

Requesting Confirmation or Reconfirmation across Languages: An Introduction

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Abstract

This special issue presents a collection of conversation-analytic and interactional-linguistic studies concerned with the cross-linguistic analysis of requests for confirmation (RfC) and requests for reconfirmation (RfRCs) as two distinct types of polar questions. In this paper, we outline a characterisation of the two actions with reference to their epistemic gradient and their sequential design, which does not take specific linguistic resources as its starting point and thus lends itself to comparative analysis. We review previous research on the linguistic design of RfCs and RfRCs and the responses they invite in different languages before we summarise the main findings of the papers in this issue. The final section discusses perspectives for future research on interactional and epistemic styles across languages.

Keywords

cross-linguistic interactional research – comparative conversation analysis – polar questions – requests for confirmation – requests for reconfirmation – newsmarks – action formation – response design

1 Introduction

As a social action, polar questions are a powerful tool for establishing, maintaining and negotiating intersubjectivity. In recent years, conversation-analytic and interactional-linguistic research has studied polar questions in mundane conversation from various angles. One perspective concerns the epistemic gradient on which polar questions are organised (Heritage, 2012). Interrogativity entails at least a minimal imbalance in epistemic access, rights or responsibilities. When posing a polar question, the speaker claims to be less knowledgeable than the addressee and takes a position that can range from a completely unknowing to a more knowledgeable stance – involving different sequential positions and linguistic designs (Deppermann, 2018; Raymond, 2010). Interactional studies have concentrated on the resources with which speakers frame their utterances as polar questions (Stivers and Rossano, 2010), index their relationship to prior discourse (Bolden, 2010; Helmer and Zinken, 2019) or express the valence of the information that is requested (Raymond and Heritage, 2021). From an action-based perspective, scholars have addressed the ‘double-barrelledness’ (Schegloff 2007: 75–78) of polar questions in looking at other actions polar questions can accomplish (Rossi, 2018; Stivers et al., 2023), including proffering a topic, seeking agreement, repair initiation, or challenges. Another analytic perspective concerns the responses polar questions make conditionally relevant and the constraints they impose on their design (Raymond, 2003; 2013). Navigating in a language’s response possibility space (Stivers, 2022), respondents may readily go along with a question’s agenda, or they may resist its sequential implications (Clayman and Heritage, 2002: chapter 7 on evasive answers; Stivers and Hayashi, 2010 on transformative answers; Stivers, 2022: chapter 3 on non-answer responses).

Cross-linguistic conversation-analytic research has started to explore the different resources languages provide to distinguish between the varying epistemic stances expressed in polar questions (Enfield et al., 2012) and the language-specific preferences in response formats (Enfield et al., 2019). The present issue takes up this comparative interest in the interactional analysis of question-response sequences while at the same time narrowing down the scope of investigation: In line with current research, we conceptualise polar questions as an overarching category for various kinds of actions that make a polar answer (often glossed as a *yes-no* answer) relevant (see for example the coding scheme in Stivers and Enfield, 2010 for an overview). These can include, among others, requests for affirmation, requests for confirmation, requests for reconfirmation (newsmarks), requests for clarification (as a type of repair), agreement-seeking actions (such as assessments) or

directive-commissive actions (such as suggestions or proposals). Languages can differ greatly in terms of how they implement this array of social actions: They may (or may not) afford different interrogative formats with which they distinguish between them; each format can come with language-specific ‘collateral effects’ (Sidnell and Enfield, 2012) or may be associated with diverging cultural concepts (Zinken and Ogiermann, 2013). Languages may also vary in the response formats they provide for different types of polar questions. Speakers of Finnish, for example, have different resources at their disposal for affirming or confirming a prior turn (Sorjonen, 2001). In German, the response particle *genau* is specialised for doing confirmation but is hardly found after requests for affirmation (Oloff, 2017). Such observations call for a closer comparative analysis of selected types of *polar question/polar answer* sequences. By focussing on requests for confirmation (RfCs) and requests for reconfirmation (RfRCs) and their particularities in different languages, the contributions in this issue explore diverse perspectives with which such an agenda can be pursued in order to learn more about the actions and their sequential trajectories and the varying verbal, vocal or bodily resources interlocutors mobilise across languages.

The remainder of the introduction is organised as follows: First, we propose a delineation of RfCs and RfRCs that does not start from pre-determined linguistic features but rather characterises the two actions with reference to their epistemic gradient and their sequential design, which thus lends itself to interactional cross-linguistic research (Section 2). We then briefly discuss previous research on RfC and RfRC sequences by highlighting selected linguistic resources that have been described as relevant for their design to provide a context for the descriptive dimensions that papers in this issue address (Section 3). The introduction continues with an overview of the comparative perspectives the individual contributions in this issue take and a summary of their main lines of argument (Section 4). The concluding section outlines directions for future cross-linguistic interactional research on *polar question/polar answer* sequences.

2 Requesting Confirmation or Reconfirmation in Mundane Conversations

In requesting confirmation, speakers present a proposition as quite probable while at the same time ascribing higher epistemic access, responsibility or rights to the addressee, therefore requiring them to (minimally) confirm or disconfirm (see, among others, Bolden, 2010; Heritage, 2012; Seuren and Huiskes,

2017). In excerpt (1), Melissa and Zack discuss their travel arrangements for a skiing holiday. In line 20, Melissa presents an upshot of Zack's prior talk and puts it up for confirmation.

Excerpt (1) British English (excerpt 1 (shortened) in Marmorstein and Szczepek Reed, this issue)

17 Zack: they're going DOWN UH::M (.) <<all> SATurday.>
 18 (0.9)
 19 then .hh kuh ku:[:h
 20 -> Mel: [so we'll BOOK it tomOorrow.
 21 (0.7)
 22 Zack: HOPEfully: we bOOK it tomOorrow;=
 23 =YEAH;
 24 (1.0)
 25 that be SWEET if we dO.

Zack responds with an expanded repeat (adding the modulator *hopefully*) followed by a response token *yeah*, accomplishing a qualified confirmation (see Marmorstein and Szczepek Reed, this issue, for a more in-depth analysis).

Requesting reconfirmation, in contrast, concerns a proposition that has already been introduced in prior discourse by one participant and which is subsequently put up again for confirmation by another. Excerpt (2) presents an example from Yurakaré, an isolate spoken in Bolivia (Gipper, forthc.). Here, the response consists of a single response token delivered in overlap with the utterance it refers to.

Excerpt (2): Yurakaré (excerpt 2 in Gipper et al., this issue)

01 Yas: **achu anchi lijutütüjti sě tappě.**
 achu ana=chi li-ku-tütü-jti-y sěě
 like_that DEM=DIR VLOC-3SG.OBJ.COM-sit-HAB-1SG.SBJ I
 ta-pěpě
 1PL.POSS-grandfather
 'Well, I was here with our grandfather.'
 02 -> Nur: **(0.4) ě anchi liju[tütüjt]im mě;**
 ě ana=chi li-ku-tütü-jti-m měě
 INTJ DEM=DIR VLOC-3SG.OBJ.COM-sit-HAB-2SG.SBJ you.SG
 'Ah, you were here with him?'
 03 Yas: **[te:,]**
 'Yeah.'

To date, both RfCs and even more so RfRCs have only seldomly been studied in their own right. Instead, they are commonly analysed together with other related actions (for instance as part of polar questions, see below) or studies concentrate on particular linguistic designs (such as declarative RfCs or selected newsmark tokens) but do not cover the whole spectrum of RfCs and RfRCs in the given languages.

Relying on formal features in cross-linguistic interactional research is not always possible as languages may afford different resources or strategies for accomplishing similar actions (Haspelmath, 2010; see also Gipper and Groß, this issue; König and Pfeiffer, in prep.). Functional definitions, however, might run into the problem that workable criteria and delimitations can be hard to establish (Lindström, 2021). Recent approaches in pragmatic typology therefore take sequential structures as a ‘natural control’ for identifying relevant and comparable cases in different languages (Dingemanse and Enfield, 2015; Dingemanse and Floyd, 2014; Floyd et al., 2020; Rossi, 2020). Based on observations made by the papers in this issue, the following sections outline how such an approach can be applied to characterise and delimit RfCs and RfRCs, respectively, without reference to their linguistic design.

2.1 *Requests for Confirmation*

Previous research has repeatedly described RfCs with reference to declarative or negative interrogative morpho-syntax (Heritage, 2002; Raymond, 2010; Seuren and Huiskes, 2017), interrogative intonation (Bolden, 2016) or particular lexical devices such as tags (Heritage, 2012). As indicated above, however, such criteria do not easily lend themselves to a cross-linguistic analysis (see also Section 3 for a more detailed discussion). Moreover, not all utterances that comply with these criteria are treated as sequence-initiating first-pair parts; rather, their sequential position and the speakers’ assumptions about their relative epistemic statuses play a major role in action formation and ascription (Heritage, 2012; Labov and Fanshel, 1977). We thus turn to the discussion of these two dimensions in previous literature to develop a non-form-based understanding of RfCs.

In contrast to other polar questions, RfCs are characterised by a relatively flat but nevertheless recipient-tilted epistemic gradient:

Polar interrogatives that are genuine requests for information (questioner fully [K-]) make Affirmation (or Denial) relevant next, whereas polar interrogatives and B-event statements that are requests for confirmation

(questioner somewhat knowing, partially [K+]) require Confirmation or Disconfirmation. The difference between Affirmation and Confirmation lies in the epistemic stance taken by the responder in relation to that of the questioner. An answerer who *affirms* something said in a prior turn positions him/herself as [K+] and consequently construes the questioner as fully [K-]; the information the answerer provides is thus treated as wholly new and informative for the questioner. An answerer who *confirms* something the other has said, on the other hand, while still positioning him/herself as [K+], construes the questioner as partly in the know. In this case, the information provided in the response is not treated as wholly new or unexpected for the questioner.' (Couper-Kuhlen and Selting, 2018: 238)

With a RfC, a speaker claims partial knowledge about the confirmable (i.e., comparatively high access, certainty or rights to claim knowledge about the matter at hand), but still positions the addressee as having more epistemic rights, access or responsibilities. RfCs thus entail the assumption that 'the proposition being put on the table is likely true, and merely requires confirmation' (Enfield et al., 2019: 288). The specific epistemic gradient of RfCs is reflected in their sequential integration in longer stretches of discourse: RfCs, as defined above, tend to be asked later in a conversation, once some common ground has been established about a matter at hand (Deppermann and Spranz-Fogasy, 2011; Raymond, 2010; Seuren, 2019; Bolden et al., 2023). Confirmations are treated as preferred and disconfirmations as dispreferred responses (Stivers, 2022: 25). However, both confirmation and disconfirmation align with the RfCs' epistemic stance. This contrasts with 'volunteered' confirmation, which retroactively treats a prior turn as a confirmable that was not designed to invite a second in the first place and that therefore functions as an epistemic challenge (Betz and Deppermann, 2018; Stivers, 2005).

As indicated above, languages may provide different resources for doing either affirmation or confirmation. While the German response token *genau* ('exactly') is used to confirm a prior declarative expressing a relatively knowing stance (see Deppermann et al., forthc.), it is hardly ever used after verb-first interrogatives, which tend to be asked from a less knowledgeable position and therefore request affirmation instead (Oloff, 2017), and it is not documented as a response to RfCs in German (see Gipper et al., this issue). For responses following 'V-interrogatives' in Finnish, Sorjonen (2001) shows that speakers tend to use repeat responses to affirm a prior question, i.e. they treat the information as new for the questioner, whereas the response token *niin* ('yes') confirms prior knowledge on the questioner's side and the token *joo* ('yes') confirms and

reconfirms. Speakers of these languages can therefore overtly distinguish between different types of polar answers that assign different epistemic positions to the questioner. For cross-linguistic research, it could therefore be highly relevant to compare response formats and resources in different kinds of polar questions.

RfCs involve more than just making confirmation relevant. Speakers take a relatively knowledgeable stance vis-à-vis a confirmable that they ‘put on the table’ (Enfield et al., 2019). That is to say, it is the RfC speaker that introduces the confirmable proposition to discourse (what Küttner and Ehmer, this issue, refer to as one basic affordance of RfCs). This distinguishes RfCs from, for instance, repair-initiating other-repeats (see Aldrup, this issue, for a discussion), which are also often followed by polar answers (see papers in Rossi, 2020). Unlike such other-repeats, which assume a second position and therefore refer back to and depend on another speaker’s prior utterance, RfCs can but need not be related to previous discourse. They can be introduced as topic-initiating proffers (Seuren and Huiskes, 2017), but they may also offer formulations or inferences from prior talk (Helmer and Zinken, 2019) or request verification of background knowledge in an ongoing telling (Satti, this issue).

2.2 *Requests for Reconfirmation*

RfRCs are often conflated with RfCs based on the assumption that they also make confirmation relevant (Raymond and Stivers, 2016: 326; Stivers and Enfield, 2010: 2621) and that they are also asked from a relatively knowledgeable position (Raymond and Stivers, 2016; Steensig and Heinemann, 2013). However, the papers in this issue (e.g. Aldrup, Gipper et al., Küttner and Ehmer, Marmorstein and Szczepek Reed) argue for a clearer distinction between the two actions. Unlike RfCs, requests for reconfirmation are concerned with something that has already been asserted by another speaker in prior discourse. They are therefore tied to a particular sequential context and they do not introduce the confirmable to discourse (and thus essentially lack one of RfCs’ basic affordances, see Küttner and Ehmer, this issue). Functionally, they range from expressions of ‘ritualized disbelief [...] that treat a prior utterance as news for the recipient’ (Heritage, 1984: 339) or ‘show repair’ (Imo, 2009: 80) to genuine expressions of ‘doubt about the truth of the informing’ (Thompson et al., 2015: 77) that register ‘divergent expectations’ (Thompson et al., 2015: 82). While not categorical in nature, studies have also reported a tendency for RfRCs to receive more than mere confirmation. Speakers can be prompted with RfRCs to provide more substantiation for the matter at hand (Stivers, 2011; Thompson et al., 2015). RfRCs can therefore work as an off-record practice for soliciting accounts (Raymond and Stivers, 2016 on known-answer

requests for confirmation). Unlike RfCs, however, it is not their main business to anchor the requester's knowledge in the interlocutors' common ground.

Even though the response formats they invite may be the same (in English and German, at least, both RfCs and RfRCs are regularly answered with tokens such as *yes/ja* or *no/nee*),¹ responses to RfRCs differ in terms of conditional relevance and preference. For instance, Gubina and Betz (2021) argue that German *echt* turns invite a response rather than make one relevant (see also Marmorstein and Szczepek Reed, this issue, for English *really?* and Arabic *wallāhi*), which contrasts with findings for RfCs that overwhelmingly receive an answer (Pfeiffer et al., *forthc.*). Similarly, in her study of medical interactions, Stivers (2011: 83) notes that not all turns following newsmarks are overtly designed as responsive. RfRCs also differ in the responsive actions they call for. Both Marmorstein and Szczepek Reed (this issue) and Gipper et al. (this issue) show that, in contrast to RfCs, RfRCs clearly favour confirmations over disconfirmations. This supports the assumption that they do not initiate other-repair (Dingemanse and Enfield, 2015: 100) but rather register a prior turn as 'remarkable' (Marmorstein and Szczepek Reed, this issue).

The above also indicates that the epistemic stance speakers take with RfRCs is quite particular: They do not assert their knowledge explicitly (and therefore do not exert agency over the confirmable as they do with RfCs) but rather they allude to their underlying expectations. What speakers claim, however, is at least some right to register a prior turn as noteworthy and unexpected – a right which is tied to a particular participation role (doing being an involved interlocutor, see Marmorstein and Szczepek Reed, this issue). This contrasts with institutional discourse, such as news interviews in which interviewers systematically withhold such responses (Greatbatch, 1988).

The previous sections have offered a characterisation of RfCs and RfRCs with reference to the different epistemic stances they express and their diverging sequential design. Such an approach can form the basis of cross-linguistic research which does not rely on language-specific categories or forms. This allows for a closer look into how the requesting and the responding turns are formatted across languages (e.g. how different languages contextualise the relevant epistemic gradient) and the social actions they implement.

1 Note, however, that speakers of a language might also treat RfCs and RfRCs differently in their responses. For Yurakaré, for instance, Gipper et al. (this issue) report a higher frequency of response tokens for RfRCs compared to RfCs, which instead tend to be answered with responses in repeat format (Gipper, *forthc.*). These results await further investigation.

3 Building RfC and RfRC Sequences

In this section, we briefly summarise previous research on the verbal, vocal and bodily resources for requesting confirmation or reconfirmation and the response formats they invite as identified in previous research. We do not intend to offer a comprehensive, state-of-the-art literature review, but rather aim at providing a contextual framework for the research questions the papers in this issue address. In the following, we therefore turn to interactional dimensions that previous research has identified as relevant for delivering RfC and RfRC sequences.

3.1 *Contextualising Epistemic Stance*

Previous studies of RfCs have concentrated on particular formal designs. For instance, Bolden (2010, for English) and Seuren and Huiskes (2017, for Dutch) build their collections of RfCs by concentrating on utterances in declarative morpho-syntax. Raymond (2010) compares *yes-no* interrogatives and *yes-no* declaratives to find that the former often request unknown information and elaborate answers while the latter claim partial knowledge and therefore instead require short sequence-closing confirmation (see also Deppermann and Spranz-Fogasy, 2011). Declaratives are regularly treated as RfCs when they deal with ‘B-event statements’ (Labov and Fanshel, 1977), i.e. statements for which the addressee but not the speaker has primary epistemic rights (Heritage, 2012). However, as a comparative synopsis of the studies on polar questions carried out at the MPI Nijmegen in ten different languages (Stivers et al. (eds.), 2010) shows, the interplay between morpho-syntax and social action is not straightforward cross-linguistically.² For instance, in American English (Stivers, 2010) and Japanese (Hayashi, 2010), speakers predominantly request confirmation with declaratives but do also use other syntactic formats. In contrast, Danish (Heinemann, 2010) mainly relies on interrogatively marked utterances, while in Dutch conversational data declaratives, tag questions and interrogatives show an almost equal distribution (Englert, 2010). Moreover, there are languages in which there is no morpho-syntactic distinction between interrogatives and declaratives (such as Italian (Rossano, 2010) or Yéî Dnye (Levinson, 2010); see also Küttner and Ehmer, this issue,

2 Unfortunately, not all papers in the Stivers et al. (eds.) (2010) issue document the quantitative distribution of the type of polar question (interrogative, declarative, tag question) across social actions. Further evidence for the complex relationship between morpho-syntactic design and social action can be found in the studies presented in the special issue ‘Request for confirmation sequences in ten languages’ (Pfeiffer and König (eds.), forthc.).

on Peninsular Spanish) and final intonation does not necessarily function as a sufficient marker of interrogativity, either (see Rossano, 2010 for Italian). If an utterance requests new information or confirmation of somewhat known information, it must be – to a large extent – determined on pragmatic grounds. Some languages rely heavily on tags to request confirmation (such as Yéî Dnye, Levinson, 2010), while these are rarely used in other languages (such as Yurakaré, Gipper, *forthc.*). Gaze can help to mobilise a response to questions that might otherwise be understood as declarative assertions (Rossano, 2010: 2767); in other languages such as Tzeltal, however, gaze tends not to be used for next-speaker selection during questions (Brown, 2010: 2647).

What this synopsis shows is that particular formal features cannot be criterial for delimiting RfCs in cross-linguistic research. For comparative purposes, it is therefore necessary to develop an understanding of RfCs that is rooted in epistemic and sequential terms (see Section 2). At the same time, the observations point out differences in the use of verbal, vocal and bodily resources for RfCs that should be made the object of study in cross-linguistic research. Further comparative analyses can supply more insights into their interrelation and quantitative distribution across languages (see Pfeiffer et al., *forthc.*). Other resources of epistemic stance-taking need more analytic attention in cross-linguistic research. For instance, in English, negative polarity (Heritage and Raymond, 2021) and particular negative-interrogative constructions (Heritage, 2002) can be used to cast a confirmable as (not) likely to be true (see also Koshik, 2005). In Dutch, *oh*-prefaced negative *yes-no* interrogatives can register a prior informing as counter to expectation (Seuren et al., 2018). For Korean, Kim (this issue) shows that different types of negation can be used to express different epistemic and normative positions (see also Keevalik, 2009 for ‘negative questions’ in Estonian). Comparative analyses of interactional uses of negative polarity RfCs are thus needed.

In contrast, RfRCs, also referred to as ‘newsmarks’ (Heritage, 1984; Jefferson, 1981) or ‘known-answer requests for confirmation’ (Raymond and Stivers, 2016), have rarely been studied in their own right (but see Gubina and Betz, 2021). Instead, they are often discussed in relation to other resources with which they co-occur (such as change-of-state tokens, Heritage, 1984) or to practices that they border on (such as other-initiated repair, Dingemanse and Enfield, 2015, responses to news or informings, Maynard, 1997; Thompson et al., 2015, or displays of surprise, Wilkinson and Kitzinger, 2006). Research on RfRCs is mainly based on English as a subject language (see Kaimaki, 2012 for a notable exception). Moreover, it often concentrates on particular forms (often token-like expressions, such as English *really?*) rather than looking at the whole range of resources for eliciting reconfirmation of a prior turn. Cross-linguistic studies

therefore still have to investigate the formal inventory different languages routinely use for building RfRCs as well as their interactional functions.

3.2 *Embedding in Ongoing Discourse*

RfCs and RfRCs can take up different sequential positions. RfCs may open up new sequences (unlike RfRCs) or return to a prior topic (Seuren and Huiskes, 2017). RfRCs can, for instance, follow volunteered tellings or responses to questions (Thompson et al., 2015, Gipper et al., this issue). In using particular discourse particles, speakers contextualise how RfCs and RfRCs are fitted to the previous conversation (see Stivers, 2022: 49f. for particles such as *oh*, *so*, *and*, *but*, *well* and *now* preceding polar questions in British and American English). They can frame RfCs as articulating something that is now remembered or now understood (see Seuren et al., 2016 for *oh ja*- and *oh*-prefaced declaratives in Dutch), that can be inferred from prior discourse (*das heißt* ('that means') (Helmer and Zinken, 2019), *dann* ('then')/also ('so') (Deppermann and Helmer, 2013)), as something which is notably missing in prior talk (cf. Bolden, 2010 on *and*-prefaced RfCs) or as something that runs counter to previous assumptions (Dutch *maar* ('but') or *toch* (untranslatable particle) Seuren and Huiskes, 2017). Prefacing RfRCs with change-of-state tokens such as English *oh* or Finnish *ai* can index divergent prior expectations about the matter at hand, thus stressing the need for reconfirmation (Heritage, 1984; Seuren et al., 2016; Thompson et al., 2015; see also Koivisto, this issue). These single language studies therefore point out that overtly marking information states, sources of knowledge, relations to previous knowledge and addressing previous talk as incomplete may be relevant in RfC and RfRC sequences. Cross-linguistic research still has to investigate how these dimensions play out in different languages.

3.3 *Multimodal Design*

As indicated above, bodily resources can play an important role in RfC and RfRC sequences, for instance by establishing conditional relevance by selecting the next speaker (via gaze, Rossano, 2010, Satti, this issue) or by indexing an epistemic stance of uncertainty (by tilting the head or furrowing eyebrows, Satti, this issue). Moreover, facial displays can contextualise affective stances such as surprise (Aldrup, this issue, Marmorstein and Szczepek Reed, this issue), which may frame an utterance as a challenge (Küttner and Ehmer, this issue). They therefore help to indicate whether an otherwise unmarked utterance is to be understood as a question or requires reconfirmation or more substantiation. Responses may be delivered by nodding or shaking the head alone (accordingly, Stivers, 2019 includes them as interjections) or as multimodal packages (Kärkkäinen and Thompson, 2018). Some studies note that

nods and head shakes are rarely used as a full response without co-occurring verbal means (e.g. Gipper et al., this issue, Deppermann et al., *forthc.*), suggesting that they may have different functions. The systematicity with which speakers of different languages use bodily resources in action formation, especially in delivering RfC and RfRC sequences, therefore needs to be explored in more detail.

3.4 *Navigating the Answer Possibility Space*

Addressees have different options to deal with the epistemic assumptions and formal constraints that RfCs set. Responses to polar questions are often glossed as *yes-no* answers, but cross-linguistic research showed quite early on that languages provide different resources or strategies (Sadock and Zwicky, 1985), ranging from particle responses (*yes* and *no*) and phrasal answers (such as English *that's right* (Barnes, 2012) and its rough German equivalent *das stimmt*, (Betz, 2015)) to repeats (full, partial, expanded, modified, see Bolden, 2023 for a discussion). While languages are said to prefer a particular format (see Gipper and Groß, this issue), speakers may also make use of the other response types or combine them in their answer turns. Cross-linguistic interactional studies are interested in how speakers navigate this field of options to accomplish different responsive actions (Enfield et al., 2019). A question that still needs to be addressed in more detail is whether different interrogative actions prefer different response types. Languages might exhibit different preferences in responding to RfCs or RfRCs (see Yurakaré, for instance, in which repeats are a frequent strategy for confirming RfCs (Gipper, *forthc.*), while response tokens are instead used to confirm RfRCs (Gipper et al., this issue); see also Keevallik, 2010) on a similar observation for RfRCs in Estonian). Repeats are often treated as doing more than merely providing confirmation, in that they may stress the respondent's agency over the proposition (Stivers and Hayashi, 2010; Enfield et al., 2019; Bolden, 2023). In some languages, however, both response particles and repeats can accomplish minimal and 'pragmatically unmarked' confirmation, such as Estonian (Keevallik, 2010), Finnish (Sorjonen, 2001) or Tzeltal, Yucatec and Zapotec (Brown et al., 2021). Moreover, in their comparative analysis of German and Yurakaré, Groß and Gipper (this issue) show that qualified confirmation can not only be accomplished by repeats but also by token responses. Further work on the interactional implications in the choice of answer possibilities across languages is therefore needed.

3.5 *Making Relevant Minimal or Expanded Confirmations*

In some sequences, speakers deliver (re)confirmation or disconfirmation with repeats or response tokens alone, while in others they also expand their turns.

The question of how RfCs and RfRCs invite more than a minimal response is not easily answered cross-linguistically. In some languages, particular forms tend to be met with either shorter or longer responses. In German, for instance, RfCs appended by the tag *ne* (derived from *nicht* ‘not’) receive more minimal, token-only responses than those appended by *oder* (‘or’, see Deppermann et al., *forthc.*). In Dutch, RfCs that are marked with *maar* (‘but’) as contrasts to prior talk usually request response elaboration (Seuren and Huiskes, 2017). Across several languages, phrasal RfCs, which often function as understanding checks, invite shorter answers than full-sentential forms (see Pfeiffer et al., *forthc.*). In German, RfRCs that are cast as repeats tend to invite longer responses than in token or newsmark format (Gipper et al., *this issue*). However, the first-pair part’s verbal design is not a straightforward predictor for response elaboration. Sequential context, too, plays a role as interlocutors are involved in ‘epistemic bookkeeping’: For Dutch, Seuren and Huiskes (2017) show that RfCs that return to something that has already been said or hinted at before are regularly treated as merely requiring minimal confirmation. The social actions that RfCs and RfRCs implement also have an impact. They receive longer responses when they are heard as challenges (Heinemann, 2008; Steensig and Heinemann, 2013; see also Gipper et al., *this issue*; Küttner and Ehmer, *this issue*). Speakers therefore attend to linguistic design, sequentiality, epistemic background and social action in delivering either minimal or expanded responses to RfCs and RfRCs (see Gubina et al., *this issue*). Comparative analyses may help to further explore the complex relationship between these dimensions across languages.

While identifying relevant dimensions for cross-linguistic research on RfC and RfRC sequences, the above overview also shows that studies conducted to date mostly concentrate on single languages. This calls for more comparative work to explore the range of resources different languages mobilise and the ways in which they shape RfCs and RfRCs, as well as their responses, as social actions.

4 Comparative Research on RfCs and RfRCs: the Papers in This Issue

The papers collected in this issue approach comparative questions in the study of RfCs and RfRCs from different angles: Some papers focus on single languages but discuss the relevance of their analyses for cross-linguistic research (Gubina et al., Kim, Koivisto). Some work with data from two or more languages to identify potentially generic features or functions of RfC and RfRC sequences (Aldrup, Küttner and Ehmer). Others contrast languages or varieties in terms

regarding the relative distribution of particular resources (Satti, Gipper et al.) or the differential use of comparable resources (Marmorstein and Szczepek Reed). The following paragraphs will briefly introduce the papers in turn.

4.1 *Requesting Confirmation: Resources and Other Actions*

The issue starts out with four papers concentrating on particular verbal and vocal resources speakers of different languages mobilise for requesting confirmation and accomplishing other actions in requesting confirmation.

Küttner and Ehmer focus on requests for confirmation as vehicles for challenges in Peninsular Spanish and American English. The authors distinguish between two basic affordances of RfCs, their interrogative character and their capacity to introduce a proposition. They argue that in both languages participants can systematically mobilise either of these two affordances more strongly, resulting in different techniques for implementing challenges and other disagreement-implicative actions. They observe that both techniques – foregrounding a RfC's questioning affordance or foregrounding its propositional affordance – are used for the two major types of 'challengeables' apparent in the data, namely 1) a co-participant's assertion and the stance associated with it and 2) a co-participant's plan or decision. Speakers cast doubt on the other's prior talk or they raise issues that might not have been taken into account properly. The authors conclude that these techniques constitute generic resources available for implementing RfCs as challenges, independent of what is being challenged and of the language-specific resources that different languages provide.

Compared to other languages (Pfeiffer et al., *forthc.*), Korean RfCs stand out due to a comparatively high ratio of negatively polarised formats calling for a closer sequential analysis. **Kim's** paper presents a comparison of the interactional nuances that RfC speakers accomplish in using different types of negation in mundane conversation in Korean. It demonstrates that RfCs with pre-verbal, post-verbal and post-nominalisation negation index various epistemic and normative stances and invite different responses. While RfCs with pre-verbal negation (*an*) present inferences from prior talk that invite confirmation, post-verbal negation (*ci anh*) is used in RfCs that register something in the prior talk as problematic. Correspondingly, the latter often also invite elaborated responses. In contrast, post-nominalisation negation (*nun-ke ani*) places the confirmable in a normative, discourse-independent framework and rather invites minimal confirmation. Comparing the findings with previous studies on English, the paper discusses the negation's position in the turn as

an interactionally relevant factor and therefore adds to research on negative polarity as a stance-indexical resource in requesting confirmation.

Satti analyses requests for verification (RfVs) – a subtype of RfCs in multi-party interactions in which a speaker invites verification by one of the co-present participants – from a comparative multimodal perspective. The practice is rooted in a particular epistemic configuration in tellings: The current speaker and another participant share knowledge about the events of talk, but not the telling's primary addressee. In such a context, a teller can display their uncertainty about certain facts or details and starts a side sequence in order to ask the other knowing participant for verification of what they assume to hold true. Comparing varieties of Spanish spoken in Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia and Ecuador qualitatively and quantitatively, the author observes significant differences in the RfVs' verbal and visible design: While speakers usually gaze at the knowing recipient across all varieties, speakers from Bolivia and Ecuador establish mutual gaze less frequently compared with speakers from Argentina and Colombia. When mutual gaze is not available (Bolivia, Ecuador), speakers use prosodically integrated tags more often to invite verification. In contrast, mutual gaze (Argentina, Colombia) allows speakers to use facial gestures to contextualise speaker uncertainty. In these two varieties, tags – if they are used – tend to be prosodically independent and instead function as response pursuits. This attests a close connection between embodied conduct and an action's linguistic design. The paper highlights the relevance of the larger activity context and its particular participation framework for the design of RfVs and their sequential trajectory. Moreover, the comparative approach to the same action across varieties of one language suggests that the attested differences in gaze behaviour are linked to cultural preferences.

Koivisto's paper presents an empirical study about turn-final uses of Finnish *vai* ('or') based on a corpus of naturally occurring conversations (face-to-face and telephone interactions, institutional and mundane discourse). The author distinguishes two functional types of final *vai* in terms of their sequential implicativeness: Forward-oriented final-*vai* turns (type 1) introduce something new to the talk (by offering an open-ended list of alternatives or opening a new topical strand). Responses to this type recurrently receive an elaborated confirmation. In contrast, backward-oriented final *vai* (type 2) is concerned with an interpretation of prior discourse in that speakers either request the clarification of a reference or present an inference which contradicts their previous assumptions. This type is associated with responses that offer only minimal elaboration or specification. This study of Finnish talk-in-interaction adds to

previous research on turn-final alternative conjunctions in other languages, indicating that the conjunctions' alternative semantics can be mobilised for different interactional functions.

4.2 *Requesting Reconfirmation*

The three papers by Aldrup, Gipper et al., and Marmorstein and Szczepek Reed start from the assumption that a fine-grained distinction between RfCs and RfRCs is warranted due to the different sequential contexts in which the two actions occur. The authors focus either on formulaic expressions (Marmorstein and Szczepek Reed) or other-repeats (Alldrup) in different languages or they compare interactional functions of both formats across languages (Gipper et al.).

In their comparative study of mundane conversations in German, Low German and Yurakaré, **Gipper, König and Weber** combine quantitative and qualitative perspectives on the sequentiality and design of RfRCs and their responses. In all three languages, the authors find similar formats, token-like RfRCs (such as German *echt?* 'really?') and (partial) other-repeats. However, unlike the two Germanic languages, Yurakaré shows a quantitative preference for repeat RfRCs. Across the collections, RfRCs clearly favour confirmative answers and therefore contrast with the response relevance set in motion by RfCs. The qualitative analysis zooms in on RfRCs in informing sequences in order to determine the social actions the different RfRC formats accomplish. While token RfRCs register a prior turn as noteworthy in all three datasets, the languages differ in how they functionalise the formal difference between token and repeat RfRCs: In German, repeat RfRCs are regularly treated as challenges to a prior turn (and thus invite accounts or further substantiations) contrasting rather clearly with token RfRCs, which tend to treat a prior turn as merely noteworthy. In contrast, in Yurakaré there is no qualitative difference in the responses the two formats invite. Both are rarely treated as challenges. Here, repeat RfRCs are the default practice with which speakers register news (which might also explain their relatively high frequency in this language). Finally, in Low German, both formats can be treated as challenging a prior, but – in contrast to German – repeat RfRCs often only receive reconfirming and non-accounting responses. In summary, even though the languages afford similar RfRC formats, they differ in the actions and sequential trajectories the formats implement.

Marmorstein and Szczepek Reed's paper presents a study of two of the most frequent formulaic RfRCs or newsmarks in mundane conversations in English (*really?*) and Egyptian Arabic (*wallāhi*, lit. 'by God'). Contrary to previous research, they show that, in both languages, the forms' primary function

is not to mark prior talk as news but rather as something that is unexpected or remarkable and thus tellable or noteworthy. Their interactional function, the authors argue, can only partly be attributed to the expressions' lexical semantics, which in the case of *really?* relates more explicitly to the truth of an utterance than *wallāhi*, which is rooted in an oath-taking expression and rather targets the speaker's commitment. With both newsmarks, speakers can either align or disalign with the current course of action and they may thus be heard as affiliating with the addressee (e.g. in troubles talk) or as challenging or doubting a prior speaker. That is, the newsmarks' sequential position plays a major role in contextualising the interactional work they achieve. Based on their qualitative analyses, the authors question the assumption that newsmarks constitute a subtype of RfCs. As none of the instances in their collections is disconfirmed, newsmarks do not seem to present 'genuinely open questions' about the veracity of a prior proposition. Moreover, the authors note a wide range of response trajectories – from no response to minimal, token-only answers to further topic talk or accounts and substantiations. Rather than anchoring the requester's knowledge in the interlocutors' common ground, newsmarks register the addressee's prior talk as in some way outstanding. The paper therefore identifies a shared basic function of formulaic newsmarks in two typologically unrelated languages that could be tested for its generalisability in future comparative research.

Aldrup conducts an in-depth interactional analysis of other-repeats in mundane conversation in English and German that make a reconfirmation of a speaker's prior statement relevant. Instead of clearly characterising such repeats as either other-repair or newsmarks – as previous research has often done – the author calls for a more cautious functional analysis that also takes boundary cases into account. She argues that, in both languages, other-repeats instead operate on a continuum between marking a prior as news and taking an affiliative stance on the one hand and registering a prior turn as in some way problematic (not acceptable, counter to expectation, issuing severe doubt) and thus taking a disaffiliative stance. The analyses systematically include interlocutors' bodily conduct: While there is no single bodily-visual resource that contextualises the different functional layers, Aldrup identifies a recurrent clustering of multimodal resources (raised eyebrows, smiling vs. lowered eyebrows, frowns, moving away from other participants) that tilts the RfRCs towards one of the poles.

4.3 *Response Design*

The papers by Gubina, Betz and Deppermann and Groß and Gipper zoom in on the responses that requests for confirmation can receive.

In responding to RfCs, speakers often expand their turns to offer more than just confirmation, yet research that systematically explores the space beyond the beginning of a responsive turn is quite rare. Building on a study of German talk-in-interaction, **Gubina, Betz and Deppermann** address this issue and develop a typology of different types of expansion that ensue after confirming responses to RfCs. In offering topical elaborations or accounts dealing with problems of intelligibility concerning the respondent's prior actions, speakers deliver expansions that have usually been invited by the foregoing RfC. They therefore align with the current course of action. In contrast, transformative confirmations resisting the terms of the RfC (often issued as slightly altered repeats) and expansions challenging the askability of the prior RfC are not projected. Even though respondents still align with the polar constraints of the RfC, these expansions move away from delivering unproblematic confirmations. The paper therefore advances the systematic analysis of whole response turns and calls for further comparative analyses of response elaboration across different types of polar questions, on the one hand, and for exploring the linguistic design of RfC turns that invite elaboration and the resources with which elaboration is accomplished across languages.

With their comparative study of German and Yurakaré conversational data, **Groß and Gipper** turn to two languages that show different response preferences for confirming RfCs: While German exhibits a preference for response particles in this context, speakers of Yurakaré mobilise repeats to the same end. These two response types, the authors argue, form the basis for different strategies for accomplishing less (epistemically hedged confirmation, qualified confirmation) or more (registering trouble with the RfC's terms or agenda, indexing the valence of the confirmable) than mere confirmation. The paper advances a two-step, cross-linguistic approach in starting by determining the functional range of a particular resource (the German response token *joa*, a variant of 'yes') to then look for functionally equivalent resources that another language affords in a comparable sequential context. In German, all of the aforementioned functions can be accomplished with stand-alone or turn-initial *joa*. In contrast, speakers of Yurakaré use different strategies for indexing epistemic downgrading (repeating the confirmable adding epistemic or evidential markers), qualified or non-straightforward confirmation (repeating the confirmable adding mitigating morphology such as the medium intensity marker *-mashi* or the diminutive marker *-nñu*.) or confirming while registering trouble at the same time (the particle response *te* with a follow-up elaboration of the trouble). The latter can be deployed as an escape strategy in that the acceptance of the RfC's terms and agenda can be avoided, which

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