Utterance-final particles in Taiwan Mandarin: contact, context, and core functions

Lin, C.H.

Cover Page

Universiteit Leiden

The handle http://hdl.handle.net/1887/29022 holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation.

Author: Lin, Chin-hui
Title: Utterance-final particles in Taiwan Mandarin: contact, context and core functions
Issue Date: 2014-10-02

Chapter 3
The UFP *a* in Taiwan Mandarin

3.1 Introduction

The particle *a* [a] is one of the most frequently used UFPs in Taiwan Mandarin (Tseng and Gibbon 2006: 802). As Chung (1966: 129–131) writes, this onsetless particle "changes its sound according to the coda of the preceding word" (quoted and translated by Wang and Liu 2010: 2) and generate variants such as [ja], [wa], [na], [ŋa], [ʐa], etc. In other words, [j], [w], [n], [ŋ] and [ʐ] are consonants "resulting from the spreading of the final consonant of a syllable to the initial position of an onsetless particle" (Wang and Liu ibid.: 1), and are termed as "liaison consonant" (ibid.). However, as Wang and Liu (ibid.: 2–4) claim, the liaison rule proposed by Chung cannot explain every case they observe in their data. For example, According to the rule, one variant [ja] is supposed to occur after [i], [y] and diphthongs ending in [i]. According to Wang and Liu's (ibid.: 3) observation, it also follows other vowels such as [a], [o], [ɤ], and [ɛ].[1] They suggest that one possible explanation is the collocation: [ja] is collocated with [a], [o], [ɤ], and [ɛ]. However, they also observe that "it is not uncommon for the speakers to depart from such collocation practice." For example, a considerable amount of occurrence of [ja] occurs after the consonant [ŋ] in their data.[2] They thus claim that the use of variant of *a* is "a matter of preference rather than a rule" (ibid.: 4). In this chapter, I use *a* in my transcription of examples. If [ja] does not result from liaison, it is transcribed as *ya*.

In previous research, the UFP *a* is usually analyzed in a broader context of Mandarin (cf. Chao 1968, Li & Thompson 1981, C. Z. Chu 1994 and C. C. Chu 2002, Xiong & Lin 2004, R. Wu 2004, B. Li 2006, Wang 2013, etc.), and is rarely discussed in the context of Taiwan Mandarin alone.[3] A possible explanation why the

---

[1] Usually, [ja] does not occur after [u] (cf. Chao 1968: 803, Wang and Liu 2010: 2). However, on the basis of a Google search done in 2007, Wang and Liu (ibid.: 3) point out that [ja] is used in the phrase *hǎo ya* [hau ja] 'okay' seven times more (5,400,000 hits) than the other variant [wa] (769,000 hits), which results from the liaison.

[2] Searching the Mandarin UFP *ya* [ja] and *a* [a] following *pūlàng* [pʰu laŋ] 'plurk' on Google by inserting the characters 噗浪/撲浪, Wang and Liu (ibid.: 4) have found out that although most occurrences still follow the liaison rule (thus [pʰu laŋ a]), "there are still about one tenth of the time when the [a] form was rendered as [ja]" (thus [pʰu laŋ ja]).

[3] As already mentioned in chapter 2, most of the studies mentioned above do not indicate whether the data includes utterances from Taiwan Mandarin speakers.

UFP *a* in Taiwan Mandarin has not attracted more attention is that its use is considered consistent within Mandarin and regional variation.

In general terms, it is true that the conversational contexts of *a* in Taiwan Mandarin are quite similar to those in mainland Mandarin. However, a few cases of *a* in my Taiwan Mandarin data are not accepted by mainland Mandarin speakers. In line 1 of example (1), at the beginning of the conversation, speaker M attaches *a* (with a high, flat pitch) to the time word *qùnián* 'last year' in order to direct the hearer's attention to a certain period of time—the background of the subsequent utterance. My informants from mainland China indicate that they would not use *a* in this way.

(1) → 1 M   qùnián   a↑   nǐ   yǒu   kàn nà ge wǎngqiú gōngkāi sài   ma?
                      last.year PRT 2_{SG}   have see that CL tennis   open   game PRT

      2 F   qùnián(.) yǒu a↑.
                     last.year have PRT

        M1:   Did you watch the open tennis tournament last year?
        F2:   Last year, yes I did.

According to my mainland Mandarin informants, in mainland Mandarin, speakers would not use any particle after *qùnián* in line 1 in such a situation. In Taiwan Mandarin, the use of *a* in such a context is not obligatory but very common. As I will argue in the following sections, such a difference results from the influence of Southern Mǐn on Taiwan Mandarin. However, at this moment it is hard to say whether the use of *a* here is just a kind of code-switching or has already been transferred or "borrowed" from Southern Mǐn to Taiwan Mandarin.

Comparing the prosodic properties of intonation of Mandarin spoken in China and Taiwan, Tseng (2004: 189) finds that the UFP *a* in a question like *Jiějie, nǐ qù nǎr a?* 'Sister, where are you going?' has a "distinctive rising intonation" in   mainland Mandarin, but not in Taiwan Mandarin. Kuang and Kuo (2011) notice that "obvious lengthening and stress placement on final particles are observed in Taiwan Mandarin, while those particles are reduced in Beijing Mandarin." Furthermore, from the previous literature one may infer that in some cases, linguists from mainland China and Taiwan have different phonological judgments on the same case (for details, see 3.2.4). In short, there are good reasons to claim that formally and functionally, the Taiwan Mandarin UFP *a* does not fully correspond to its counterpart *a* in mainland China.

In section 3.2, I will review previous studies on *a* in Mandarin and Taiwan Mandarin. My hypothesis will be presented in section 3.3. This hypothesis will be tested and discussed in section 3.4, with my Taiwan Mandarin data. Section 3.5 presents the conclusion.

3.2 Previous studies

As mentioned above, most of the previous studies on a do not specifically include Taiwan Mandarin data. For instance, C. Z. Chu (1994), B. Li (2006), and Wang (2013) use mainland Mandarin as research data. The primary data used by C. C. Chu (2002: 16) come from "recordings of six hours of conversation at family gatherings." C. C. Chu does not mention whether all the speakers are from mainland China or Taiwan, but mentions that, although some of the speakers have dialectal background, "Mandarin is their family language." Many other scholars propose one core function that can provide a general account for the various uses and contexts. However, there is some disagreement with regard to the question of what this core function should be. In what follows I will sum up and critically evaluate previous studies.

3.2.1 C. Z. Chu (1994)

In his comparison of sentences with and without the UFP *a*, C. Z. Chu (1994: 47) concludes that *a*-attached sentences always sound softer, which is in line with the claim of Li and Thompson (1981: 313–7) that *a* serves to express "reduced forcefulness." Examples (2a–d) are adapted from C. Z. Chu.

(2) (C. Z. Chu 1994: 44–5, my transcription, glosses and translation)

    a. nǐ qù bú   qù   a?
         2SG go NEG   go   PRT
         'Do you go or not?'

    b. nǐ qù bú   qù?
         2SG go NEG   go
         'Do you go or not?'

    c. míngtiān zǎodiǎn lái   a!
         tomorrow earlier   come PRT
         'Come earlier tomorrow!'

    d.   míngtiān   zǎodiǎn   lái!
          tomorrow   earlier   come
          'Come earlier tomorrow!'

According to C. Z. Chu (1994), the *a*-attached question (2a) sounds softer than (2b), and the *a*-attached imperative sentence (2c) sounds more like an advice, rather than a direct command, as (2d). However, C. Z. Chu's analysis is based on isolated sentences only. He does not provide any conversational context in which the example sentences occur, and does not identify the pitch realization of his *a*-attached sentences. As a result, the above sentences may occur in various contexts, most of which would yield different interpretations or could be judged differently by different native speakers.

3.2.2 Shie (1991)

Shie (1991) is one of the few studies which explicitly uses Taiwan Mandarin data. His data was collected from TV talk shows, drama series, radio interviews, and daily conversations. Shie argues that the UFP *a* has two phonological variants: one is with a higher tone; the other is pronounced with "a slightly falling intonation" (ibid.: 6). He further claims that these two variants of *a* occur in different contexts and carry different functions: the high-pitch *a* occurs in responses and serves to respond to "the stimulation of an existing proposition" (ibid.: 19); whereas the low-pitch *a* occurs "only in questions and exclamations" and can be used "to challenge, to condemn, to request hearer confirmation, and to delay the time for reaction when used in echo questions" (ibid.: 199).

    Shie's approach has been criticized by C. C. Chu, who argues that the study "suffers from being largely taxonomic in nature, unable to provide a general characteristic for the particle from which all the interactional functions and structural interpretations can be systematically and reasonably derived" (2002: 10–11). As a matter of fact, as my own analysis below will show, Shie's study does not cover all of the usages of *a* in my Taiwan Mandarin data.

    Shie's argument about the pitch variation has been supported by many following studies (e.g. C. C. Chu 2002, R. Wu 2004, B. Li 2006, etc.), regardless of the regional origins of the data. The existence of two *a* variants (i.e. high-pitch *a* and low-pitch *a*) in both Mandarin varieties may thus be considered uncontroversial.[4]

---

[4]   Using the *Mandarin Conversational Dialogue Corpus* (MCDC) established by

3.2.3 C. C. Chu (2002)

C. C. Chu (2002: 39) defines the UFP *a* as a discourse marker and proposes that its core function is to "indicate 'speaker involvement' in the current state of affair."Combining Shie's (1991) claim that *a* has two variants with I. Li's (1999) analysis of Taiwan Southern Mĭn, C. C. Chu suggests that a high pitch on the particle signals "addressee orientation," meaning that the *a*-attached utterance is "intentionally directed to the addressee" (2002: 26). On the contrary, a low pitch on the particle signals "speaker orientation," which means that the utterance is "primarily meant for the speaker him-/herself" (ibid.).

3.2.4 B. Li (2006)

In line with C. C. Chu (2002), B. Li (2006: 64) argues that UFP *a* is a discourse marker and claims that compared to other Mandarin UFPs such as *ne*, *ba* and *ma*, *a* "displays a greater variation in terms of the contexts in which it may occur and the interpretations that it may evoke" (2006: 37). She distinguishes high and low pitch variations associated with *a*, and follows C. C. Chu's (2002) analysis that the high pitch marks "addressee orientation" and the low pitch marks "speaker orientation," as in the following examples (quoted from B. Li (2006: 47). Lines 1 and 2 are cited from R. Wu (2004: 181); line 3 is added by B. Li):[5]

---

the Academia Sinica (http://mmc.sinica.edu.tw/mcdc_e.html), C. Liu (2005) examines the relationship between nineteen pragmatic functions (sixteen proposed by Shie (1991), three added by C. Liu) and pitch realizations of *a* with the help of computational engineering. He finds that there are four pitch contours of *a*, including mid high-falling, high-level, mid-falling, and mid-rising. However, he claims that owing to the fact that "there is no clear-cut preference for the distributions of pragmatic functions of particle *A* to a certain pitch realizations" (ibid.: 71), these pitch contours do not correlate with the pragmatic functions perfectly. Adapting R. Wu's (2004) classification of pragmatic functions of *a*, H. Liu (2011) also investigates the relation between pitch realization and pragmatic function of *a*. Her result supports the claim that there are two phonetically distinctive types of *a*, because she finds a "contrastive relationship" (ibid.: 1269) between *a* used in interrogatives and non-interrogatives.

5   In the original transcription of previous literature, there is no arrow next to the particle *a*. In this thesis, for the reader's convenience, I will add an upwards arrow (↑) and a downwards arrow (↓) to indicate the high-pitch and low-pitch respectively if the pitch height is indicated by the authors.

(3) (B. Li 2006: 47, some glosses are modified)

  1 H ei, wèishénme huì duō yì wǎn fàn zài nàbiān?
       PRT why   can additional one CL rice at there

→ 2 X hái yǒu <E Victor E> a↑
      still have Victor PRT

→ 3 H ou, hái yǒu <E Victor E> a↓
      PRT still have Victor PRT

    H1: Hey, how come there is an additional bowl of rice over there?
    X2: There is still Victor.
    H3: Oh, there is still Victor.

B. Li (2006: 47) states that in this situation, the utterance in line 2 in (3) indicates that "the speaker X thinks that H should have known the answer, and expects an explanation for his ignorance. In this sense X is saying something like '*There is still Victor. — How come you don't know?*' In contrast, the speaker of the second *a*-suffix sentence, i.e., H, is expressing his own sudden realization of the situation, claiming that, '*There is still Victor. I see the reason now.*' " (B. Li 2006: 47, original italics).

  Subscribing to C. C. Chu's (2002) proposal, B. Li applies the high vs. low pitch dichotomy to the other Mandarin UFPs (such as *ne*, *ba* and *ma*) and claims that sentences attached by a high-pitch particle usually "imply that the speaker is inviting the hearer's response or expecting further discussion," whereas utterances attached by a low-pitch particle usually "convey the speaker's own opinion, sound more definitive and tend to close the conversation" (2006: 47–48).B. Li disagrees with C. C. Chu's claim that the core function of *a* is to indicate "speaker involvement" in the current state of affair. Instead, she subscribes to R. Wu's (2004: 33) argument that "so far as a speaker chooses to produce an utterance about, or a response to, a particular matter, he or she can be seen as indicating his or her involvement in that matter" (2006: 51). Arguing that C. C. Chu's analysis of speaker involvement is "unnecessary," B. Li (ibid.: 50) suggests that *a* functions to highlight the relevance of the utterance to its discourse context. In other words, *a* is used to show the speaker's effort to relate his/her own utterance to the conversational environment. B. Li argues that in example (4) (B. Li 2006: 50, citing R. Wu 2004: 155), there is no apparent connection between the content of the question delivered by C and the

conversation that is going on between W and C. She (ibid.) believes that the use of *a* increases the relevance between C's question and its conversational environment. In this case, it serves to call the hearer's attention to what is being asked.

(4) (B. Li 2006: 50, partly modified transcription and glosses)

1 W	tā	hái	jiānchāi		ou.		
	3sg	still	work-part-time		PRT		

2 C	zhè	ge	zěnme	kāi?		
	this	CL	how	open		

3 W	sān	tiān	zài	táidà,	sān	tiān	zuò	jī.
	three	day	at	Taiwan.University	three	day	do	prostitute

→ 4 C	zhè	ge	zěnme	kāi	a↓?
	this	CL	how	open	PRT

W1:   She also has a part-time job.
C2:   How to open this?
W3:   Three days at Taiwan University, and three days as a prostitute.
C4:   How to open this?

B. Li further claims that when *a*-attached utterances are relevant to the main conversation topic, as in (5), the *a*-attached utterances show the speaker's high degree of concern with the hearer's reaction. Example (5) is taken from B. Li (2006: 51) citing R. Wu (2004: 206–207). This conversation takes place during a dinner party, involving a group of friends. Prior to this part of the conversation, the topic of the conversation was the upcoming trip of participant L to Taiwan. Just before this excerpt, X has made the suggestion that L should consider taking either China Airlines or Eva Airlines. However, this suggestion is contested by C in line 1, who asserts that these two airlines are quite expensive.

(5) (B. Li 2006: 51, partly modified transcription, glosses and translation)

    1 C   kěshì huáháng   gēn chángróng dōu shì bǐjiào   guì   de.
           but   China.airlines and Eva.air   all be relatively expensive DE

→ 2 X   jùshuō huáháng   hěn piányí a↑.
           it's.said China.airlines very cheap   PRT

    3 C   tāmen   gèng piányí.
           3PL   more cheap

→ 4 W   bú   huì ba. huáháng   hái shì hěn guì   a↑.
           NEG   can PRT China.airlines still be very expensive PRT

→ 5 X   jùshuō xiànzài yǐjīng bǐjiào   piányí le   a↑.
           it's.said now   already relatively cheap PRT PRT

    6 X   kěshì yào rěnshòu shēngmìng- rěnshòu shēngmìng de wéixiǎn.
           but   need bear life   bear life   DE danger

    C1:   But both China Airlines and Eva Airlines are more expensive.
    X2:   I heard that China Airlines was very cheap.
    C3:   They are cheaper.
    W4:   No way. China Airlines is still very expensive.
    X5-6: I heard that it has already become cheaper now, but you need to
           tolerate- tolerate the risk of life.

Comparing the *a*-attached utterances in example (5) and their counterparts without *a*, B. Li claims that the latter convey a strong force; they sound more abrupt and definitive. On the other hand, with the deployment of *a*, speakers "seem more concerned with the hearers' reaction" (2006: 41). She suggests that the addition of *a* makes "the speaker's participation in the conversation more activated." This effect is induced since *a* "functions to increase the degree of relevance of the utterance to the discourse unit" (ibid: 51).

    Although I agree that the use of *a* is to some extent related to the conversational environment, I disagree with B. Li's analysis of the two examples cited above. Following Norrick's (1987: 256) argument that a repetition itself can already be

"hearer-oriented in creating cohesion and segmenting the discourse for processing," I believe that, with the repetition, the speaker can establish coherence with the previous dialogue and it helps the hearer process the information. In these two examples, even without *a*, the two repetitions *zhè ge zěnme kāi?* 'how to open this?' in line 4 of example (4) and *jùshuō xiànzài yǐjīng bǐjiào piányí le* 'I heard that it has already become cheaper now' in line 5 of example (5) by themselves fulfill the function of calling the hearer's attention. The claim that *a* functions to "increase the relevance between *a*-attached utterance and discourse contexts" is therefore not convincing.

As for example (5), I basically agree that the deployment of *a* in lines 2, 4, and 5 shows the speaker's higher degree of concern with the hearer's reaction than their counterparts without *a*. Yet I disagree with B. Li's judgment that the cases without *a* convey a strong force. On the contrary, according to my Taiwan Mandarin informants, the *a*-attached utterances actually convey a stronger force, which is also in line with R. Wu's (2004: 207) judgment.[6]

I also disagree with B. Li's proposal that *a* serves to highlight the relevance of the preceding utterance to the discourse context. First, as mentioned above, the relevance can be strengthened by various conversational strategies, for instance, repetition. Second, the addition of any UFP generally indicates a higher degree of relevance in comparison to utterances without an UFP. For instance, C. C. Chu (1984: 88–89) compares utterances with and without Mandarin UFP *ne*:

(6) Chu (1984: 88–89, partly modified transcription, glosses and translation)

	1 A	nǐ	xiànzài	děng	zhe	bìyè	le,	zhēn	kāixīn.
		2$_{SG}$	now	wait	ASP	graduate	PRT	really	happy

→	2 B	wǒ	hái	děi	xiě	yì	piān	lùnwén	ne.
		1$_{SG}$	still	must	write	one	CL	thesis	PRT

A1:   You are now waiting for graduation. What a happy guy!
B2:   I still need to write my thesis.

---

6   The different judgments for this case may be due to the fact that B. Li is a mainland Mandarin native speaker, while R. Wu and I are Taiwan Mandarin speakers.

C. C. Chu claims that the UFP *ne* serves to connect the *ne*-attached utterance with the previous discourse, when the *ne*-attached utterance is not in direct response to the previous utterance. In example (6), if *ne* is left out, B's response will sound abrupt and indifferent, as if saying "it's my business, not yours." Here, B's response to A with *ne* increases the relevance, as if saying "this is not what you expected but it is a response relating to what you said."

If we replace the *ne* in line 2 with Mandarin UFP *ou* (as in (7)), which can serve to "register a piece of information as news" (R. Wu 2004: 113), the degree of relevance is still higher than without *ou*.

(7)   1 A   nǐ   xiànzài děng zhe bìyè   le, zhēn kāixīn.
              2SG   now   wait ASP graduate PRT really happy

   → 2 B   wǒ   hái děi   xiě   yì   piān lùnwén ou.
              1SG   still must write one CL   thesis   PRT

       A1:   You are now waiting for graduation. What a happy guy!
       B2:   (Maybe you still don't know, but) I still need to write my thesis.

Here, the *ou*-attached utterance is something the speaker supposes to be new to the hearer. The deployment of *ou* implies that the hearer should receive this newly- provided information. In addition, the hearer is supposed to comprehend the speaker's indirect response, as if saying "this may not be what you expected but here is some information you probably don't know yet, and it is relevant to what you said."

3.2.5 R. Wu (2004)

R. Wu's (2004: 38–40) core corpus comprises seven telephone conversations and four video-taped conversations of altogether some 12 hours. All of the speakers are from Taiwan. Although she supplements her data with another four hours of mainland Mandarin data, it can still be argued that her primary data is Taiwan Mandarin. She proposes that the UFP *a* can be uttered with a "notably low pitch" and a "flat or slightly high pitch," which is basically in line with previous studies such as Shie (1991) and C. C. Chu (2002) (cf. R. Wu 2004: 229). R. Wu claims that these two types of *a* occur in different contexts but share a central property: to mark "the matter being responded to as deviant from how the matter should be, or normally is, from the *a* speaker's perspective" (ibid: 224).

3.2.5.1 Low-pitch *a*: *a*-formulated questions and *a*-attached questions

In R. Wu's data, the low-pitch *a* commonly occurs in interrogatives. It can be attached to "a repeat, partial repeat, or a candidate understanding of what another has said or intended in the previous turn, and thereby makes confirmation or disconfirmation a relevant next action" (ibid.: 178). These instances are termed "*a*-formulated questions" (ibid.: 129). For example, in example (8), B's response can be seen as an *a*-formulated question because *míngtiān* 'tomorrow' is not a "grammatically constructed question" by itself.

(8) 1 A   wǒ   míngtiān qù   táiběi.
             1SG   tomorrow go   Taipei

→ 2 B   míngtiān   a↓?
             tomorrow   PRT

         A1:   I will go to Taipei tomorrow.
         B2:   Tomorrow?

R. Wu claims that the "deviance" marked by *a* in such "*a*-formulated questions" usually relates to the fact that the adequacy or truth value of what someone else has just said runs counter to the *a* speaker's expectation which is based on prior knowledge or experience. Therefore, questions of this type "regularly serve as understanding checks initiated as a result of problem in hearing or understanding the preceding talk" (2004: 129). Example (9) is adapted from R. Wu (ibid.: 130). In this conversation, L is inquiring about the academic progress of a mutual friend.

(9) (R. Wu 2004: 130, modified transcription, glosses and translation)

     1 L   ei,   nà   jul-   j-   shénme shíhòu bìyè?
             PRT   that   jul-   j-   what   time   graduate

     2   (.)

→ 3 T   <E Julie E> a↓?
                 PN   PRT

4 L   hen.
           PRT

5   (0.2)

6 T   dàgài   shíyuè   ba.
           probably October   PRT

   L1:   By the way, when will Jul- J- …graduate?
   T3:   Julie?
   L4:   Yeah.
   T6:   Probably October.

R. Wu argues that "in this context, the use of *a* embodies the speaker's less-than-full grasp of what has just been delivered or intended by another speaker and therefore can be viewed as invoking a contrast in the current knowledge or information state between a speaker and his or her co-participant" (2004: 131). However, as B. Li observes, the contrast reading associated with this context arises anyway, no matter whether *a* is present or not (2006: 38). The very action of posing a question about some content mentioned in the preceding speech already signifies the speaker's lack of understanding.

Aside from *a*-formulated questions, according to R. Wu (2004: 152), the low-pitch *a* can also be attached to "grammatically-constructed questions, such as question-word questions, disjunctive questions, or A-not-A questions." For instance, the sentence *nǐ qù bu qù a?* means 'do you go or not?'. Since *nǐ qù bu qù* 'do you go or not' itself is already a question, R. Wu terms these cases "*a*-attached questions." She states that in the case of "*a*-attached questions," the "deviance" marked by *a* is circumstantial in nature, and is most commonly associated with what the "*a* speaker" perceives as a problematic and/or unexpected aspect of a situation in the local conversation environment.

The following excerpt is adapted from R. Wu (2004: 169), with slight modifications which do not affect the meaning of the utterances. It is taken from a telephone conversation between a dancer (X) and one of her acquaintances (D). Prior to this excerpt, the dancer has talked about the sports injury she has been suffering from.

(10) (R. Wu 2004: 169, modified transcription, glosses and translation)

    1 D   nà-   kěshì jiù xiàng   yùndòngyuán a↑:, tāmen-
          that   but   just like   athlete   PRT 3PL

    2 D   xiàng yùndòngyuán de nà ge niánlíng   dōu bù cháng a↑.
          like   athlete   DE that CL age   all NEG long PRT

    3 X   duì   ya↑. [tāmen yě shì yíyàng [[yùndòng shānghài.
          right PRT   3PL   also be   same   sports   injury

    4 X   [jiù   shì yīnwèi-   [[yùndòng shānghài.
                   3PL   also be   sports   injury

→ 5 D   nà-(.) wǒ xiǎng- tiàowǔ dehuà yě huì bú huì zhèyàngzi a↓?
          that 1SG think   dance if   also will NEG will this.way   PRT

    6 X   huì.   tiàowǔ yě   shì   yíyàng.
          will   dance   also be   same

    7   (0.5)

    8 D   ou::.
          PRT

    D1-2: Then- but just like athletes, they- Like all athletes, the uh career life
            is not long.
    X3:   Yeah. They are the same. Sports injuries.
    D4-5: Just because of- sports injuries. And- I was wondering- if (you)
            dance, will (you) also be like this?
    X6:   Yes. Dancers are the same.
    D8:   Oh::.

R. Wu argues that D deploys an *a*-attached question in line 5 because the topic of
this conversation is a potentially sensitive one, as it is about the short career spans of
athletes. Asking such a question may be regarded as insensitive. R. Wu further ar-
gues that the lack of *a*-suffixing to the question results from the questioner's treat-

ment of the question being asked as "non-delicate and non-problematic" (2004: 171).

In my data, however, the *a*-attached questions do not necessarily occur in a problematic context. In example (11), M and F are talking about the 2001 Australian Open Tennis Championship.

(11) 1 M   dōu   shì   yìxiē   bǐjiào   yǒumíng de xuǎnshǒu dōu-
             all   be   some   relatively famous   DE player   all

      2 M   yǒu   jìnjí   bǐsài   zhèyàngzi.
             have rise.in.rank   competition this.way

      3 F   on.   ei   nà-
             PRT   PRT that

  →   4 F   qùnián gēn <E Hingis E> zài duìkàng nà ge shì shéi a↓?
             last.year with   PN   at   confront that CL be   who   PRT

      5 F   hǎoxiàng yí   ge   mán   niánqīng de   ma.
             seem   one CL   quite young   DE   PRT

      6 M   qùnián   dǎ   dào-   bǐjiào   hǎo de   shì- dàwēiliánsī a↑.
             last.year play arrive relatively good DE   be   PN   PRT

          M1-2: All of (them) are those more famous players, all- they all climbed in
                the ranking. That's it.
          F3-5: Oh. Well, then- the one who was competing against Martina Hingis
                last year…who's that? It seemed quite a young player.
          M6:   Last year the one who achieved…the better one was…Venus
                Williams.

Prior to this excerpt, they were exchanging information about the possible candidates for the championship. In lines 3–4, F deploys an *a*-attached question asking M whether he knows the name of the player who competed against Martina Hingis in the year before. It is hard to claim that the topic of this question is in any sense problematic.

3.2.5.2 High-pitch *a*: informing and disagreeing sequences

The second type of UFP *a* (i.e. high-pitch *a*) in R. Wu's (2004) analysis only occurs in non-interrogatives. These *a*-attached utterances commonly occur in two sequential contexts: "informing" and "disagreeing."

R. Wu (2004: 224) states that when *a* occurs in informing contexts, it serves to mark "the speaker's stance that the information provided in the *a*-attached utterance is something that the recipient should have known, or has displayed to have known otherwise." This is illustrated in example (12) (adapted from R. Wu ibid.: 184–5). In this excerpt, the conversation participants are discussing L's personal baseball playing history. Prior to this part of the conversation, L has confirmed that he had played in the national baseball league in Taiwan. In line 1, speaker R—L's long-term girlfriend—poses a question about when this happened. It is significant that L's responses in line 2 and line 4 are both attached by *a*.

(12) (R. Wu 2004: 184–5, modified transcription, glosses and translation)

	1 R	shénme	shíhòu?		
		what	time		

→	2 L	xiǎo	shíhòu	a↑.	
		little	time	PRT	

	3 R	nǐ	dǎ	guò	o.
		2SG	play	ASP	PRT

→	4 L	duì	a↑.	duì	a↑.
		right	PRT	right	PRT

	5 T	<S li	m	chai	ou? S>
		2SG	NEG	PRT	PRT

	6 R	wǒ	zhīdào tā	yǒu.	lìshǐ	hái	bù zhīdào.
		1SG	know 3SG	have	history	still	NEG know

R1:   When?
L2:   When I was a kid.
R3:   You played...

> L4:   Yes. Yes.
>
> T5:   You didn't know? (Southern Mǐn)
>
> R6:   I know he played but I didn't know about the history yet.

R. Wu claims that "L's deployment of *a*-suffixing here may be grounded in the presumption that R should have known his baseball-playing history is reinforced by co-participant T's subsequent reaction in line 5" (2004: 185). T's question clearly shows that he, too, does not expect R's knowledge of L's baseball-playing history.

R. Wu further argues that, when high-pitch *a* occurs in "disagreeing" contexts, it is regularly used to mark a speaker's "countervailing perspective" (ibid.: 222). Let us again turn to example (5). R. Wu argues that all the *a*-attached utterances in this excerpt are attached to utterances which are launched "either to disagree with a stated position by another, or to reassert one's own previously stated position which has just undergone an attack" (ibid: 207). In either case, the *a* speaker displays an oppositional stance vis-à-vis his interlocutor. Using *a* in the disagreeing utterance can strengthen a disagreeing stance. Although I agree with R. Wu that the *a*-attached disagreement sounds stronger than its counterpart without *a*, I do not think that the core function of *a* in these contexts is to mark the "deviance." As mentioned earlier, line 4 in example (11) does not, as R. Wu proposes, occur in a "problematic" context.

Thus far, I have introduced the main arguments of previous studies on the UFP *a* in both Mandarin and Taiwan Mandarin. It is generally agreed that the UFP *a* has two variants: high-pitch *a* and low-pitch *a* (cf. Shie 1991, C. C. Chu 2002, R. Wu 2004, B. Li 2006). However, a consensus about the core function of this particle has not been reached. Following Li and Thompson (1981), C. Z. Chu (1994) claims that *a* serves to reduce the forcefulness of the *a*-attached sentences. C. C. Chu (2002) and B. Li (2006) both state that *a* is a discourse marker, and the high pitch marks the "speaker orientation," whereas the low pitch marks the "hearer orientation." However, they have different view on the core function of *a*: C. C. Chu (2002) argues that the core function of *a* is to indicate the speaker's involvement, whereas B. Li (2006) believes that *a* serves to highlight the relevance of the utterance to its discourse context. R. Wu (2004) argues that the core property of *a* is to mark the "deviance." These different judgments may result from the different regional origins of the Mandarin data used in different studies. In what follows, I will put forth my own proposal of the core function of *a* in Taiwan Mandarin. Following previous studies (e.g. Shie 1991, C. C. Chu 2002, B. Li 2006, etc.), I divide Taiwan Mandarin *a* into two types: low-pitch *a* and high-pitch *a*. I suggest that the two types of *a* share

one core function: to mark knowledge activation. This proposed core function will be tested with my own Taiwan Mandarin data in 3.4.

3.3 Core function: marking knowledge activation

My proposal about the UFP *a* builds upon I. Li's (1999) analysis of Taiwan Southern Mǐn, which I extend to Taiwan Mandairn, but with a minor modification. I. Li claims that there are two functional types of UFP *a* in Taiwan Southern Mǐn, type one correlating with *a7/a1/a5* (hereafter: *a7* group), and type two with *a3/a2* (hereafter: *a3* group).[7] She proposes that these two types of *a* share the common characteristic of "indicating activation of prior or accessible knowledge" (ibid: 137) and suggests that the *a7* group signals "activation of the addressee's prior/accessible knowledge" and that the *a3* group signals "activation of the speaker's own knowledge state."[8] Although the contexts of I. Li's data of *a* in Taiwan Southern Mǐn and my Taiwan Mandarin data are not entirely identical, I. Li's proposal for the function of Taiwan Southern Mǐn *a* can be extended to Taiwan Mandarin *a*.

As I. Li does not clearly define what the "accessible knowledge" is,[9] I follow Cook (1990: 409) who proposes that the accessible knowledge includes both *common knowledge* and *shared knowledge*. According to Cook, common knowledge is "what the members of the society or a group are supposed to know," and shared knowledge includes two types of "sharedness": one is "knowledge assumed to be shared among the interlocutors or the members of a group but not necessarily assumed to be in the consciousness of the addressee at the time of the utterance" (ibid.). The other type is "knowledge that is assumed to be in the consciousness of the addressee at the time of the utterance."[10] Cook states that "'shared knowledge'

---

7   In I. Li (1999: 102-103), the numbers following *a* refer to different pitches. I. Li claims that the *a7* (with a mid-level pitch) and *a3* (with a low-falling pitch) form "two natural classes among the variants" (ibid.: 103). Given the fact that *a1* (high-level pitch) and *a5* (mid-rising pitch) and *a7* are generally interchangeable, I. Li (ibid.) believes that these three variants fall into the same category. The *a2* (with high-falling pitch) and *a3* are also treated as one group.

8   I. Li (1999: 124) treats *a2* (with high-falling pitch) as a variant of *a3* under modification of intonation. She only discusses the occurrences of *a3* in her study.

9   According to I. Li (1999: 136-7), *a7/a1/a5* "signals the speaker's attempt to activate the addressee's prior/accessible state of knowledge, i.e. he intends for his current utterance to be taken as having been present in the addressee's old knowledge or at least easily accessible to him from the context." In her study, she does not provide a clear definition of the "accessible knowledge."

10 Cook (1990: 409) mentions that the first type of shared knowledge is what Prince

in a particular speech situation may not be common in the society, and common knowledge in the society or group may not be shared knowledge among the interlocutors at the time of the speech. […] [A]ccessible knowledge is 'a union of common knowledge and shared knowledge'" (Cook 1990: 410).

It is important to note here that the activation states of knowledge, according to Chafe (1994: 53), can be categorized as *active*, *semiactive* or *inactive*, according to "whether some idea is in the focal, peripheral, or unconscious." Chafe (1994: 54) writes,

> Speakers realize, of course, that one or more other minds are involved in the communicative use of language. As they speak, they not only take account of the changing activation states of information in their own minds, but also attempt to appreciate parallel changes that are taking place in the minds of their listeners. Language is very much dependent on a speaker's beliefs about activation states in other minds.

In this thesis, "knowledge activation" is regarded as bringing some information to the "focal consciousness" (cf. Chafe 1994: 53). I argue that, analogous to Taiwan Southern Mǐn *a*, the use of UFP *a* in Taiwan Mandarin serves to explicitly mark the activation of knowledge. Following Shie (1991), I divide Taiwan Mandarin *a* into two types: low-pitch *a* and high-pitch *a*. I will argue that the low-pitch *a* signals the activation of the speaker's own knowledge, whereas the high-pitch *a* marks the activation of the addressee's common or shared knowledge (i.e. accessible knowledge).

3.3.1 Low-pitch *a*: activation of the speaker's own knowledge

According to Haviland and Clark (1974: 513), "communication is a cooperative effort between the speaker and listener." They claim that the speaker syntactically identifies the "given information" which he thinks his audience already knows, and the "new information," which he thinks his audience does not already know. This identification is crucial for the comprehension by the listener. The information marked as "given" leads the listener to search for its "antecedent" in memory, and then "integrate the new information into memory at that point" (ibid.).

(1978) calls "known information," whereas the second type is equivalent to the "given information" as defined by Chafe (1976: 30).

Building on this explanation, I propose that the deployment of a low-*a*-attached utterance can be seen as an explicit signal showing the moment of matching the new information with its "antecedent" (i.e. some relevant pre-existing knowledge) in the *a* speaker's own knowledge state. In other words, by using a low *a*-attached utterance, the *a* speaker shows that some of the old knowledge in his knowledge state has been activated because of some information given in the previous context. In order to test this claim, let us first re-examine example (9), repeated here as example (13):

(13)　1 L　　ei,　　nà　　jul-　j-　shénme　shíhòu　bìyè?
　　　　　　　PRT　　that　jul-　j-　what　　time　　graduate

　　　2　　　(.)

→　　3 T　　<E Julie E> a↓?
　　　　　　　　　　PN　　　PRT

　　　4 L　　hen.
　　　　　　　PRT

　　　5　　　(0.2)

　　　6 T　　dàgài　　shíyuè　　ba.
　　　　　　　probably　October　PRT

　　L1:　By the way, when will Jul- J- …graduate?
　　T3:　Julie?
　　L4:　Yeah.
　　T6:　Probably October.

I argue that the use of UFP *a* in line 3 does not mark deviance or contrast, as R. Wu (2004: 131) proposes, but indicates the activation of the speaker's own knowledge. Upon hearing the information L provided by saying *jul- j- shénme shíhòu bìyè* 'when will Jul- J- graduate' in line 1, T is searching his memory trying to identify the referent. In this case, the piece of information attached by *a* (i.e *Julie*) is the "antecedent" which has just been activated. By deploying *a*, T indicates that this piece of

information was hidden until it was activated. In order to make sure that L's utterance *jul- j-* refers to *Julie*, T invites L's confirmation.

In some cases, the activation of the knowledge state can be triggered by non-linguistic, i.e. circumstantial context. This is demonstrated in example (14), adapted from Lin (2003: 81). In this excerpt, speakers H and Y belong to two different drama troupes which happened to reserve the same theater for their rehearsals. Prior to this conversation, the rehearsal of H's troupe has been interrupted by Y, who declared that his troupe had the right of using the theater. In this conversation, Y states that the poster of his play "Arcadia" has been posted outside the theater. H deploys an *a*-attached utterance to indicate that this information was not within her focus of consciousness but is now being activated.

(14)   (Lin 2003: 81, modified transcription, glosses and translation)

  1 Y   wǒmen   míngtiān   yào   zhèngshì   gōngyǎn.
           1PL   tomorrow   will   formal   perform.in.public

  2 Y   wàimiàn   yǒu   yì   zhāng   hǎibào   táohuāyuán=
           outside   have   one   CL   poster   Arcadia

  3 Y   =wǒ   xiāngxìn   nǐmen   dōu   kàn   dào   le.
           1SG   believe   2PL   all   see   arrive   ASP

→ 4 H   táohuāyuán   jiù   shì   nǐmen   a↓!
           Arcadia   just   be   2PL   PRT

     Y1-3: Tomorrow we will give a formal performance in public. There is a
            poster "Arcadia" outside, I believe that you all saw it.
     H4:   "Arcadia"—that's you guys!

Here, having perceived what Y has said in lines 1–3, H's utterance in line 4 shows that she matches the information provided by Y (i.e, there is a poster hanging outside) and its "antecedent" in her memory, since she has seen that poster prior to this conversation. The *a*-attached utterance in line 4 indicates the activation of H's knowledge, as if saying: "now I get it."

It is worth noting that in my data, the low-pitch *a* often occurs in questions. However, the utterances attached by low *a* do not always require confirmation or an

answer. Some of them just serve to indicate that the speaker has received the information, as shown in (14).

So far I have demonstrated how my proposed core function can account for the examples discussed in previous studies. I suggest that the low *a* in these examples serves to mark the activation of the speaker's own knowledge state.

3.3.2 High-pitch *a*: activation of addressee's common or shared knowledge

The high *a* in Taiwan Mandarin, in contrast, serves to activate the addressee's common or shared knowledge. It is typically used in the following two situations: (i) the addressee has just displayed his/her lack of knowledge that the speaker supposes the addressee should have had; (ii) the speaker believes that once some old information in the addressee's knowledge has been activated, the addressee can easily comprehend what the speaker intends to say at the time of the utterance.

Representing situation (1), i.e. the occurrence of high *a*, example (15) is part of example (3), cited from R. Wu (2004: 181). Here, H's question displays his lack of knowledge, a knowledge X supposes H should have had.

(15)   1 H   ei, wèishénme huì   duō   yì wǎn fàn zài nàbiān?
                 PRT why   can   additional one CL   rice at there

  →   2 X   hái yǒu <E Victor E>   a↑
                 still have   Victor   PRT

       H1:   Hey, how come there is an additional bowl of rice over there?
       X2:   There is still Victor.

I agree with B. Li's (2006: 47) judgment that in this situation, the utterance in line 2 indicates that "the speaker X thinks that H should have known the answer." Moreover, I believe that X's deployment of a high *a* here displays his intention to activate H's knowledge. In other words, X believes that H should have known the reason why there is an additional bowl of rice over there and wants to remind him (i.e., activate his knowledge) of this.

Example (5), which is repeated here as example (16), demonstrates situation (ii), i.e. the occurrence of high *a*. As mentioned earlier, in this excerpt, speakers X and W have different opinions regarding the ticket prices of China Airlines.

(16) 1 C   kěshì huáháng   gēn chángróng dōu shì bǐjiào   guì   de.
               but   China.airlines and Eva.air   all be relatively expensive DE

  → 2 X   jùshuō huáháng   hěn piányí a↑.
               it's.said China.airlines very cheap   PRT

     3 C   tāmen   gèng piányí.
               3PL   more cheap

  → 4 W   bú   huì ba. huáháng   hái shì hěn guì   a↑.
               NEG   can PRT China.airlines still be very expensive PRT

  → 5 X   jùshuō xiànzài yǐjīng bǐjiào   piányí le   a↑.
               it's.said now   already relatively cheap PRT PRT

     6 X   kěshì yào rěnshòu shēngmìng- rěnshòu shēngmìng de wéixiǎn.
               but   need bear   life   bear   life   DE danger

     C1:   But both China Airlines and Eva Airlines are more expensive.
     X2:   I heard that China Airlines was very cheap.
     C3:   They are cheaper.
     W4:   No way. China Airlines is still very expensive.
     X5-6: I heard that it has already become cheaper now, but you need to
           tolerate- tolerate the risk of life.

Here, due to a lack of previous context, it is difficult to judge X's motivation for
deploying an *a*-attached utterance in line 2. However, according to the judgments of
Mandarin speakers (from both mainland China and Taiwan), the utterance in line 2
carries an overtone of "(why don't you know that/it's strange that you don't know
that) China Airlines is very cheap," whereas its counterpart without *a* does not.

W's objection in line 4 to X's argument in line 2 is at the same time the
agreement with C's assertion in line 1. This agreement is based on W's shared
knowledge with C. In other words, the proposition "China Airlines is (relatively)
expensive" is already shared by the conversational participants W and C, but not by
X. In such a context, the deployment of *a*-attached utterances functions to activate
interlocutor X's knowledge for reaching a consensus. Among the three *a*-attached

utterances in this excerpt, the utterance in line 5 is a rephrased form of line 2, with the addition of some extra information. The information the utterance in line 5 carries can thus be seen as given information in this context. I therefore propose that all the *a*-attached utterances in example (16) carry the information the *a* speaker supposes the hearer should have known.

The utterances in line 2 and line 5 are both initiated by *jùshuō* 'it's said', which may be seen as an indication of X's own information source. If this is the case, these two utterances do not seem compatible with my argument that *a* serves to activate the addressee's knowledge which s/he is supposed to know, since what "is said" to the *a* speaker need not be known to the addressee. Following Feng's (2008: 1701) argument that *jùshuō* in Mandarin "reveals the degree of the speaker's commitment to the truth of a proposition," I claim that the use of *jùshuō* here is not an indication of the information source. It merely shows that the speaker is to a certain extent committed to what he said. It therefore does not affect my analysis. If the occurrences of UFP *a* in line 2 and 5 are left out, the utterances in lines 2 and 5 are merely simple assertions without any implication or expectation.

The last example introduced in this section is example (17), which is a repetition of (12). As mentioned earlier, prior to this part of the conversation, L has confirmed that he had played in the National Baseball League in Taiwan, and speaker R, who is L's long-term girlfriend, asks when this happened.

(17)   1 R   shénme shíhòu?
                what   time

  →   2 L   xiǎo   shíhòu   a↑.
                little   time   PRT

       3 R   nǐ   dǎ   guò   o.
                2SG   play   ASP   PRT

  →   4 L   duì   a↑.   duì   a↑.
                right   PRT   right   PRT

       5 T   <S li   m   chai   ou? S>
                   2SG NEG   PRT   PRT

6 R   wǒ   zhīdào tā   yǒu.   lìshǐ   hái   bù   zhīdào.
         1SG   know   3SG   have   history   still   NEG   know

   R1:   When?
   L2:   When I was a kid.
   R3:   You played...
   L4:   Yes. Yes.
   T5:   You didn't know? (Southern Mǐn)
   R6:   I know he had but I didn't know about the history yet.

If line 2 is not followed by *a*, it is just a simple answer without any implication. However, as R is L's long-term girl friend, it is reasonable to suppose that she should have known L's baseball playing history. Quite tellingly, in line 4, L deploys an *a*-attached confirmation *duì a duì a* 'right, right' to R's question *nǐ dǎ guò o* 'have you played before' in line 3. Since the answer has already been given in the prior context, the *a*-attached confirmation implies that the addressee should have known it, as if saying "yes of course." This is further supported by the fact that in line 5, R's lack of knowledge is emphasized by another interlocutor T. His question *li m chai ou* 'you didn't know' implies that L's baseball playing history should be shared knowledge among the interlocutors.

    Thus far I have developed my proposal on the basis of examples from the literature. I propose that low *a* serves to indicate the activation of speaker's own knowledge, whereas high *a* serves to activate the addressee's knowledge. In other words, the use of high *a* indicates that the *a*-attached information is something the speaker supposes the addressee should have known. Alternatively, the speaker supposes that a certain piece of knowledge possessed by the addressee needs to be activated so that the addressee and the speaker can easily reach a consensus in conversation. This proposal corresponds closely to C. C. Chu's (2002: 26) proposal according to which low *a* signals "speaker-orientation" that is "primarily meant for the speaker him-/herself" (ibid.), whereas the high *a*, is "addressee-orientation," implying that the *a*-attached utterance is "intentionally directed to the addressee" (ibid.).

3.4 UFP *a* in Taiwan Mandarin

In this section, I will test my hypothesis with my corpus of Taiwan Mandarin data. I will discuss the occurrences of *a* according to their distributional contexts. These are, for the low-pitch *a*: questions, exclamations, and discourse topic-introduction. These distributional contexts are basically the same as in mainland Mandarin.

For the high-pitch *a,* however, the distributional contexts in Taiwan Mandarin and mainland Mandarin are not completely identical. In Taiwan Mandarin, the high-pitch *a* can be found in (i) discourse topic-introduction, (ii) storytelling and reporting, (iii) disagreements and agreements, (iv) answers, and (v) requests. As shown at the beginning of this chapter, according to my preliminary test among mainland Mandarin speakers, some cases of high-pitch *a* in Taiwan Mandarin are different from that in mainland Mandarin. In section 3.4.4, I introduce these cases.

3.4.1 Low-pitch *a* in questions

As in mainland Mandarin, there are two types of low-pitch *a*-attachment in Taiwan Mandarin questions: (i) to a piece of information provided by the previous context, turning this piece of given information into a question, or (ii) directly to a question. Here I use R. Wu's (2004) terms: "*a*-formulated question" and "*a*-attached question" to refer to these two types of question respectively. Low *a*-questions are usually responses to the information provided in a prior context. They are, in other words, triggered by the discourse context. If we compare the following three questions, (18a) and (18b) can be initiated without a prior context. However, (18c) requires a prior context (either linguistically or non-linguistic/circumstantial). For example, (18c) is naturally uttered when the speaker becomes aware that the addressee is going to Taipei.

(18)   a.   nǐ qù bú   qù   táiběi?
              2$_{SG}$ go NEG   go   Taipei
              'Do you go to Taipei or not?'

          b.   nǐ   qù táiběi ma?
              2$_{SG}$ go Taipei PRT
              'Do you go to Taipei'

          c.   nǐ   qù táiběi a↓?
              2$_{SG}$ go Taipei PRT
              'Do you go to Taipei'

In everyday conversations, according to Keenan and Schieffelin (1976: 337), "much of the talk that occurs concerns propositions about persons, objects, or ideas." When these referents are not known to the hearer, "the hearer initiates a series of fairly predictable exchanges directed at clarifying and locating the referent about which some claim is being made" (ibid.). One predictable way for the listener to clarify the referent in Taiwan Mandarin is to pose an *a*-attached question in order to receive the speaker's confirmation, as in example (19).

Prior to excerpt (19), H and L have been discussing the fact that legislators in Taiwan always "put on a show" when the media is present. In lines 1 and 3–4, H mentions a legislator Lo Fu-chu (Luó Fúzhù) who, after hitting people, used to say that the victims all became famous. In line 5, L interrupts H's claim and suggests a possible victim Lee Ching-an (Lǐ Qìng'ān) and attaches the low *a* to the suggested name.

(19) 1 H   e Luó Fúzhù bú   shì dǎ   rén   ma?
                uh PN   NEG   be   hit person   PRT

      2 L   duì   a↑.
                right   PRT

      3 H   ránhòu nà   ge bèi dǎ de   rén bú jiù   dōu chūmíng ma?
                then   that CL BEI hit DE person just all   famous   PRT

      4 H   wǒ   juéde @@   yě   mán-
                1SG   think (laughter) also quite

→   5 L   Lǐ Qìng'ān a↓?
                PN   PRT

      6 H   duì   duì   nà   yě   mán   jué   de.
                right   right   that also quite unique   DE

      H1:   Uh, Lo Fu-chu, he hits people, right?
      L2:   Right.
      H3-4: Then those who were hit became famous? I think, ha ha, that's also
             quite…

L5:   Lee Ching-an?

H6:   Right. Right. Right. That's quite interesting.

The *a*-formulated question in line 5 is an explicit signal showing the moment of matching the new information and its antecedent in L's memory. In other words, by using an *a*-formulated question, L shows that some of the old knowledge (in this case, the name Lee Ching-an has been activated). In the example above, L's proposed name of a victim is confirmed by H in line 6. However, as mentioned in 3.3.1, in some contexts, the *a*-formulated question does not necessarily require confirmation, but simply marks that the speaker's knowledge state has been activated. In such instances, *a*-attachment can be seen as a signal that the speaker indicates his reception of what the other has just said (as in this example), or of what he has just realized from the non-verbal circumstance (as indicated in (14)).

In example (20), M and F are talking about a tennis player. M says in line 2 that this player is currently the number one in the world ranking. In line 3, F first deploys an *a*-formulated question to show her reception of what M has just said, then immediately poses another *ma*-question (truth-value-seeking) for this information. Here, F's *a*-formulated question in line 3 *dìyīmíng a* 'first place' is taken by M as a signal of F's reception of the information he provided. Based on this piece of activated knowledge, she poses a relevant question *bú shì Kuerten ma?* 'isn't that Kuerten?'

(20)   1 M   jiù   shì   tā   de-   zǒng jīfēn   a↑,
                just be   3_{SG}   DE   total point   PRT

        2 M   xiànzài shì   děngyú dìyīmíng.   duì.
                now   be   equal.to first.place   right

→   3 F   dìyīmíng   a↓? bú   shì   <E Kuerten E>   ma?
                first.place   PRT NEG BE   PN   PRT

        4 M   <E Kuerten E> yǒushíhòu shì   dìyī yǒushíhòu shì   dì'èr.
                    PN   sometimes be   first sometimes be   second

    M1-2:   His total points… now he is the number one, right.

    F3:   Number one... Isn't that Kuerten?

    M4:   Kuerten…sometimes he's number one, and sometimes number two.

When *a* is attached to a piece of information which the previous speaker has uttered, as shown in (19) and (20), these *a*-formulated questions indicate that the speaker's own knowledge has been activated due to some information given in the previous context. In what follows, I will demonstrate another two examples of *a*-attached question (i.e. *a* is used directly after a question).

Let us turn to example (10), repeated here as example (21). Prior to this conversation, M and F were exchanging information about the possible candidates for the Australian Open Tennis Championship.

(21)	1 M	dōu	shì	yìxiē	bǐjiào	yǒumíng	de	xuǎnshǒu	dōu-
		all	be	some	relatively	famous	DE	player	all

	2 M	yǒu	jìnjí	bǐsài	zhèyàngzi.
		have	rise.in.rank	competition	this.way

	3 F	on.	ei	nà-
		PRT	PRT	that

→	4 F	qùnián	gēn	\<E Hingis E\>	zài	duìkàng	nà	ge	shì	shéi	a↓?
		last.year	with	PN	at	confront	that	CL	be	who	PRT

	5 F	hǎoxiàng	yí	ge	mán	niánqīng	de	ma.
		seem	one	CL	quite	young	DE	PRT

	6 M	qùnián	dǎ	dào-	bǐjiào	hǎo	de	shì-	dàwēiliánsī	a↑.
		last.year	play	arrive	relatively	good	DE	be	PN	PRT

M1-2: All of them are those more famous players, all- they all climbed in the ranking. That's it.

F3-5: Oh. Well, then- the one who competed against Martina Hingis last year…who's that? It seemed quite a young player.

M6: Last year the one who achieved…the better one is…Venus Williams.

In lines 1–2, M reports to F that all the famous players climbed in the ranking. In lines 3–4, F deploys an *a*-attached question asking M whether he knows the name of the player who competed against Martina Hingis in the year before. Note that in line

3, F first utters a prolonged *on*, then a turn-initial particle *ei* with a rising contour.[11] I believe that F's deployment of *ei* here is to indicate that a piece of her own knowledge has been activated by the preceding talk, i.e. something has just come to her mind. She then intends to make a turn relating to the activated knowledge. The *a*-attached question is thus a result of this knowledge activation.

Example (22) is another instance of a low *a*-attached question. Prior to this conversation, R has told S that her friend C got married because of premarital pregnancy. This was quite surprising, as C was known for her conservative lifestyle. In order to demonstrate C's conservative attitude, R gives an example that she once went to an open-air hot spring with C and C's boyfriend. According to R, C and her boyfriend were so conservative that they even wore swimming suits.

(22) 1 R   yīnwèi   tā   bìng   bú xiàng shì nà   zhǒng rén   a↑,
              because 3SG actually NEG like be that kind person PRT

      2 R   yǐqián   gēn   tā   chūqù xǐ-
              before   with 3SG   go.out wash-

      3 R   wàimiàn xǐ   ge nà zhǒng lùtiān   wēnquán   a↑,
              outside   wash CL that kind open-air   hot.spring PRT

      4 R   tā   gēn   tā   nánpéngyǒu   qù xǐ-
              3SG with 3SG   boy.friend   go wash-

      5 R   e fǎnzhèng jiù shì xǐ   de hěn bǎoshǒu   jiù duì le la↓.
              uh anyway   just be wash DE very conservative just right PRT PRT

      6 S   chuān   yǒngyī   chuān   yǒngkù.
              wear   swimming.suits wear   swimming.trunks

      7 R   duì a↑. @@
              right PRT (laughter)

---

[11] Here, the *on* functions as English *oh*, which can be used to display the hearer's understanding of the preceding talk (cf. Heritage 1984: 320). Tsai (2008: 1025) claims that "the *Ei*-prefaced question exhibits close association with the inquiries that build on the preceding talk, yet explores certain previously non-focal part/ dimension of what has just been produced."

→ 8 S   en nà   zhèyàng   xǐ   ge shénme a↓?
          eh that this.way   wash   CL what   PRT

  9 R   xǐ   wēnquán   a↑.
          wash   hot.spring   PRT

R1-5:   Because she is not like that kind of person. I once went out with her
        to take- we went to take one of those open-air hot springs. She went
        with her boy friend to take a bath…The way they took the bath was
        just very conservative.
S6:   Wearing swimming suits and swimming trunks.
R7:   Right (laughter).
S8:   Eh…what kind of bath is that?
R9:   Hot spring.

In line 6, S mentions the conservative way of taking bath in a hot spring, that is, to
wear swimming suits. Receiving the confirmation by R, in line 8, S attaches *a* to the
end of his question *nà zhèyàng xǐ ge shénme*? 'what kind of bath is that?'. In line 9,
R's response, followed by a high *a*, implies that the answer is obvious (see
discussion in 3.4.7).

    I argue that the use of low *a* with a question again serves to indicate the
activation of the speakers own knowledge: in (22), by using this *a*-attached question,
S informs R that the reason why he has posed such a question is because a certain
part of his knowledge has been activated from the previous context (in this example,
he realizes the fact that C wore swimming suits while taking a bath in hot spring).
This concurs with the following explanation by I. Li (1999: 130):

    If the preceding discourse has activated the speaker's old knowledge and
    prompted him to raise the question, then most likely there must have been
    something in the discourse that did not agree with his prior conception and has
    thus caused a change of his knowledge state.

Thus far we have seen cases of low *a* in questions. Compared to other question
forms in Mandarin, such as *ma*-attached questions, a low *a*-attached question is usu-
ally not self-initiated, but typically triggered by the discourse contexts. The deploy-

ment of *a* after both "*a*-formulated question" and "*a*-attached question" is to signal that the speaker's own knowledge has been activated by the prior contexts.

3.4.2 Low-pitch *a* in exclamations

In my data, there is only one *a*-attached exclamation. In this example, the low-pitch *a* forms a fixed expression *tiān a* 'my goodness', as shown in (23). In the context prior to this example, K and W have been talking about a baseball stadium in Taipei and the ticket price for watching a game. In line 1, K, who has been to this stadium, tells W about his experience. In line 2, W deploys an *a*-attached exclamation to show his surprise.

(23) 1 K   nà   shíhòu   wǒ   kàn   wǔ   bǎi.
             that   time   1SG   see   five   hundred

→ 2 W   tiān   a↓!   nà   yǒu   shénme   zhéjiàquàn?
             sky   PRT   that have   what   coupon

K1:   At that time I paid five hundred dollars.
W2:   My goodness! Did you get any coupons?

Here, the usage is similar to what we have seen in (22): the *a*-attached exclamation is used when something in the prior context has activated the speaker's own knowledge state. By using this kind of *a*-attached expression, the speaker shows that part of his knowledge has been activated at the time of the utterance. In this example, W makes such an *a*-attached exclamation at the moment when he realizes the fact that K has paid a very low price for a baseball game ticket.

3.4.3 Low-pitch *a* in discourse topic-introduction

Except for being attached to questions and exclamations, the low-pitch *a* is also used for the introduction of a discourse topic.[12] Here, the low-pitch *a* likewise serves to indicate the activation of the speaker's own knowledge state. Concretely speaking, it indicates that during the conversation, the speaker's knowledge state has been activated due to some information given in the previous context. Consequently, a

---

12   Here, I follow Keenan and Schieffelin (1976: 380), who define discourse topic as "not a simple NP but a proposition (about which some claim is made or elicited)."

new topic comes to the speaker's mind. The speaker then introduces this new topic to the ongoing conversation.

Prior to the conversation in example (24), M and K have been talking about earlier flood problems in Taiwan. In lines 1–2, M tells K that he had discussed this problem with some friends a few days ago. In lines 4–5, M introduces a new discourse topic "origin of the name of the city of Xìzhǐ" by asking whether K knows about it. Here, before posing the question, M attaches a low-pitch *a* to Xìzhǐ, the key referent of this topic in line 4.

(24) 1 M qiánjǐtiān   gēn   péngyǒu yě   shì zài liáo zhè   ge-
          few.days.ago   with   friend   also be at chat this   CL

      2 M zhè   ge- yānshuǐ zhè ge-   wèntí.
          this   CL   flood   this CL   problem

      3 K mm.
          BC

→   4 M nǐ   zhīdào   yǐqián- xìzhǐ   a↓,
          2SG   know   before   PN   PRT

      5 M zhè ge- xìzhǐ- zhè ge-   dìmíng   zěnme yóulái   ma?
          this CL   PN   this CL   place.name how   origin   PRT

      M1-2: Recently I was talking with friends about this… this flood, this
            problem.
      K3:   Hmm.
      M4-5: Do you know, before, that Xìzhǐ …that Xìzhǐ, the name of that
            place…where does it come from?

In this case, the low-pitch *a* is used to signal the activation of M's knowledge state. As it is well-known in Taiwan that Xìzhǐ is a city which frequently suffers from flooding during the typhoon season, the deployment of low-pitch *a* indicates that the *a*-attached information (i.e. Xìzhǐ) has just come to speaker M's mind triggered by the previous discussion. However, as this piece of information has just come to the speaker's mind, he is not yet prepared to make an immediate subsequent elaboration about this new topic. This is why sometimes, when the low-pitch *a* occurs in such a

context, it behaves like a pause marker[13]—the speaker uses *a* to prepare his next utterance. This nicely fits the fact that in line 5, the speaker uses the pause marker *zhège* 'this' two times to signal that he is still preparing his next utterance.[14] In other words, we can assume that he is not yet prepared to elaborate at the moment when the *a*-attached utterance is made because the piece of information has only just been activated.

Thus far I have introduced three different distributional contexts of low-pitch *a*. These occurrences do not contradict my claim that the low-pitch *a* signals the activation of the speaker's own knowledge.

3.4.4 High-pitch *a* in discourse topic-introduction

In what follows, I will introduce five types of context of high-pitch *a* in my data: (i) discourse topic-introduction, (ii) storytelling/reporting, (iii) disagreements/agreements, (iv) answers, and (v) requests. As mentioned, my claim is that high-pitch *a* serves to mark activation of the addressee's knowledge in these contexts. The prerequisite of this kind of *a*-deployment is: the speaker assumes that the addressee already possesses a certain knowledge that can be activated.

Like its low-pitch counterpart, high-pitch *a* can occur in the context of discourse topic introduction. It can be attached directly to a topic, or to some other piece of information in anticipation of the following topic. By using *a*, the speaker intends to activate the addressee's knowledge and direct the addressee's focus to the topic in question. Examples (25)–(27) demonstrate this use. In (25), at the very beginning of the conversation, speaker T attaches *a* to *Qú Měifèng shìjiàn* the 'Chu Mei-feng (Qú Měifèng) affair'[15], which is the topic she intends to discuss with the interlocutor.

(25) → 1 T   Qú Měifèng   shìjiàn   a↑   bú   shì   hěn   rèmén   ma?
             PN   affair   PRT   NEG   be   very   hot   PRT

---

[13]   This observation is similar to what I. Li (1999: 126) observes for the Southern Mǐn UFP *a3*.

[14]   Huang (1999: 88) refers to *zhège* 'this' as a pause marker signaling that "although the speaker takes (or continues to hold) the turn, s/he is not fully prepared." He claims that "[s]peakers may pause to make a lexical choice or to formulate a syntactic frame or to gather their thought (conceptual planning)."

[15]   The "Chu Mei-feng affair" refers to a sexual scandal involving a female politician in 2001 in Taiwan.

2 T	wǒ	juéde	zhè-	zhè ge	shì-	zhè-
	1SG	think	this	this CL	be	this

3 T	zhè ge-		zhè ge-	huàtí	hěn	tèshū	a↑,
	this CL		this CL	topic	very	special	PRT

4 T	jiù	shì	shuō	yǐqián	cónglái	méi	yǒu	fāshēng	guò,
	just	be	say	before	ever	NEG	have	happen	ASP

5 T	a	nǐ	rènwéi	zěnmeyàng	lei?
	PRT	2SG	think	how	PRT

T1-5:   The "Chu Mei-feng affair" is quite popular, isn't it? I think this-
this- this- this topic is very special. I mean, something like this has
never happened before. What do you think about that?

According to Keenan and Schieffelin (1976: 339), in a conversation, "the hearer must know what proposition the speaker is adding new information to or requesting new information about" in order to collaborate on a discourse topic. The listener's knowledge should be taken into consideration when the speaker selects a discourse topic. In other words, the speaker must "insure that the proposition that constitutes the discourse topic is known to or knowable by the listener" (ibid.). Given that the speakers should make all possible effort to make sure that the listener can identify the referent they are talking about, some conversational devices must be implemented to this end. In this respect, *a*-attachment is one of the devices serving to help the listener identify the referent easily in the process of new-topic-introduction.

Since high *a* serves to activate the addressee's common or shared knowledge, it is suitable to be used for establishing the referent. Once this knowledge has been activated, the discourse topic will become more accessible. Returning to example (25), T's high *a*-attached utterances in line 1 and the following lines show her efforts in establishing a clear referent for the listener. The information attached by *a* (i.e. Chu Mei-feng affair) was a very well-known topic in Taiwan, which T supposed that her interlocutor (another Taiwanese) should know about. With the deployment of *a*, speaker T helps the listener to identify the referent by activating the listener's knowledge state.

As already shown earlier in example (1), repeated here as example (26), *a* is attached to a piece of information related to a new topic, in order to direct the hearer's attention to the following topic. In this excerpt, *a* is attached to the time word *qùnián* 'last year', which is the temporal background of the following discourse topic (the tennis tournament). With the deployment of *a*, the speaker directs the hearer's attention to a certain period of time which is the focus of the following topic. Here, F's repetition *qùnián* 'last year' can be seen as an action to register the receipt of the information (cf. Wong 2000: 411). In other words, it clearly shows that this piece of information has been successfully received by the speaker.

(26) → 1 M   qùnián   a↑   nǐ   yǒu kàn nà ge wǎngqiú gōngkāi sài   ma?
                last.year   PRT   2SG   have see that CL tennis   open   game PRT

      2 F   qùnián(.) yǒu   a↑.
                last.year   have PRT

      M1:   Did you watch the tennis tournament last year?
      F2:   Last year, yes I did.

In example (27), speaker R proposes a new discourse topic to her interlocutor. In this excerpt, R not only attaches *a* to the time word *zuìjìn* 'recently', but also to the following assertion *wǒmen kàn hěn duō zázhì* 'we read lots of magazines'. Similar to the use in (25) and (26), with the deployment of *a*, the speaker intends to activate the interlocutor's knowledge and directs the interlocutor's attention to the following discourse topic.

(27)   1 R   wǒ   xiǎng   gēn   nǐ   tán   jiù shì-
                1SG   want   with 2SG talk   just be

   → 2 R   zuìjìn   a↑::
                recently   PRT

   → 3 R   wǒmen   kàn hěn   duō   zázhì   a↑
                1PL   see very many magazine PRT

      4 R   yóuqí   shì shénme zuì- qù- yǒu yī ge xīn de zázhì=
                especially be want   most go have one CL new DE magazine

        5 R   =yī zhōukān yǒu-   lái   táiwān   ma.
                  one weekly   have   come   Taiwan   PRT

        R1-5: What I want to say, the- recently, we read lots of magazines,
               especially last- there is a new magazine "Next Magazine" coming to
               Taiwan.

In line 3, speaker R uses *wǒmen* 'we' as the subject of her assertion, which shows
that the assertion made in line 3 is "mutually-experienced-knowledge" in the speak-
er's presupposition. Note that in line 2, the UFP *a* is prolonged. In this way, the ef-
fect of this kind of knowledge activation appears to be strengthened. By using *a* in
lines 2 and 3, speaker R intends to activate a specific part of the addressee's prior
knowledge and help the addressee to access the proposed topic easily.

    As mentioned previously, this use is not accepted by my informants from
mainland China. However, it is interesting to note that this kind of use can actually
be found in the Southern Mǐn spoken in Taiwan. Example (28) is extracted from a
longer example provided by I. Li (1999: 107).[16] In this excerpt, F is talking with his
family about how difficult it is to serve as a public employee. From line 1 to line 4,
F introduces the topic Ong Chhiu-long (Ong5 Chiu1long5), while presenting the
story about the topic in line 5. According to I. Li, the topic is a public figure in the
speech community; the speaker obviously supposes that his addressees must have
had some knowledge of it. I. Li claims that "since this topic is being newly
introduced into this discourse, it is thus most likely not within the addressees'
current focus of attention" (ibid.). Therefore, the speaker tries to deploy an
a-attached topic twice, in order to ensure successful activation of the addressees'
prior knowledge.

(28) (Taiwan Southern Mǐn data, I. Li 1999: 107, modified transcription and
     glosses)

   → 1 F   ing2kue3 co3   kue3 soo1o3- soo1o3 tin3tionn2 he1 e5 a↑
                 before   serve ASP   PN   PN   magistrate that CL PRT

---

[16] In the original expert, the two occurrences of *a* in lines 1 and 2 are marked as *a1*
      and *a7* respectivly. As I. Li (1999: 104) categorizes the *a7*, *a1* and *a5* in her data
      as "the higher-pitch group" and *a3* "the low-pitch," I use the upwards arrow (↑)
      to refer to the first group, and the downwards arrow (↓) for the second group.

→ 2 F   Ong5 Chiu1long5 a↑,
             PN   PRT

  3 F   kau2 bue2a2 beh4 kah4 lang5   king3suan2
             to   end   want with person run.for

  4 F   kuan7tionn2   he1 e5.
             county-magistrate that CL

  5 F   co3   nng7- nng7 jim7 e   tin3tionn2 hoNn,
             do   two   two term DE   magistrate PRT

  F1-5:   The guy who used to be So-o, Magistrate of So-o… Ong Chhiu-
           long, (remember him?) The one who later ran for the position of
           County Magistrate. He served as a magistrate for two, two
           terms…

In short, in both Taiwan Mandarin and Taiwan Southern Mǐn, high *a* can be attached
to something that the speaker supposes the addressee should have known but which
is probably not on his/her mind at the moment when the topic is introduced. In other
words, by using high *a*, the speaker signals that the newly-introduced topic actually
already exists in the hearer's previous knowledge and needs to be activated. The
function of high *a* in this context is thus to activate the hearer's knowledge and
direct the hearer's focus of attention to a newly introduced topic.

3.4.5 High-pitch *a* in storytelling/reporting

The second type of high-pitch *a* context are storytelling/reporting turns. In this type
of context, *a* can be attached to an assessment, or to a piece of information in the
speakers exemplification. I argue that when *a* occurs in this context, it still serves to
activate the addressee's knowledge.

    Example (29) demonstrates the use of *a* in an assessment. Prior to excerpt (29),
M and F have been talking about the performance and the dress of a female tennis
player. In this excerpt, M makes some comments on what this player was wearing in
the games of this year. In lines 1–2, he makes an assessment that the way she
dressed was more conservative than in previous years. After giving evidence to

support his first assessment in lines 4, 5 and 7, he concludes his comment in line 8, which is attached by UFP *a*.

(29) 1 M   tā   jīnnián   chuān   de   bǐjiào   bǎoshǒu,
              3SG this.year   wear   DE   relati   conservative

      2 M   méi   yǒu   xiàng- e
              NEG have   like   uh

      3 F   chuān   ge   lòubèi   de   @@.
              wear   CL   barebacked   DE   (laughter)

      4 M   qián   jǐ   nián dōu chuān nà   zhǒng yǒudiǎn xiàng sān-
              before several year all   wear   that kind   a.bit   like   three

      5 M   e   jiù   shì-   lòu   dùqí   zhèyàng yǒu   méi   yǒu?
              uh   just be   show   navel   this.way have   NEG have

      6 F   @@
              (laughter)

      7 M   jīnnián   hǎoxiàng shì chuān bǐjiào   liánshēn de nà zhǒng,
              this.year   seem   be   wear   relatively one-piece DE that kind

  →   8 M   gǎnjué   bǐjiào   méi   yǒu   nàme   pùlù   a↑.
              feeling   relatively NEG have   that   bare   PRT

      M1-2:   The way she dressed this year is more conservative. Not like-
              uh….
      F3:   Wearing a barebacked dress… (laughter)
      M4-5:   In the last years she always dressed in that kind of…three…
              uh…you could see her navel, have you ever seen that?
      F6:   (laughter)
      M7-8:   This year, she is apparently wearing something like a one-piece
              dress. It doesn't make that much of a naked impression...

The reason why the utterance in line 8 is attached by *a* is that this assessment contains information the speaker supposes the hearer knows but is not aware of at the time of the utterance: M's assessment in line 8 is actually a rephrased statement of his first assessment in line 1: *tā jīnnián chuān de bǐjiào bǎoshǒu* 'the way she dressed this year is more conservative', which is given in the previous conversation and can be seen as a sort of "given information."

Note that in line 5, M asks F whether she has seen the dresses the tennis player has been wearing in previous years. However, he does not receive any satisfactory answer from F, but only laughter. This uncooperative response may lead to M's move in line 8, showing M's intention to activate F's prior knowledge and his expectation concerning F's cooperation.

Now let us re-examine example (25) (repeated here as example (30)) and look at the instances of *a* attachment we have not discussed above. As mentioned earlier, speaker T introduces a new discourse topic (i.e. the Chu Mei-feng affair) and makes efforts to get a response from the interlocutor. In line 1, she poses a question to elicit an answer from the addressee but fails. In lines 2–3, T makes a second attempt: an *a*-attached assessment.

Ford and Fox (1996: 161) state that "[a]n assessment allows the speaker to display his/her attitudes towards characters and events in a story and thereby to indicate to the recipients how they should respond to this story." By making an assessment, T gives an indication to her addressee to respond. Note that this assessment contains the information she supposes the interlocutor knows but probably not consciously (the reason why the interlocutor should know may lie in the topicality of this issue, which was widely discussed in Taiwanese society). With the *a*-attached assessment, speaker T intends to activate more of the interlocutor's knowledge of this issue, and expects the interlocutor's response based on the activated knowledge. However, she fails again to receive the expected response, but only silence.

In line 4, T makes her third attempt. She explicitly explains the reason why she makes such an assessment, which can be regarded as a stronger way to activate the interlocutor's knowledge state. In line 5, she directly poses a question requesting the interlocutor's response, which shows her strong intention to receive a collaborative move.

(30) 1 T   Qú Měifèng   shìjiàn   a↑   bú shì hěn   rèmén   ma?
            PN   affair   PRT NEG be very   hot   PRT

2 T   wǒ   juéde   zhè- zhè ge shì-   zhè-
       1SG think   this this CL be   this

→ 3 T zhè ge-   zhè ge- huàtí hěn   tèshū   a↑,
       this CL   this CL topic very   special PRT

4 T   jiù shì shuō   yǐqián cónglái méi yǒu   fāshēng guò,
       just be   say   before ever   NEG have   happen ASP

5 T   a   nǐ   rènwéi zěnmeyàng   lei?
       PRT 2SG think   how   PRT

T1-5: The "Chu Mei-feng affair" is quite popular, isn't it? I think this- this-
       this- this topic is very special. I mean, something like this has never
       happened before. What do you think about that?

Except for being attached to an assessment, the high-pitch *a* is also used when the
speaker makes an exemplification to support a previous claim. I argue that high-
pitch *a* in this case can still be considered an attempt to activate the knowledge of
the addressee. The following example is extracted from the same conversation (24)
and demonstrates this use. Prior to this excerpt, M has told his interlocutor K that the
last typhoon has caused economic losses.

(31) 1 M   xiàng wǒ   zuò fángdìchǎn a↓,
             like 1SG do real.estate PRT

  → 2 M   qíshí   běnshēn xiàng xìzhǐ a↑   nèihú a↑,
           actually itself   like PN   PRT PN   PRT

    3 M   hoNn zhè yí   dài   bǐjiào   cháng yānshuǐ de dìfāng,
           PRT this one area relatively often flood   DE place

    4 M   xiànzài yǒu   xiē yínháng,
           now   have some bank

5 M   gēnběn   dōu bú yuànyì   dàikuǎn   gěi   tāmen.
         completely   all   NEG be.willing grant.a.loan give 3PL

M1-5: For example, in my field, real estate, actually places such as Xìzhǐ
      and Nèihú, in those areas where floods occur quite often; nowadays
      some banks...they just don't want to grant any loans for those
      regions.

In line 1, M introduces a new (sub-) topic (real estate) to clarify his point about the economic losses. As Taiwanese, M and his interlocutor share the knowledge that the two cities Xìzhǐ and Nèihú are well known for suffering from flooding during the typhoon season. In line 2, M provides two examples with high-pitch *a* attachment in line 2 in order to activate the hearer's knowledge. By providing high *a*-attached examples, the speaker eases the information retrieval by the addressee.

This use is comparable to the "enumeration" function mentioned by Chao (1968: 806), i.e. providing examples in support of an upcoming utterance.

(32) (Chao 1968, my transcription, glosses and translation)

shénme tiān   a, dì   a, rì   a, yuè   a, fēng a, cǎo   a,
what   heaven PRT earth PRT sun PRT moon PRT wind PRT grass PRT

zhè   xiē zì   a,   dōu huì xiě   le.
this   CL character PRT all can write ASP

'Things like heaven, earth, sun, moon, wind, grass, these words, he can write all of them.'

In such contexts, the high-pitch *a* is used to activate the hearer's prior knowledge about the *a*-attached information; high *a* attachment thus helps the hearer to access the speaker's subsequent utterances on the basis of a piece of activated knowledge.

3.4.6 High-pitch *a* in disagreements/agreements
The next distributional contexts for the occurrence of high-pitch *a* are disagreements and agreements. As in the cases analyzed above, when *a* occurs in these contexts, it shows the speaker's assumption concerning the hearer's knowledge state. That is, by

attaching a high *a* to disagreeing or agreeing utterances, the speaker implies that the hearer should have possessed a piece of common or shared knowledge so that the hearer can easily understand the speaker's motive of making such a disagreement or agreement (see 3.3.2, discussion of example (16)).

In example (33), fourteen-years-old F claims that the life of her seventeen-years-old sister J is happier than her own life, because her sister, who is a senior high school student, can have her own mobile phone.

(33) 1 F   gāozhōng   bǐjiào   xìngfú.
             senior.high.school relatively   happy

      2 F   gāozhōng   yǒu   shǒujī,
             senior.high.school have   mobile.phone

      3 F   ránhòu   kěyǐ   qù   guàngjiē.
             then   can   go   shopping

      4 J   nǎ   yǒu   a↓?
             where   have   PRT

      5 F   nǐ   yǒu   shǒujī   wǒ   méi   yǒu.
             2SG   have   mobile.phone   1SG   NEG   have

→   6 J   guózhōng   yě   yǒu   a↑.
             junior.high.school also   have   PRT

      7 F   guózhōng   wǒ   méi   yǒu.
             junior.high.school 1SG   NEG   have

      8 F   quán   bān   zhǐ   yǒu   wǒ   gēn   nǚ-
             whole   only   have   have   1SG   with   female

      9 F   yí   ge   nǚ   de   méi   yǒu.
             one   CL   female DE   NEG   have

F1-3: It's happier to be in the senior high school. In senior high school students, you can have mobile phones, and then you can go shopping.

J4: How could that be?

F5: You have a mobile phone. I don't.

J6: In junior high school, there are also students who have mobile phones.

F7-9: In junior high school- I don't. In my whole class, I am the only one, and a girl- a girl who doesn't have a mobile phone.

In line 5, F explains her complaint made in lines 1–3 by referring to the fact that her sister can have a mobile phone. The *a*-attached disagreement in line 6 is a direct denial of F's statement as J points out that students in junior high schools can also have their own mobile phones (so F is supposedly allowed to have one, too). The function of *a* here is to signal that J believes F should have known the information attached by *a*. F's following response in line 8 confirms this, as F should be aware of the fact that almost all of her classmates have mobile phones.

In excerpt (34), S and R are talking about widely discussed news stories. In line 1, S mentions that there have been many fire accidents at the end of the previous year. Confronted by R's challenge *yǒu ma* 'are there?' in line 2, S first utters a confirmation *yǒu* 'yes', then rephrases it with a rhetorical question *zěnme méi yǒu* 'why not (how should it be possible that there haven't been fire accidents?)' to reinforce his certainty. Then he deploys an *a*-attached clarification in lines 4–5 and gives two examples in line 6 to support his claim. However, in line 7, R responds with a backchannel *hmm*, which is not taken by S as full agreement.[17]

(34) 1 S   niánwěi   huǒzāi   yòu   tèbié   duō.
          end.of.the.year   fire.accident   again   especially   much

---

2 R   yǒu   ma?
           have   PRT

3 S   yǒu-   méi   yǒu-   zěnme   méi   yǒu-
           have   NEG   have   how   NEG   have

4 S   zài   táiběi   huǒchēzhàn   nàbiān   fùjìn,
           at   Taipei   train.station   there   neighborhood

→ 5 S   chángcháng bèi   rénjiā   zònghuǒ a↑.
           often   BEI   others   set.fire   PRT

→ 6 S   mótuōchē   bèi   shāo   a↑,   jiù gōngyù   bèi shāo   a↑,
           motorcycle   BEI   burn   PRT   old apartment   BEI burn   PRT

7 R   hmm.
           BC

8 S   duì   a↑,   m-   bù   cháng   kàn   xīnwén   ma?
           right   PRT   m-   NEG   often   see   news   PRT

9 R   cháng   kàn   a↑.
           often   see   PRT

10 S   cháng   kàn   zěnme   huì   bù   zhīdào?
           often   see   how   can   NEG   know

    S1:   There have been lots of fire accidents at the end of the year.
    R2:   Have there?
    S3-6:   Yes, no…of course there have…near Taipei train station, there have been frequent cases of arson. Motorcycles and old apartments were burned.
    R7:   Hmm.
    S8:   Right, m- don't you watch the news often?
    R9:   I do.
    S10:   If so, how come you don't know this?

Note that in line 8, S first utters *duì a* 'right', which serves to "affirm the speaker's own statement" (Wang et al. 2010), and then poses a question *bù cháng kàn xīnwén ma* 'don't you watch the news often?', which explicitly shows his assumption that R should have known the *a*-attached information he gave in the previous context. Confronted with R's *a*-attached challenge in line 9 (which implies that S may have ignored that fact that she watches TV news often), S poses another rhetorical question *cháng kàn zěnme huì bù zhīdào* 'if you watch the news often, how come you don't know this?' to show his surprise concerning the discrepancy between R's words and R's knowledge state.

In (35), M and F are talking about the famous male tennis players Pete Sampras and Marat Safin. In line 5, M asks F whom she will support, and F says that she hopes that Sampras will win because he is her idol. Note that F's answer in lines 7 and 8 are both attached by high-pitch *a*, indicating that she supposes that M should know this, as the fact that F is a big fan of Pete Sampras has been stated in the contexts prior to this conversation. By using the modal adverb *dāngrán* 'of course', she reinforces the obviousness of her statement in line 7.

In line 9, M's disagreement is initiated by the disagreement token *kěshì* 'but', claiming that he thinks another player also plays well. M's *a*-attached refutation does not indicate clearly who exactly the player is but uses a question pronoun *shéi* 'who', indicating that M supposes that F knows whom he is referring to. As F actually does not know to whom M has just referred and does not answer as expected, M provides the *a*-attached answer *shāfèi* 'Safin' with an attached UFP *a* to explicitly activate F's knowledge, as if indicating the obviousness of the answer.

(35) 1 M   zhè cì shānpǔlāsī zuì   dà   de   duìshǒu hǎoxiàng-
             this CL PN   most   big   DE   opponent seem

      2 M   yě shì nà ge sūlián   de- nà ge- jiào shāfèi ba.
             also be that CL the Soviet Union de that CL call PN   PRT

      3 M   wǒ   bù   xiǎodé nǐ   zhī   bù   zhīdào?
             1SG NEG   know   2SG know NEG   know

      4 F   o   wǒ   zhīdào wǒ   zhīdào.
             PRT 1SG know   1SG know

5 M   nà   nǐ   juéde   tāmen liǎng   ge   shéi   huì   yíng?
        that 2SG feel   3PL   two   CL   who   will   win

6 M   rúguǒ zhēnde-
        if   really

7 F   e   wǒ   dāngrán   shì   xīwàng shānpǔlāsī   yíng a↑. @@
        uh 1SG of.course be   hope   PN   win   PRT (laughter)

8 F   tā   shì   wǒ   de   ǒuxiàng   a↑.
        3SG be   1SG DE   idol   PRT

→ 9 M   kěshì- kěshì-   wǒ juéde nà   ge shéi yě   dǎ   de búcuò   a↑.
        but   but   1SG feel   that CL who   also play DE not.bad PRT

10 F   shéi?
        who

11 M   shāfèi   a↑.
        PN   PRT

    M1-3: The most threatening opponent to Sampras seems… also the one
            from Russia…called Safin. I don't know whether you heard about
            him or not.
    F4:   Oh. I know, I know.
    M5-6: The two of them, who do you think will win? If it's really…
    F7-8: Eh…of course I hope Sampras will win (laughter). He is my idol.
    M9:   But, but I think …that one…also plays well.
    F10:   Who?
    M11:   Safin!

Taken from the same conversation as (25), example (36) is a representative example
showing how a series of *a*-attached utterances is used to activate the hearer's knowl-
edge in the context of disagreement. In this example, J and T are talking about the
aforementioned "Chu Mei-feng affair." In line 1, J claims that Kuo Yu-ling (Guō
Yùlíng), a suspected blackmailer involved in the affair, has been sentenced. Her

claim is then immediately denied by T with some information attached by *a*, saying that no evidence has been found and Kuo Yu-ling has not admitted anything yet. In line 6, J tries to provide another piece of information to challenge T's claim. This triggers T's deployment of a series of *a*-attached utterances (lines 8–9, 11 and 12). Confronted by J's second challenge in line 14, T deploys another two *a*-attached utterances in lines 15 and 17.

(36)   1 J   xiànzài hǎoxiàng- nà   ge shénme Guō Yùlíng yǐjīng   bèi pàn-
                 now   seem   that CL what   PN   already BEI sentence

        2 T   ei hái méi pànxíng, yīnwèi hái zhǎo bú dào   zhèngjù,
                 uh still NEG sentence because still search NEG arrive evidence

→   3 T   tā   zìjǐ hái méi   chéngrèn a↑.
                 3SG   self still NEG admit   PRT

        4 J   tā   méi   yǒu- tā hái méi yǒu   chéngrèn o?
                 3SG NEG   have 3SG still NEG have admit   PRT

        5 T   tā   méi   yǒu   chéngrèn.
                 3SG NEG   have admit

        6 J   kěshì tā bú shì yǐjīng- zhǎo dào   yí bùfèn de zhèngjù?
                 but   3SG NEG be   already search arrive one part DE evidence

        7 T   tā shìxiān hǎoxiàng yǒu-
                 3SG before   seem   have

        8 T   tā   yǒu   jiào   tā de nà ge shénme   rén=
                 3SG have call   3SG DE that CL what   person

→   9 T   =bāng tā zuò xiāohuǐ   de dòngzuò a↑.
                 help 3SG do burn   DE action PRT

        10 J   ou. suǒyǐ-
                 PRT SO

→ 11 T   suǒyǐ xiànzài yìzhí   zhǎo   bú   dào zhèngjù a↑,
                so   now   always   search   NEG   arrive evidence PRT

→ 12 T   suǒyǐ bù   néng pàn   tā   xíng   a↑,
                so   NEG can   sentence 3SG   punishment PRT

13 J   ou. méi   yǒu   bànfǎ   zhǎo   dào   zhèngjù.
                PRT NEG   have   method search arrive evidence

14 J   kěshì tā   nǚ'ér   bú   shì yǐjīng bèi shōuyā le   ma?
                but   3SG daughter NEG   be   already BEI detain PRT   PRT

→ 15 T   kěshì tā   hái   shì bù   jiǎng   chūlái   a↑.
                but   3SG still be   NEG say   out   PRT

16 J   ou.
                PRT

→ 17 T   bù   jiǎng   chūlái méi   yǒu   zhèngjù=
                NEG say   out   NEG   have evidence

→ 18 T   =jiù shì bù   néng duì   tā   rúhé   a↑.
                just be   NEG can   to   3SG   how   PRT

J1:   Now, it seems that Kuo Yu-ling has already been sentenced….
T2-3:   Ei, not yet. No piece of evidence has not been found yet. She
          hasn't admitted to anything yet.
J4:   She hasn't- she hasn't admitted?
T5:   She hasn't.
J6:   But haven't they found partial evidence?
T7-9:   She seems to… She asked someone to help her burn all pieces of
          evidence.
J10:   Oh, so-
T11-12: So until now nothing has been found, so they cannot sentence her.
J13-14: Oh. Nothing could be found. But her daughter was detained,
          wasn't she?
T15:   But she [Kuo Yu-ling] still hasn't said anything.

J16:   Oh.
T17-18: If she doesn't say anything and they can find no evidence, then
         there is nothing they can do against her.

All the information conveyed in the *a*-attached utterances is arguably still a kind of shared or common knowledge that the speaker T supposes the hearer J should possess. Given the fact that the sexual scandal was a widely discussed issue and also widely covered by the mass media every day when this conversation took place, it's reasonable to assume that the relevant information is shared by both speakers. In fact, J's utterances in lines 6 and 14 show her possession of certain knowledge regarding this issue. In this excerpt, T's *a*-attached utterances can all be categorized under either shared knowledge (lines 3, 8–9, 11, 15) or common knowledge (lines 12, 17–18).

It must be added that the deployment of high-pitch *a* in a disagreement is not obligatory, yet quite common in conversational negotiation or argumentation. As in the examples above, the use of high *a* reinforces the refutation or disagreement, by indicating that the addressee should have known the *a*-attached information. In some cases it even implies that the speaker is blaming the addressee for his/her ignorance, as if carrying an overtone that "you should have known that" or "how could you not know it," thus leading to a stronger effect.

Similar to *a*-attached disagreements, *a*-attached agreements also show the speaker's assumption concerning the hearer's knowledge state. In example (37), L and H are talking about Chu Mei-feng, the politician who was involved in the sexual scandal. Prior to this example, L has told H that she had a good impression of this female politician before, but then she realized that what she did was just to make herself more popular. In line 2, H deploys an *a*-attached agreement token *zhè shì dāngrán* 'of course it's like that', which not only shows H's agreement with L's previous statement, but also indicates the obviousness of the statement itself. In other words, H assumes that L should have known that the claim in line 1 has already been part of H's own knowledge, and H would like to point this out. It is evident that in lines 5–6, H explicitly shows her knowledge about L's claim: she knows that all politicians supposedly do things in order to make themselves popular, and this female politician could hardly be an exception.

(37)   1 L   hòulái   wǒ   fāxiàn   tā   shì-   tā   shì-
                then 1_{SG} discover 3_{SG} be 3_{SG} be

        2 L   wèile   dǎ   zìjǐ   de   zhīmíngdù.
                 for   strike self   DE   popularity

  →   3 H   zhè   shì   dāngrán   a↑.
                this   be   of.course PRT

        4 L   yào   chūfēngtóu.
                 want   in.the.limelight

        5 H   tā   dōu shì   zhèyàng   hǎo   bù   hǎo?
                 3SG   all   be   this.way   good   NEG   good

        6 H   měi   ge   zhèngzhìrénwù   dōu   shì   zhèyàng.
                 every CL   politician   all   be   this.way

     L1-2:   Then I discovered that it was for making herself more popular.
     H3:   Of course it's like that.
     L4:   She wants to be in the limelight.
     H5-6:   It's her way, okay? Every politician is like that.

Lastly, I will introduce interesting cases of *a*-attached disagreement in which the
a-attached utterance does not contain a clear referent, as in (38).

(38) →1 Z   kěshì   táiwān   jiù   shì   bǐjiào-   nà   ge   a↑.
               but   Taiwan   just be   relatively that CL   PRT

       2 Q   táiwān-   nǐ   shì   shuō   táiwān   bǐjiào   ruòshì   ma?
               Taiwan   2SG   be   say   Taiwan   relatively weak   PRT

       3 Z   duì   a↑.
               right   PRT

     Z1:   But Taiwan is just more- that.
     Q2:   Taiwan- you mean Taiwan is weaker?
     Z3:   Yeah.

Before this excerpt, the two speakers Z and Q have been talking about an invention of Taiwanese businessmen who are based in mainland China. Q mentioned that in China the law is complicated and sometimes theory does not work out in practice. It is therefore not easy for Taiwanese businessmen to invest in mainland China. In line 1, Z attaches the high-pitch *a* to her disagreeing assessment without a clear referent. In line 2, Q provides a possible referent for Z's assessment according to his knowledge. This answer is immediately confirmed by Z in line 3 with a high *a*-attached agreement *duì a*. I argue that the deployment of the high-pitch *a* can be explained by speaker Z's assumption that Q is able to identify the unidentified referent *nàge* 'that' (in other words, Q is believed to possess some relevant knowledge). With the use of *a*, Z attempts to activate Q's knowledge. We can see that in line 2, Q's move proves that Z's assumption is correct (i.e., Q's knowledge is successfully activated and she identifies the referent successfully).

3.4.7 High-pitch *a* in answers

When the high *a* is appended to answers in a question-answer pair, the answer carries an overtone of "obviousness." In other words, by deploying the high *a* to the answer, the speaker implies that the hearer (the question poser) should have already known the answer to his own question, as if saying "don't you know/remember that?" or "can't you see it?"

Excerpt (39) is an extension of example (1). M asks whether F has watched a certain tennis tournament. In line 2, F attaches the UFP *a* to her answer, as if saying "of course I did." Understanding that M still doesn't accept the obvious answer, F explicitly provides a further explanation *dōu zài jiā lǐ kàn* 'we all watched it at home' and adds a tag question *bú shì ma* 'wasn't it'. This use of a tag question is in line with Lakoff's (1973: 55) explanation: "Sometimes we find a tag-question used in cases where the speaker knows as well as the addressee what the answer must be, and doesn't need confirmation." Hu (2002: 54) also points out that the tag *bú shì ma* shows the speaker's confidence about her own statement. I thus argue that this tag question indicates that F already has the obvious answer in mind and she believes that M has too.

(39) → 1 M   qùnián   a↑   nǐ   yǒu   kàn   nà   ge   wǎngqiú   gōngkāi sài   ma?
             last.year   PRT   2SG   have   see   that   CL   tennis   open   game   PRT

      2 F   qùnián(.)   yǒu   a↑.
            last.year   have   PRT

3 M   yǒu   a↓?
        have   PRT

4 F   dōu   zài jiā   lǐ   kàn bú   shì   ma?
        all   at home inside see NEG be   PRT

M1:   Did you watch the tennis tournament last year?
F2:   Last year, yes I did.
M3:   Did you?
F4:   We all watched it at home, wasn't it?

Example (40) is another example of an *a*-attached answer. The two speakers D and L
are good friends. Prior to this conversation, L, who is an English teacher, has told D
that she and her boyfriend plan to run a private tutorial school. In lines 2 and 3, L
deploys two *a*-attached utterances to respond to D's question about potential teach-
ers. As D is supposed to know that L is a teacher, the *a*-attached utterances not only
reveal L's assumption, but also imply that D's question is redundant. L uses *dāngrán*
'of course' in her response in line 3, illustrating that the fact that she will be the
teacher is self-evident.

(40)   1 D   rúguǒ-   xiàng yào qǐng lǎoshī nǐmen yào   qù nǎbiān qǐng?
               if   like   want hire teacher 2PL   must go where hire

   →   2 L   jiù   zìjǐ   jiāo   le   a↑
               just   self   teach ASP   PRT

   →   3 L   yì   kāishǐ   dāngrán   zìjǐ   jiāo   a↑
               one   START   of.course self   teach   PRT

   D1:   If- when you want to hire teachers, how do you hire them?
   L2-3: I will teach! In the beginning, of course I will be the teacher.

3.4.8 High-pitch *a* in requests

The last distributional context of *a* are requests. When *a* is used in requests, it retains the same core function, i.e. to activate the addressee's knowledge state. The speaker expects that the addressee should possess a certain shared or common knowledge explaining why such a request or suggestion is being made.

In excerpt (41), Y, S, Z and W are supposed to make a recording of their conversation as a class assignment. Throughout the conversation, S, Z and W have been talking a lot, but Y kept quiet. Prior to this excerpt, Y was asked why he hasn't been talking much. In line 1, Y answers that he does not know what to say. W uses an *a*-attached suggestion in line 3, and explicitly reveals what she has expected in line 4. A few minutes later, the team members realize that Y still does not talk much. W thus uses another *a*-attached suggestion in line 92, in order to force Y to talk more.

(41) 1 Y   wǒ   bù   zhīdào yào   jiǎng   shénme.
              1SG   NEG   know   want   say   what

      2 S   nǐ   juéde   zhèyàng hěn   yǒu   yāpògǎn   ma?
              2SG   think   this.way very   have   sense.of.pressure PRT

→ 3 W   wǒmen   liáotiān nǐ   jiù   gēnzhe liáo   a↑
              1PL   chat   2SG   just   follow chat   PRT

      4 W   nǐ   dōu bù   shuōhuà, zhèyàng lù   bú dào nǐ jiǎnghuà.
              2SG   all NEG talk   this.way record NEG arrive 2SG talk

(85 lines omitted, Z and W said to Y)

      90 Z   nǐ   jiǎng   tài   shǎo   le.
              2SG   talk   too   few   PRT

      91 W   jiù   liǎng   sān   fēnzhōng éryǐ,
              just   two   three   minute   just

→ 92 W   suíbiàn shuō   jǐ   jù   huà   a↑.
              casual say   several sentence word   PRT

93 W	yòu	méi	yǒu	guānxi.
	again	NEG	have	relationship

Y1:   I don't know what to say.
S2:   Do you feel under stress like this?
W3-4:   When we chat you can join us. You just don't talk. Like this your words will not be recorded.
Z90:   You hardly talk.
W91-93: Just two or three minutes. Just talk a little. It does not matter at all.

In lines 4 and 92, W clearly shows her expectation which can be regarded as a common knowledge (if a person does not talk, her/his words cannot be recorded) or a sort of shared knowledge among the group members (saying some sentences does not matter at all; everybody should contribute to the assignment). In this context, the *a*-attached suggestion has a stronger effect than its counterpart without *a*. It is reasonable to assume that if a speaker makes a suggestion or request and supposes the hearer should know the reason why s/he does so, the suggestion/request itself implies an extra effort, as if saying: "you should have known why I make such a suggestion/request. Why should I bother doing so?" This is in line with previous studies explaining that the *a*-attached requests carry a stronger effect (cf. Chao 1968: 795–796, 804).

3.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that the core function of the UFP *a* in Taiwan Mandarin is knowledge activation, which is in line with what I. Li (1999) proposes for the Southern Mǐn UFP *a*. Low-pitch *a* marks the activation of the speaker's own knowledge, whereas high-pitch *a* indicates activation of the addressee's knowledge. By using low *a*, the speaker signals that part of his/her own knowledge has been activated. By using high *a*, the speaker supposes that the addressee has a certain knowledge of which he is not aware at the time of the utterance and that once that knowledge has been activated, the addressee can understand the speaker's moves and motives in conversation.

I have also demonstrated that the use of UFP *a* in Taiwan Mandarin is not entirely identical with that in mainland Mandarin. In Taiwan Mandarin, high-pitch *a* can be used for introducing a discourse topic. As I will show in chapter 7, there are good reasons to assume that this functional asymmetry is due to the influence of Southern Mǐn on Taiwan Mandarin.