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Effectiveness of Prosodic Features in the Perception of Mandarin
Utterance-final Particles

Bin Li^a and Jinping Zhu^b

^aDepartment of Chinese, Translation & Linguistics, City University of Hong Kong, 83 Tat Chee Ave.
Kowloon Tong, 220 Hong Kong, China

^bTsingHua University, 104 Main Academic building, 100084 Beijing, China

Utterance-final particles (UFPs) in Mandarin are regarded as discourse markers, whose "elusive" meanings and functions have been investigated in different perspectives such as pragmatics and semantics. Our study focuses on two most frequently used UFPs: NE and A, both of which can occur in identical utterances. The difference lies in that NE implies a shared common ground between the speaker and the hearer, whereas such commonness lacks for A. A preliminary acoustic analysis found that prosodic features of an utterance were more salient when a UFP was not used. The current study aims at the effectiveness of these prosodic features in perceiving these particles. Native speakers of Mandarin are asked to listen to sentences, which may originally contain a UFP that is removed. Their tasks are to decide whether a UFP, and which one, is needed in a given sentence. It is hypothesized that without textual cues, speakers will rely on prosodic features in their judgment; therefore, they will perform better in sentences where UFPs are not used originally and where prosodic cues are more salient.