calibrate the 'strength' of the confirmation, e.g., through the addition of (partial) modified repeats as in *YES.=he HA:S.* (AE #112; see also Stivers 2005, Enfield and Sidnell 2015) or (epistemic) qualifications (e.g., *yeah i THINK so*, AE #143). In other cases, confirmers expand their confirmations by taking up a stance toward the state of affairs they just confirmed, e.g., by adding assessments (as in *yeah (.) which I find really weird but apparently that's how it works*). In yet other

18 For what it's worth, we can note that *none* of the negative interrogatives in our collections received a minimal verbal response, which testifies to their somewhat special interactional character (Heritage 2002, Keisanen 2007).

Table 21: Distribution of minimal and non-minimal token responses by response type in BE and AE

	BE responses with tokens (*n* = 134)		AE responses with tokens (*n* = 146)	
	Minimal (*n* = 58)	**Non-minimal (*n* = 76)**	**Minimal (*n* = 47)**	**Non-minimal (*n* = 99)**
Confirmation	58 (100%)	60 (78.9%)	46 (97.9%)	86 (86.9%)
Disconfirmation	—	15 (19.7%)	1 (2.1%)[19]	12 (12.1%)
Neither	—	1 (1.3%)	—	1 (1.0%)

cases, confirmers expand their token-based confirmations with further specifications and elaborations of, or accounts for, what they just confirmed (Gubina et al. 2021, 2024, see also Zinken and Küttner 2022, Seuren and Huiskes 2017). Here, too, a variety of factors can give rise to such, typically more substantial, expansions. It may be a matter of recipient design, as when a respondent volunteers an additional account for, or an elaboration of, a token confirmation that the RfC-speaker might otherwise find unintelligible, confusing, or misleading. On other occasions, the RfC can be (and evidently is) understood to look for more than mere confirmation (e.g., in the service of elaborating a topic or topicalizing and unpacking a prior informing). In the following extract, for instance, Briar reports that she has not received a call she was supposed to receive that night, wherefore she now entertains the idea of just going to bed (lines 04–06, 08). Maya infers from this that Briar's original plan consisted of going out and doing something fun (lines 10–11).

(13) CFEngn5000 (AE #108)

01		MAY:	w'll you ^sOUnd HAPpy.=briar,
02		BRI:	i'm ↑GEnerally pretty hAppy,
03		MAY:	[thAt's really GOO:D; h°]
04		BRI:	[i'm (0.2) °h NO]:T very happy;=
05			=because some people were supposed to CALL me tonight.=
06			=and they[2] (0.2) [2]HAVen't yet.
07		MAY:	[O:Hw.]
08		BRI:	°h[h and] so now i'm thinking i'm just prObly gonna go to BED.
09			which is nOt a BAD thi[ng;]
10	**->**	**MAY:**	**[lik]e you were gonna go OUT?=**
11	**->**		**=and dO somethin' [FUN,]**
12	**=>**	**BRI:**	**[YEAH–=**
13	**=>**		**=w'l]l they All went out to DINner–=**
14	**=>**		**=and i didn' (.) wanna GO to dinner;=**
15	**=>**		**=because i have no MOney,**
16			(0.4)
17	**=>**	**BRI:**	**°h so: h° [i said well <<h> call me AFter;>=**
18		MAY:	[w'll briar i'm s:o:]
19	**=>**	**BRI:**	**=an'] i'll go to**
	=>		**the p(a)h° (.) that ↑PARty with you.=**
20	**=>**		**=an' (0.3) they haven't CA:LLED–**
21	**=>**		**=and i'm thinking i don't really wanna go to the party (.)**
	=>		**!↑A!nyway.**

19 This single case of a minimal token-implemented disconfirming response is produced in response to an RfC that inquires into personal, and potentially delicate, matters. Specifically, it targets the respondent's relationship to a member of the opposite sex as inferred from a prior reporting (^*WHOA;=hot DATE?*, AE #106). As such, the minimal token-implemented disconfirmation may embody a refusal to go into further details about this matter.

The designedly unspecific reference to *doing something fun* employed in the RfC (rather than, say, *like you were gonna go out and party?)* can be heard to solicit a more specific description of what Briar's plans were. And Briar hears it that way: after producing the relevant confirmation with a type-conforming response token (line 12), she continues with a rather elaborate description of her original evening plans, in which she explains the arrangements she had made, the reasons for making them, and the role of the as-yet pending phone call she had mentioned earlier as part of these arrangements (lines 13–17, 19–21). The entire description serves to unpack what the token-implemented confirmation of 'you were gonna go out and do something fun' entails.

On some occasions, the information-soliciting character of the RfC may be understood to interlock with considerations of recipient design in responding. Consider the following example in which Jean is telling her Dad how she went for a run and saw the local tennis team practice.

(14) CFEngn5635 (AE #157)

01		JEA:	an' uhm (0.4) the: (.) the tEnnis team was PRACticing.
02		DAD:	uh_[huh,]
03		JEA:	[so i s]tOpped and said HI:,
04			°h and i even PLAYED a little bit. [h°]
05		DAD:	[yo]u DI:[D?]
06		JEA:	[YE]:AH; h°
07			°h it was NICE, h°
08			[(this)]
09		DAD:	wha[t's the] (.) how was the t (.) how are the GIRLS there.
((6 secs omitted in which Jean assesses the team as good and states that she watched them play and knows the team's trainer.))			
10		JEA:	so she was just SITtin' there, =
11			=and she was like (0.2) she Asked me if i wanted to ↑`HIT;
12		DAD:	m_hm–
13		JEA:	so i DID.
14		DAD:	m_hm,
15		JEA:	it was ^NI_ICE,
16	**->**	**DAD:**	**you woul? you didn't have your TENnis ra:cket;=di[d you,]**
17	**=>**	**JEA:**	**[NO]:;=**
18	**=>**		**=i bOrrowed uhm MIKE'S.**
19	**=>**		**the COAch's.**
20			[(mike/like pled)]
21		DAD:	[Oh the CO]Ach's,
22		JIL:	uh_huh,

Jean's announcement that she even played a little bit herself (line 04) is met with a newsmark that is prosodically marked for surprise (line 05) and solicits further talk about this matter (Thompson et al. 2015, Wilkinson and Kitzinger 2006). Indeed, when Jean merely produces a positive assessment after her confirmation token (lines 06–07), Dad solicits further information about the team (line 09). Jean's response ends with a report of how it came about that she ended up playing with them, viz. her having been invited to hit a few shots by the team's trainer (line 11). Dad's RfC in line 16 draws on presumptive knowledge that would have constituted a potential obstacle to her participation, namely that Jean did not have her tennis racket with her, which Jean confirms with a negative token-response in line 17. On its own, this token-based confirmation would be somewhat confusing, as it would fail to address the issue of how she was able to play nevertheless. And indeed, soliciting such a 'how come'-type account can be understood to be the underlying purpose of Dad's RfC (compare Pomerantz 1980, Pomerantz 2017). Jean's turn continuation past the confirmatory token engages with the relevance of this issue by adding the account *i bOrrowed uhm MIKE'S* (line 18) and a subsequent specification of the person reference (*the COAch's*, line 19).

Cases like these call for a more differentiated view as regards the sequential implicativeness of RfCs. Beyond their use as candidate understandings in other-initiated repair sequences (or similar, sequentially embedded insert expansions) and possibly some more strongly sequence-closing implicative upshot formulations (see extract (9)), it appears difficult to maintain the view that RfCs tend to occur in subordinate lines of action that attract minimal confirmatory responses (cf. Enfield et al. 2019, 290–1). As the above cases show, for various reasons, respondents quite regularly orient to RfCs as requiring or deserving more than minimal confirmation with a response token.

5.5 Full and expanded repeats

As previously suggested in the existing literature, repetition is not a major resource speakers of English draw on for building responses to RfCs. The clear majority of responses in our samples do not re-use *any* lexical material from the RfC at all. Both full as well as expanded repeats are uncommon as a response format in English RfC sequences (Table 22). The observed frequencies are even lower than the ones reported for answers to polar questions more generally (~5–10%), despite the fact that our sample includes confirming as well as dis- and non-confirming responses.

Table 22: Absolute and relative frequencies of full and full expanded repeats as responses to RfCs

Repeats	Frequency BE (Total *n* = 179)	Frequency AE (Total *n* = 196)
Full repeat	1 (0.6%)	7 (3.6%)
Full repeat combining with response token	—	4 (2.0%) (3× *yeah*,1× *right*)
Standalone full repeat, with no response token	1 (0.6%)	3 (1.5%)
Full expanded repeat	1 (0.6%)	3 (1.5%)

Given that repetitional answers have been shown to convey the respondent's claim to epistemic ownership over the asserted proposition (Schegloff 1996, Stivers 2005, Heritage and Raymond 2012, Enfield and Sidnell 2015, Enfield et al. 2019), this relative paucity of use as part of sequences that are fundamentally characterized by an underlying recipient-tilted epistemic asymmetry may be somewhat surprising. However, it may be precisely *this* characteristic feature of RfC sequences which further inhibits the use of full or expanded repetitions as a response format. Claiming or asserting epistemic ownership over the matter at hand may be tantamount to an 'epistemic overkill' in a context where the RfC speaker already conceded epistemic authority to the respondent in and by seeking confirmation for its accuracy or correctness from them. In fact, this same pragmatic mechanism may provide the foundation for the use of repetitional confirmations as a practice for 'confirming allusions' (Schegloff 1996), allowing a respondent to index that the RfC has (adequately) explicated something the respondent had already conveyed inexplicitly before.

That repetitions are used to confirm RfCs in rather special interactional circumstances is vividly illustrated by the only case of a full repeat from the BE collection. Here, the repeat confirms an *oh*-prefaced self-repair and follows an aborted polar interrogative. In line 01, Amy initiates a new telling concerning her two sisters Kay and Emma. Emma, her younger sister, is pregnant.

(15) Recording 5 Amy and Hannah (BE #181)

01 Amy: so i wEnt round to see (0.3) KAY;
02 my sIster KAY;
03 Han: m[m;
04 Amy: [YESterday for a bit;
05 and wOrrying about EM[ma;

06 Han: [was that (.) one that's pre-
08 -> oh ↓EM[ma's preg[nant;
09 => Amy: [NO; [↓EMma's pregnant;
10 worrying about EMma;
11 (0.8)
12 and KAY (.) seems to thInk she'd sort of PLANNED it;

In line 06, Hannah aborts an information-seeking turn *was that (.) one that's preg-* which is heard as asking about whether Kay is the sister who is pregnant and therefore receives a slightly delayed *no* response from Amy in line 09. Hannah's RfC in line 08 proffers a revised candidate understanding, *oh ↓EMma's pregnant*, and is met with Amy's full repeat (line 09). Amy's turn does not only identically repeat Hannah's RfC lexically but also matches it prosodically (primary accent on *↓EMma*, falling final pitch from there and no further accents). While the lexical and prosodic mirroring designs Amy's turn as responsive to the turn it matches (Szczepek Reed 2012, 2020), her turn also provides a response to Hannah's aborted enquiry and unambiguously clarifies the identity of the pregnant sister. In this context of displayed referential trouble, then, a full repeat is chosen over a token or other form of simple affirmative to achieve greater clarity.

5.6 Interim summary: Building responses to RfCs in BE and AE

In summary, the response slot following RfCs is almost always filled with a response, which is most often a confirmation. Responses to RfCs frequently contain response tokens, which are typically positioned initially. In a solid number of cases, response tokens constitute the whole of the response, and such minimal responses are virtually always confirmations. However, quite regularly responses that contain response tokens also contain other talk, which shows that RfCs are frequently deployed to do more than deal with brief obstacles of uncertainty about the matter at hand. Full repeats of the RfC turn are extremely rare, which may be related to the fact that epistemic authority over the confirmable proposition has typically already been conceded to the would-be confirmer with the preceding RfC. In such an environment, the use of repetitional confirmations appears to be highly constrained.

6 Conclusion

The results of our study highlight the value of adopting a variety-specific approach in at least some domains of interactional linguistic (IL) and conversation analytic (CA) inquiry. While speakers of BE and AE mostly draw on the same linguistic resources and use them in similar ways when building RfCs and their responses, they do not do so across the board. Our study revealed a few variety-specific differences in the lexical domain (e.g., with respect to the relevant inventories of tags and response tokens being used in RfC sequences) as well as major differences in the prosodic domain, with respect to the intonational design of RfCs. Especially in these domains, future interactional research on English should therefore be alert to the possibility of regional variability and approach the assemblage of databases accordingly, considering more carefully where and for what research questions BE and AE data can be lumped together unproblematically or where it may be less appropriate to do so.

The results of our study also suggest that RfCs and their responses do, in places, behave somewhat differently from a more widely conceived category of polar questions and their responses. There is reason to believe that similar particularities would surface when other subtypes of polar questions (e.g., newsmarks or questioning repeats) are taken into focus. And even *within* our *meso*-level category of RfCs, some functional subtypes appear to differ somewhat systematically from others. In terms of their intonational design, for example, sequentially late upshot formulations tend to be done with falling intonation in both our samples, whereas the two varieties exhibit divergent intonational preferences for RfC usages in other sequential environments. Our study thus points to the continued importance of CA/IL research that explores how

linguistic resources are methodically mobilized in *particular* sequential environments to bring off *specific* (social) actions in interaction. Only with the help of such more fine-grained, action-specific research will it become possible to make sense of the differences between BE and AE that have yielded the divergent distributions of specific turn-design features in RfC sequences we observed in our study, their precise role for the constitution of particular RfC-based actions, and the expression of particular stances in the two varieties.

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Appendix

Transcription conventions

Transcripts follow the GAT 2 conventions for English. The following list provides an overview of the most important symbols and conventions used in this article. Readers unfamiliar with the GAT 2 system are referred to Couper-Kuhlen and Barth-Weingarten (2011) for a full account.

[talk]	overlap and simultaneous talk
[talk]	
=	fast, immediate continuation with a next unit of talk (latching)
°h/h°	in- and outbreaths
(.)	micropause (<0.2 s)
(0.3)	measured pause, duration in seconds: lengthening of sounds
ʔ	cut-off by glottal closure
<<:-)> so>	smile voice

Accentuation

SYLlable	focus accent
sYllable	secondary accent
!SYL!lable	extra strong accent

Final pitch movements of intonation phrases

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

Pitch jumps

↑	pitch upstep
↓	pitch downstep

Changes in pitch register

<<l> talk>	lower pitch register
<<h> talk>	higher pitch register

Intralinear notation of accent pitch movements

ˆSO	rising-falling
ˇSO	falling-rising

Miscellaneous

( )	unintelligible passage
(may i)	assumed wording
(may i say/let us say)	possible alternatives