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

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Cover Page

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Chapter 6
The core functions of *a*, *la* and *ê* in comparison

6.1 An overview of core functions and distributional contexts of the three UFPs
In the previous chapters, I have tested my proposed core functions of the three utterance-final particles *a*, *la* and *ê* with Taiwan Mandarin conversational data. The core function of UFP *a* is "marking the knowledge activation." That is, by using the high-pitch *a*, the speaker shows his/her intention to activate the addressee's knowledge; by using the low-pitch *a*, the speaker indicates that his/her own knowledge has been activated by the previous conversation. UFP *la*, serves to mark an explicit or implicit adjustment. UFP *ê* is used to invite a collaborative move by foregrounding the utterance to which it is attached.

The purpose of this chapter is to sharpen the contours of the proposed core functions by taking a contrastive look at the UFPs analyzed in this thesis. In order to maintain comparability, I only compare UFPs in identical distributional contexts. Table 6.1 shows the distribution of the three UFPs in six different contexts. Since it is impossible to find maximally comparable authentic data in the same context, the approach I use here is different from the one in the previous chapters: on the basis of data from the previous chapters, I have constructed minimal pairs and compared the use of UFPs in these pairs (or triplets) by eliciting judgements from ten Taiwan Mandarin native speakers.

	High-pitch *a*	Low-pitch *a*	Simplex *la*	*ê*
Disagreements/agreements	✓		✓	✓
Storytelling/reporting	✓		✓	✓
Topic-introduction/topic-shift	✓	✓		✓
Answers	✓		✓	✓
Requests	✓		✓	
Questions		✓	✓	

Table 6.1 Overview of distributional contexts of *a*, *la* and *ê*

6.2 Comparison

The following sections compare the UFPs in: (i) disagreements/agreements, (ii) storytelling/reporting, (iii) topic-introduction/topic-shift, (iv) answers, (v) requests, and (vi) questions.

6.2.1 Disagreements/agreements

As presented in table 6.1, except for the low *a*, the high-pitch *a*, *la* or *ê* can all be attached to disagreements or agreements. This is not surprising since disagreements and agreements are usually directed to the other speakers, which is not compatible with the core function of the low *a*. Consider first the low-pitch *la* (1a) in disagreement contexts. This excerpt is partially repeated from (16) in chapter 4 (cf. 4.5.2.1).

(1a)   1 F   tā   dào   zuìhòu hǎoxiàng yě:=
               3SG arrive   last   seem   also

        2 F   =bù   shì   dǎ   de   hěn   hǎo   hoNn.
               NEG   be   play DE   very good   PRT

        3 F   [kěnéng-
               maybe

        4 M   [kěshi-   yǐ tā de niánjì zhè yàng   dǎ
               but   as 3SG DE age   this way   play

→ 5 M   wǒ   juédé yǐjīng suàn shì búcuò   le   la↓::.
          1SG think already count be not bad ASP   PRT

        F1-3: It seems that she didn't play quite well in the last few rounds, right?
               Maybe…
        M4-5: But, for her age, I think she still did a good job.

I have demonstrated in chapter 4 that the use of *la* in (1a) marks an explicit adjustment (i.e. M's direct modification of F's previous assessment), by providing another judging criterion (i.e. age). For the purpose of comparison, in example (1b), the *la* in line 5 is replaced with the high-pitch *a*.

(1b)   1 F   tā   dào   zuìhòu hǎoxiàng yě:=
                  3SG arrive   last   seem   also

       2 F   =bù   shì dǎ   de hěn hǎo   hoNn.
                  NEG   be   play DE very good PRT

       3 F   [kěnéng-
                maybe

       4 M   [kěshi- yǐ tā de niánjì zhè yàng   dǎ
                but   as 3SG DE age   this way   play

→   5 M   wǒ juédé yǐjīng suàn shì búcuò   le   a↑::.
                1SG think already count be not bad ASP   PRT

         F1-3: It seems that she didn't play quite well in the last few rounds, right?
               Maybe…
        M4-5: But, for her age, I think she still did a good job.

The interpretation of my informants of this high *a*-attached utterance in (1b) is dif-
ferent from that of (1a): here, the *a*-attached utterance is not a direct modification of
the previous assessment. In this excerpt, speaker M supposes that he shares a com-
mon knowledge with F. That is, both interlocutors know and agree that the quality
of the player's performance can be judged positively when her age is taken into
consideration. With the deployment of *a*, M shows his belief that once this piece of
knowledge is activated, F will perhaps re-consider his assessment in lines 1–2.

    In (1c), *la* has been replaced with *ê*.

(1c)   1 F   tā   dào   zuìhòu hǎoxiàng yě:=
                  3SG arrive   last   seem   also

       2 F   =bù   shì dǎ   de hěn hǎo   hoNn.
                  NEG   be   play DE very good PRT

       3 F   [kěnéng-
                maybe

```
     4 M   [kěshi-  yǐ  tā   de   niánjì  zhè yàng      dǎ
            but       as  3SG  DE   age    this way      play


→    5 M    wǒ   juédé  yǐjīng   suàn   shì  búcuò   le    ê::.
            1SG  think  already  count  be   not bad  ASP   PRT
```

F1-3: It seems that she didn't play quite well in the last few rounds, right?
         Maybe…
M4-5: But, for her age, I think she still did a good job.

According to my informants, line 5 in (1c) sounds softer than the utterances in (1a) and (1b). I believe that this interpretation results from the core function of *ê*, which is to "invite a collaborative move." By presenting his own assessment with *ê*, M offers F a chance to challenge this foregrounded assessment. Whereas high *a* is used to activate the hearer's knowledge, *ê* indicates that the speaker does not have any presupposition about the hearer's knowledge, but s/he merely presents something s/he finds important for the current conversation. Thus, the *ê*-attached disagreement is the weakest with regard to the speaker's position or belief; it sounds most negotiable, as if saying: "But, for her age, I think she still did a good job—what is your opinion/don't you think so?"

        The following examples (2a–c) illustrate the distinct use of the three UFPs in agreements. Example (2a) is taken from example (24) in chapter 5. As mentioned there, prior to this excerpt, speakers C and F have been talking about environmental protection. In line 1, C tells F that she never leaves any litter on the street.

```
(2a)  1 C    wǒ- wǒ  juéduì   bú   zài  wàimiàn  luàn  diū   lèsè.
             1SG  1SG  absolute  NEG  at   outside   messy throw  rubbish


  →   2 F    ei↓    wǒ    yě    shì    ê.
             PRT    1SG   also   be     PRT


      3 F    [wǒ lián-  wǒ  lián  yī    zhāng  <E memo E>  zhǐ    o,
             1SG  even  1SG  even  one   CL      memo        paper  PRT


      4 C    [hen.   zhè    yī    diǎn     wǒ-
             PRT    this   one    point    1SG
```

C1:   I- I never drop my litter on the street.
F2-3: ME NEITHER, even a memo note, I…
C4:   Right, about this I-

In chapter 5, I have provided arguments in support of the claim that the use of *ê* not only highlights a positive response, but also indicates a further collaborative move, which in turn implies the speaker's collaborative attitude. Consider now the replacement of *ê* with *la*, as in (2b).

(2b)   1 C   wǒ- wǒ juéduì   bú   zài wàimiàn luàn diū   lèsè.
                1SG 1SG absolute NEG at outside   messy throw rubbish

→ 2 F   ei↓   wǒ   yě   shì   la↓.
                PRT   1SG   also   be   PRT

       C1:   I- I never drop my litter on the street.
       F2:   Me neither.

According to my informants, the most common utterance following line 2 in (2b) would be initiated by *kěshì* 'but' or *búguò* 'but'. In other words, the *la*-attached agreement introduces a following disagreement. This judgment is in line with what I mentioned in 4.5.2.1, i.e. the *la*-attached agreement is mostly followed by a disagreement, and can be seen as a "disagreement initiator."

        The informants further point out that if *ê* is replaced with a high-pitch *a*, as in (2c), the information carried in this *a*-attached utterance would sound "obvious," as if saying: "you should know that I am the same."

(2c)   1 C   wǒ- wǒ juéduì   bú   zài wàimiàn luàn diū   lèsè.
                1SG 1SG absolute NEG at outside   messy throw rubbish

→ 2 F   ei↓   wǒ   yě   shì   a↑.
                PRT   1SG   also   be   PRT

       C1:   I- I never drop my litter on the street.
       F2:   Me neither.

6.2.2 Storytelling/reporting

The second type of context in which the high-pitch *a*, *la* or *ê* occur is storytelling/ reporting. The low *a* is rarely observed, except for one example (see (24) in 3.4.3) in which the speaker uses a low *a* to introduce a new topic in his own reporting turn. I categorize this use as another type of context (see discussion in 6.2.3).

In a storytelling/reporting turn, the high-pitch *a*, *la* or *ê* can all be attached to an assessment, as shown in example (3a), which is taken from example (25) in chapter 3. In this example, speaker T introduces a new discourse topic (i.e. the Chu Mei-feng affair) and makes efforts to elicit a collaborative move from the interlocutor.

Given the fact that the topic was widely discussed in Taiwanese society when this conversation took place, both interlocutors are supposed to know about it. As the topic has been introduced in line 1, by making a high *a*-attached assessment, speaker T intends to activate more of the interlocutor's knowledge of this issue, and expects the interlocutor to respond according to his activated knowledge.

(3a) 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 shuõ yĭqián cónglái méi yŏu   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 it?

If the high *a* is replaced with *la*, as in (3b), the utterance in line 3 sounds more "assertive" according to my informants. This assessment is then not related to the speaker's assumption to the knowledge state, but to the prominence the speaker gives to the issue in question. According to my informants, it is possible for (3b) to occur in a conversation in which the participants are discussing different topics and the question of which topic is more special.

(3b) 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   la↓.
                 this CL   this   CL   topic very   special PRT

      T1-3:   The "Chu Mei-feng affair" is quite popular, isn't it? I think this-
              this- this- this topic is very special.

If we replace *la* with *ê*, as in (3c), the resulting *ê*-attached assessment sounds softer. This interpretation is linked to the core function of *ê*, which is to invite a collaborative move. The speaker marks his/her own assessment and invites the addressee to respond, or even to challenge, as if saying: "here is my opinion, what do you think about that?"

(3c) 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   ê.
                 this CL   this   CL   topic very   special PRT

      T1-3:   The "Chu Mei-feng affair" is quite popular, isn't it? I think this-
              this- this- this topic is very special.

6.2.3 Topic-introduction/topic-shift

In the previous chapters, I have demonstrated that the high-pitch *a*, low-pitch *a* and *ê* can all be deployed in a topic-introducing turn (see 3.4.3, 3.4.4 and 5.4.2). The UFP *la* is not found in this type of context.

The following example is taken from example (24) in chapter 3. Here, M introduces a new discourse topic "origin of the name of the city the Xìzhǐ" in lines 4–5, by asking whether K knows about it.

(4a) → 4 M   nǐ   zhīdào   yǐqián-   xìzhǐ   a↓,
            2sɢ 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

       M4-5:   Do you know, before, that Xìzhǐ …that Xìzhǐ, the name of that place…where does it come from?

In chapter 3, I have shown that the low-pitch *a* is used to show the change of M's knowledge state. That is, it is an indication that the speaker's knowledge state has been activated due to some information given in the previous context, and a new topic comes to the speaker's mind. The current speaker then introduces this new topic, which is related to that information, to the ongoing conversation.

Consider (4b), where the low *a* is replaced with a high *a*.

(4b) → 4 M   nǐ   zhīdào   yǐqián-   xìzhǐ   a↑,
            2sɢ 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

       M4-5:   Do you know, before, that Xìzhǐ …that Xìzhǐ, the name of that place…where does it come from?

According to my informants, if the low-pitch *a* in line 4 is replaced by a high-pitch *a*, as shown in (4b), the utterance in line 4 would sound like reminding the address-ee. That is, the speaker directs the addressee's focus to the topic in question while introducing the new topic by trying to activate the addressee's knowledge. As men-

tioned in chapter 5, the use of *ê* is usually triggered by something in the context that deviates from the speaker's assumption. Since there is nothing in this context which is against the speaker's assumption, it is not suitable to use *ê* here.

Example (5a) is part of example (16) in chapter 5. Prior to this excerpt, the two speakers H and L have been discussing the Chu Mei-feng scandal. Before the beginning of this excerpt, L has told H that she has no interest in this kind of political news. L's explanation in line 1 is interrupted by H's *ê*-attached utterance, with a piece of new information related to the preceding topic they have discussed several minutes ago.

(5a)   1 L   qíshí   zhèngzhì rénwù   dàbùfèn   dōu-
                actually politics   figure   mostly   all

→ 2 H   wǎnglù   shàng hái   yǒu   fēnxī   ê.
                internet up   still have   analyze PRT

       L1:   Actually most of the politicians are…
       H2:   There is some analysis on the Internet.

Since *ê* has nothing to do with the speaker's presupposition about the knowledge state, but serves to foreground the utterance to which it is attached and to invite the hearer to make a collaborative move, it fits to the core function of *ê* to be attached to a piece of new information which can be unknown to the hearer.

If the *ê* is replaced with a high-pitch *a*, like in (7b), the interpretation would be different.

(5b)   1 L   qíshí   zhèngzhì rénwù   dàbùfèn   dōu-
                actually politics   figure   mostly   all

→ 2 H   wǎnglù   shàng hái   yǒu   fēnxī   a↑
                internet up   still have   analyze PRT

       L1:   Actually most of the politicians are…
       H2:   There is some analysis on the Internet.

Here, according to my informants, the example is understood as follows: speaker H supposes that L should know about the fact that some analysis can be found on the

Internet. This interpretation corresponds to my analysis: with the deployment of the high *a*, H intends to activate L's knowledge. This can be regarded as a kind of "reminding." The low *a* is not compatible with the utterance in line 2, because in this context, the speaker does not need to activate his/her own knowledge.

6.2.4 Answers

In contrast to the low *a*, the high *a*, *la* and *ê* can all be attached to an answer to a question (see. 3.4.7, 4.5.3, and 5.4.4). I believe the reason why the low *a* does not appear in this type of context is that an answer is usually directed to the questioner. The low *a*, which indicates the activation of the speaker's own knowledge state, is therefore not compatible with this context.

The following example is part of example (25) in chapter 5. Prior to this excerpt, L has told D that she plans to make use of her boyfriend's apartment to run a language school in Xīnzhuāng, a district of New Taipei city. In this example, D asks L on which street in Xīnzhuāng the school is located.

(6a) 3 D   @@   shénme lù?
              (laughter)   what   road

→ 4 L   bù   zhīdào ê.
             NEG   know   PRT

D3:   (laughter) Which street?
L4:   Don't know.

In line 4, L uses *ê* to foreground her inability to provide a satisfactory answer and shows her attempt to invite a collaborative move, as if saying: "I don't know, maybe you do?" As mentioned in chapter 5, the use of *ê* can mitigate a negative effect of an unsatisfactory response. In (6b) and (6c), the *ê* in line 4 is replaced by *la* and high *a* respectively.

(6b) 3 D   @@   shénme lù?
                (laughter) what   road

→ 4 L   bù   zhīdào la↓.
                NEG   know   PRT

          D3:   (laughter) Which street?
          L4:   Don't know.

(6c) 3 D   @@   shénme lù?
                (laughter) what   road

→ 4 L   bù   zhīdào a↑.
                NEG   know   PRT

          D3:   (laughter) Which street?
          L4:   Don't know.

According to the judgment of my informants, in (3b), the *la*-attached answer sounds strong, like a refusal to answer the question. Some informants think this utterance conveys the speaker's impatience. I argue that this interpretation stills results from its core function—to mark an adjustment. As discussed in chapter 4, the adjustment marked by *la* can be directed to the proposition of the question. Sometimes, as in this case, it can also be used to highlight the inappropriateness of the question itself.

On the other hand, the high *a*-attached answer in (6c) appears to imply L's presupposition: D should have known the fact that L does not know the exact address of this language school (and this piece of information needs to be activated), as if saying: "you should have known that I have no idea about the address—why do you keep asking me such a question?"

(7a) is part of example (28) in chapter 5. J asks L, who has watched a certain movie in the past, whether the movie is nice. In line 2, L attaches *ê* to his assessment on this movie.

(7a) 1 J   <S a cit4 chut4 kam2 ho2   khuann3 S>
                  PRT this   CL   PRT good   see

→ 2 L   hái bú   cuò ê.
             still NEG bad PRT

    J1:   Is this a good movie?
    L2:   Not bad.

I have argued previously that the use of *ê* here creates an opportunity for further col-laboration (for instance, to take the following turn and say something relevant) by foregrounding the assessment in line 2. If the speaker does not add *ê* here, the utter-ance sounds more assertive. If *ê* is replaced by *la* or a high *a*, as in (7b) or (7c), the interpretation will be different.

(7b)   1 J   <S a cit4   chut4 kam2 ho2   khuann3 S>
               PRT this CL   PRT good   see

   → 2 L   hái bú   cuò la↓.
             still NEG bad   PRT

    J1:   Is this a good movie?
    L2:   Not bad.

(7c)   1 J   <S a cit4   chut4 kam2 ho2   khuann3 S>
               PRT this CL   PRT good   see

   → 2 L   hái bú   cuò a↑.
             still NEG bad PRT

    J1:   Is this a good movie?
    L2:   Not bad.

My informants feel that although the content of the answer is positive, the *la*-at-tached utterance in (7b) implies that the speaker is not fully satisfied with that movie. Some said it sounds like a disagreement-initiator, anticipating the speaker's sub-sequent negative assessment. This is in accordance with the proposed core function of *la* in Taiwan Mandarin: *la*-attachment to an answer indicates that the proposition of the question needs to be adjusted.

According to my informants, the *a*-attached answer in (7c) sounds self-evident. I argue that this overtone of "obviousness" can be attributed to the core function of the high *a*: L presupposes that J should have known his opinion about the movie.

6.2.5 Requests

The last type of context I would like to discuss is request. In my data, only *la* and the high *a* can be used with requests. Example (8a) is taken from (28) in chapter 4. M and F are describing one of their mutual friends H to C, who does not know her.

(8a)   1 M   nǐ xiān jiǎng yīxià   tā de dǎbàn. tā de jǔzhǐ   xíngwéi.
                2SG first say   a.while 3SG DE dress up 3SG DE behavior behavior

       2 F   e:: tā   jiù shì nà   zhǒng en:
                uh 3SG just be that kind uh

→ 3 M   nǐ xiān jiǎng yīxià wàimào   la↓.
                2SG first say   while appearence PRT

       4 F   ou. hěn shànyú sànfā   mèilì de nǚshēng la↓.
                PRT very good.in distribute charm DE woman   PRT

         M1:   First talk about how she dresses up, and her behavior.
         F2:   Uh…she is that kind of…uh…
         M3:   About her appearance.
         F4:   Oh. She is the kind of woman who is good in displaying her
                charm.

I have mentioned in chapter 4 that the *la*-attached request in line 3 is to show M's intention to adjust F's move and her attempts to draw F's attention to this adjustment. The high *a* can also be used in the same context, as shown in (8b).

(8b)   1 M   nǐ xiān jiǎng yīxià   tā de dǎbàn. tā de jǔzhǐ   xíngwéi.
                2SG first say   a.while 3SG DE dress up 3SG DE behavior behavior

       2 F   e:: tā   jiù shì nà   zhǒng en:
                uh 3SG just be that kind   uh

→ 3 M   nǐ   xiān jiǎng yīxià wàimào   a↑.
           2SG first say   while appearence PRT

   4 F   ou. hěn shànyú sànfā   mèilì de nǚshēng la↓.
            PRT very good.in distribute charm DE woman   PRT

   M1:   Let us first talk about how she dresses up, and her behavior.
   F2:   Uh…she is that kind of…uh…
   M3:   About her appearance.
   F4:   Oh. She is the kind of woman who is good in displaying her
          charm.

The *a*-attached request yields a different interpretation than (8a). Compared to (8a), which sounds like a direct command, the *a*-attached request in (8b) sounds like a reminder or a suggestion, telling the hearer where to start her description.

This judgment still fits what I propose for the core function of the high *a*: to activate the addressee's knowledge. As both M and F know the friend F describes, they share knowledge about this friend. With the deployment of *a*, M shows her attempt to activate part of F's knowledge (i.e. the friend's appearance) and displays her expectation that F accepts her request with that piece of activated knowledge.

6.2.6 Questions

Among the UFPs discussed in this study, only the low *a* and *la* are attached to questions. As mentioned in chapter 3, *a* can be suffixed to a piece of information concerning what the previous speaker has said and form a question (i.e. the *a*-formulated question, as termed by R. Wu (2004)), or directly to a question (i.e. *a*-attached question, ibid.). I argue that a low *a*-attached question is usually triggered by the discourse context. The deployment of *a* in this type of context serves to signal that the speaker's own knowledge has been activated by prior context.

Unlike *a*, which can be attached to a piece of information and form a question; the simplex *la* in Taiwan Mandarin can only be attached to a question directly. When *la* is used after a question, as mentioned in chapter 4, the question is no longer a question, but a comment, carrying the speaker's belief and attitude towards the proposition. In other words, it functions rhetorically.

Example (9a) is taken from (25) in chapter 4. Here, F asks H to tell her how she got acquainted with her husband. In line 2, H attaches a *la* to the question *shuō*

shénme 'what to say'. However, according the following utterances in line 3, it is clear that H refuses F's request to tell her own love story. The *la*-attached question in line 2 does not serve to solicit any information, but functions as a rhetorical question and conveys the speaker's attitude towards F' request.

(9a) 1 F   shuō shuō kàn nǐmen zěnme rènshì de.
                 say   say   see 2PL   how   kow   DE

→ 2 H   shuō shénme la↓?!
                 say   what   PRT

   3 H   bú   yào   zhèyàngzi.
                 NEG want like.this

     F1:   Try to say how... how it was that you two first got to know each
             other?
     H2-3:   What (the hell) should I say? Don't be like this.

If we replace the *la* with a low *a*, as in (9b), according to my informants, the *a*-attached question would very likely be followed by F's answer. In other words, it would not be a rhetorical question. This judgment is in line with what I discussed in 3.4.1. The *a*-attached question is triggered by the previous context (in this example, F's request in line 1) and signals that part of the speaker's own knowledge has been activated by the prior context (in this case, H realizes that she has to say something about her). By raising this question, H indicates that F should clarify what she expects H to say. The *a*-attached question is therefore a result of the activation of H's knowledge.

(9b) 1 F   shuō shuō kàn nǐmen zěnme rènshì de.
                 say   say   see 2PL   how   kow   DE

→ 2 H   shuō shénme a↓?
                 say   what   PRT

     F1:   Try to say how... how it was that you two first got to know each
             other?
     H2:   What to say?

Example (10a) is an excerpt from example (22) in chapter 3. Prior to this conversa-
tion, R has told S about her friend C, who is known for her conservative attitude. In
order to clarify C's conservative attitude, R gives an example that she once went to
an open-air hot spring with C and C's boyfriend. They were so conservative that
they even wore swimming suits.

(10a) → 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

        S8:   Eh…what kind of bath do they take like this?
        R9:   Hot spring.

As mentioned in chapter 3, S's *a*-attached question in line 8 is triggered by the
activation of his own knowledge during the previous conversation. Compare this
example with (10b).

(10b) → 8 S   en nà zhèyàng xǐ   ge shénme la↓?
                 eh that this.way wash CL what   PRT

        S8:   Eh…what kind of bath do they take like this?

My informants confirm that compared to (10a), (10b) sounds like a comment, as if
the speaker would say: 'it's ridiculous to take bath the way they do'. In other words,
the *la*-attached question becomes a rhetorical question.

6.3 Conclusion
In this chapter, I have compared the use of different UFPs in various types of con-
text. The contrastive analysis of the UFP is based on native-speaker judgments of
my Taiwanese informants. The result ties in with my proposed core functions of the
three UFPs: the high *a* is used to activate the speaker's knowledge; the low *a* indi-
cates the activation of the speaker's own knowledge; the simplex *la* serves to mark
an explicit or implicit adjustment, and *ê* is employed to invite a collaborative move
by foregrounding the utterance to which it is attached.