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

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SUMMARY

The use of utterance-final particles (UFPs) is a salient feature of Taiwan Mandarin, a Mandarin variety spoken in Taiwan. Despite of their ubiquity, most of the previous studies focus on UFPs shared by various Mandarin varieties, such as *a*, *ba* and *ne*, and discuss these UFPs in a general fashion by including data from both mainland China and Taiwan, or solely from mainland China. Distribution-wise and function-wise, however, some Taiwan Mandarin UFPs are different from mainland Mandarin UFPs. This study, then, provides a precise description and analysis of the use of three such Taiwan Mandarin UFPs, viz. *a*, *la* and *ê*. On the basis of a large corpus of spontaneous spoken data, the core functions of these three UFPs in the conversational contexts are examined. In addition, I aim to provide possible accounts for the emergence of these three UFPs in Taiwan Mandarin from the perspective of language contact.

The study is divided into eight chapters. **Chapter 1** introduces my four research questions: (1) In what kind of context(s) do the Taiwan Mandarin UFPs under discussion occur in spontaneous conversation? (2) What are the core functions of these UFPs? (3) How can we explain the use of these UFPs in Taiwan Mandarin which "deviates" from their use in mainland varieties? and (4) How can we explain the "emergence" of these UFPs, or their typical use, in Taiwan Mandarin?

Chapter 1 also outlines the methodological approach taken in the rest of the study: I adopt a discourse-functional approach to explore the core functions of these UFPs in conversational contexts and, in order to identify the possible source language(s), I compare the core functions of the UFPs in Taiwan Mandarin with possible counterparts in Southern Mǐn and other (mainland) varieties. The comparison is based on spoken data and judgments of native speakers of different varieties of Mandarin.

In **Chapter 2,** in order to draw a clear picture of the formation of today's Taiwan Mandarin, I first introduce the socio-historical background to the language situation in Taiwan, with a focus on language contact, such as the influence of Southern Mǐn and the process of "leveling". The chapter also reviews previous literature on UFPs and language contact. The literature review provides the context for the discussion in chapter 7, where I take a closer look at the Taiwan Mandarin UFPs as a contact-induced phenomenon. I finally provide an overview of Taiwan Mandarin UFPs and their counterparts in standard Mandarin and Southern Mǐn and explain why I selected the three UFPs *a*, *la* and *ê* as my research object.

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 analyze the distribution and the discourse functions of the UFPs *a*, *la* and *ê* in Taiwan Mandarin. Different core functions are proposed for

each UFP and then tested with spoken data. In **chapter 3**, I first review the previous literature on Mandarin UFP *a* (Shie 1991, C. Z. Chu 1994, C. C. Chu 2002, R. Wu 2004, and B. Li 2006). Following these studies, I divide Taiwan Mandarin *a* into two categories according to distinct pitch heights: high-pitch *a* and low-pitch *a*. I propose that the core function of the Taiwan Mandarin UFP *a* is to mark knowledge activation: The low-pitch *a* marks the activation of the speaker's own knowledge, whereas the high-pitch *a* indicates activation of the addressee's knowledge. I also show that the use of UFP *a* in Taiwan Mandarin is not entirely identical with that in mainland Mandarin. In Taiwan Mandarin, the high-pitch *a* can be used to introduce a discourse topic. This function is not attested in mainland Mandarin. I argue that this "deviated" use results from contact with Southern Mǐn.

Chapter 4 distinguishes two types of *la* in Mandarin: the fused *la* and the simplex *la*. The fused *la*, which exists in both mainland Mandarin and Taiwan Mandarin, is the fusion of Mandarin perfective marker *le* and UFP *a*. The simplex *la*, on the other hand, stands in its own right, and exists in both Taiwan Mandarin and Southern Mǐn, but not in mainland Mandarin. I propose that the core function of the simplex *la* is to mark an adjustment. I define "adjustment" in a broad sense: it can refer to utterances which carry the speaker's modification or correction of previous utterances, or utterances which serve to adjust the interlocutor's attitude or move; it can also refer to an adjustment of the speaker's role. I then compare the use of simplex *la* in Taiwan Mandarin and Southern Mǐn and conclude that the distributional contexts and functions of the UFP *la* are identical in both languages.

In **chapter 5**, I first examine the differences between *ê* and its variant *ye*. I suggest that the use of *y*[j]-initial forms in Taiwan Mandarin onsetless UFPs involving syllable lengthening has an "emphatic" connotation and argue that the core function of *ê* is to induce a collaborative move by foregrounding the utterance to which *ê* is attached.

In order to sharpen the contours of the proposed core functions, **chapter 6** provides a contrastive analysis of the use of *a*, *la* and *ê* in identical contexts. Since it is impossible to find contextually and otherwise maximally comparable authentic data, the approach I use in this chapter is to construct minimal pairs/triplets on the basis of data from the previous chapters, and compared the use of the UFPs in these pairs/triplets by eliciting judgments from Taiwan Mandarin native speakers.

Chapter 7 discusses the emergence of the aforementioned UFPs and their functions in Taiwan Mandarin from the perspective of language contact. I suggest that the simplex *la* is a result of lexical imposition of Southern Mǐn on Taiwan Mandarin, that is, the transfer includes all the features of *la*. Moreover, the use of *la*

is no longer a case of code-switching only associated with speakers with a Southern Mǐn background: it is also used by people with a Hakka background and Mandarin monolinguals.

In contrast to the simplex *la*, which was fully imposed from Southern Mǐn, the emergence of the Taiwan Mandarin *a* involves a more complex process of function transfer. This process can be accounted for by what Lefebvre (1998, 2001) calls "relexification". The UFP *a* is a particle which was relexified under the influence of the Taiwan Southern Mǐn UFP *a*.

On the basis the socio-historical background introduced in chapter 2, I propose that the UFP *ê* was imported by first-generation mainland immigrants. I propose that the source language of *ê* is Jiāng-Huái Mandarin, which is spoken in Northern Jiāngsū, Nánjīng, and central Ānhuī. The reason why this UFP has spread to Taiwan Mandarin is related to the fact that mainland immigrants from those areas occupied high positions in education, politics and economy after they relocated to Taiwan. This claim implies that except for Southern Mǐn, other Sinitic varieties also played a role in the formation of the Taiwan Mandarin UFP system.

In the same chapter, I also examine the reverse direction of language contact, i.e. the influence of Mandarin on the use of the Southern Mǐn UFP *a*. In addition, I look at possible motivations for a speaker in Taiwan when it comes to the choice between a Mandarin UFP and a non-Mandarin one when both are available. This language choice situation is illustrated by the use of *nê* by bilingual Taiwanese speakers.

Chapter 8 presents the conclusion, revisits my research questions and elaborates on the significance of my study. I also discuss the limitations of it and provide suggestions for future research.