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Hua Lin

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GSIL
(Graduate Student in Linguistics)
University of Southern California
To our keynote speaker, Professor Edwin G. Pulleyblank, on his 75th birthday.
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Overlap in Mandarin Conversation

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This paper examines when, where, how and why overlaps occur in Mandarin conversation by investigating (1) the placement of an overlap with respect to turn projection cues, (2) speakership negotiation and the form that realizes the overlapping speaker’s speech, and (3) the function of the overlapping speaker’s speech in its sequential context. We find that speakership negotiation is related to both the first speaker’s turn projection cues and the function of the second speaker’s overlapping speech in its sequential context. Many overlaps are pragmatically motivated to demonstrate the listener’s attentiveness to the speaker’s speech or to reclaim one’s lost (or about-to-be-lost) speakership.

1. INTRODUCTION

Conversational turn-taking is well-structured according to a set of prioritized principles (Sacks et al., 1974). The completion of an on-going turn and the onset of the upcoming turn are highly projectable in terms of the convergence of pragmatic, prosodic, and syntactic completion (Ford & Thompson, 1996). Given the turn transition orderliness, speech overlap among interlocutors is a phenomenon that deserves our special attention. This paper examines when, where, how, and why overlaps occur in Mandarin conversation. We use the term "overlap" with a broad definition, so that for a dialogic setting we not only consider cases in which both speakers utter substantial speech at the same time, but also cases in which the primary speaker’s speech is overlapped with the listener’s backchannel expression.

In this paper, we investigate the following aspects of an overlap: (1) its placement with respect to turn projection cues, (2) speakership negotiation and the form that realizes
the overlapping speaker's speech, and (3) the function of the overlapping speaker's speech in its sequential context. We find that speakership negotiation is related to both the first speaker's turn projection cues and the function of the second speaker's overlapping speech in its sequential context. Many overlaps are pragmatically motivated such that the prosodic and/or syntactic turn projection cues become secondary. The pragmatic motivations behind these overlaps are either to demonstrate the listener's attentiveness to the speaker's speech or to reclaim one's lost (or about-to-be-lost) speakership. These pragmatic motivations are in various degrees associated with some specific forms that realize the overlapping speaker's speech.

In the following, we introduce the background and the database for this study in Section 2. From Sections 3 to 5 we discuss, respectively, the key notions and our findings of (1) the placement of an overlap with respect to turn projection cues, (2) speakership negotiation and the form that realizes the overlapping speech, and (3) the function of the overlapping speech in its sequential context. Section 6 is the conclusion.

2. BACKGROUND AND DATABASE

Overlap is a well-discussed phenomenon in conversation analysis. Researchers focused on overlap discuss its placement, the types of its onset, or its functions (Jefferson, 1973, 1983, 1986, 1993; Lerner, 1989). Recently, linguists interested in the relationship between discourse and grammar also examine overlap as a special type of speaker change in order to investigate the syntactic, intonational, and pragmatic resources for the projection of conversational turn completion (Ford & Thompson, 1996). In this paper we follow Ford & Thompson (1996) to treat overlap as a special type of speaker change. Ford & Thompson defines speaker change as follows: 'A speaker change was judged to have occurred at any point where another speaker took a recognizable turn, whether a full turn or a backchannel turn' (Ford & Thompson, 1996:152).

Our database consists of an 80-minute long, mostly two-party casual conversation between two native speakers of Mandarin. Their conversation was interspersed with talk by their American mutual friend, who was a non-native speaker but spoke fluent Mandarin. The conversation was transcribed according to the system proposed in Du Bois et al. (1993) with minor modifications (see Appendix for transcription conventions). The unit segmenting conversation is intonation unit (IU hereafter), which is roughly, 'a
stretch of speech uttered under a single coherent intonation contour’ (Du Bois et al., 1993: 47). For ease of reference, we call the person who has been speaking before the overlap the first speaker, and the other person is the second speaker.

3. THE PLACEMENT OF OVERLAP

In this section we discuss the placement of overlap in terms of two kinds of turn projection cues, i.e., IU-boundary and intonation as prosodic cues for possible turn completion, and the completion of a clause as the syntactic cue for possible turn completion (Ford & Thompson, 1996).

First, IU-boundary and overlap. In a dialogic setting, when two speakers overlap their speech, they either start their respective IU (almost) at the same time, or, one speaker starts speaking when the other speaker is still in the midst of her IU. In the first situation, the onset of the overlap is at (or very near) the IU-boundary. We shall call this type of overlap an IU-boundary overlap. In the second situation, the onset of the overlap is in the midst of an IU. We shall call this type of overlap an IU-internal overlap.

IU-boundary overlaps can be further distinguished into two types, i.e., those that occur after a prior IU that has a final intonation, and those that occur after a prior IU that has a continuing intonation. By contrast, IU-internal overlaps by definition occur before the first speaker’s IU reaches its intonational completion.

Next, let us consider syntactic completion and overlap. We follow Ford & Thompson (1996) in defining syntactic completion: ‘We judged an utterance to be syntactically complete if, in its sequential context, it could be interpreted as a complete clause, i.e. with an overt or directly recoverable predicate, without considering intonation.

---

1 For this study, overlaps that involve laughter or indiscernible speech are discarded. Overlaps that involve more than two speakers, e.g., two speakers overlap with each other after the third speaker’s speech, are also discarded in order to avoid the turn-taking complications in multiple-party conversation.

2 Following Ford & Thompson (1996), an IU-boundary overlap is judged to have occurred if the second speaker’s speech started within the first two syllables of the first speaker’s speech. Otherwise, it is an IU-internal overlap.
Biq: Overlap

Syntactically complete utterances can always be extended through further additions, so points of syntactic completion may be incremental.... [B]y "syntactic completion", we mean a point in the stream of talk "so far", a potential terminal boundary for a recoverable "clause-so-far".... [S]yntactic *incompletion* is calculated in terms of a projected upcoming predicate' (Ford & Thompson, 1996:143-145).

It is common that IU boundaries do not coincide with syntactic completion. Due to the fragmented nature of spontaneous speech, a full clause typically does not reach its completion with one IU but rather with a number of IUs. Thus, the point of syntactic completion tends to converge with an IU boundary but many IU boundaries are not points of syntactic completion (Tao, 1996). For IU-boundary overlaps, we distinguish those of which the IU-boundary is also a syntactic completion point from those of which the IU-boundary is not a syntactic completion point. For IU-internal overlaps, while it is possible to find syntactic completion occurring within an IU, the frequency of such cases is not high, again because most IUs in casual conversation are fragmented and short.

In the database we found that syntactic (in)completion and intonational (in)completion generally match with each other for most of the tokens, no matter whether they are IU-boundary or IU-internal. In order to simplify the discussion on other issues, we will focus on the "prototypical" samples of data in the remainder of this paper. In other words, we will examine a total of 231 tokens which consist of (i) the 57 cases of IU-boundary overlaps that occur after both a final intonation and a syntactic completion (bdCP hereafter), (ii) the 37 cases of IU-boundary overlaps that occur after a continuing intonation with no syntactic completion (bdINC hereafter), and (iii) the 137 cases of IU-internal overlaps that occur with neither syntactic completion nor prosodic completion (internal hereafter). Please see Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Placement</th>
<th>bdCP</th>
<th>bdINC</th>
<th>Internal</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overlap</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>231</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Overlap placement types

The following are examples of the three placement types.
Biq: Overlap

(1) backchannel, bdCP, interactional (A9:12)

B: ... Dan ni zai Yunnan keyi kandao feichang de lan de tian.
--- B: ... [gen,
--- A: ... [Uhm.
   B: ... hen piaoliang de yun.
ENGLISH TRANSLATION:
   B: ... But in Yunnan you see skies that are just as blue as can be.
--- B: ... [As well as,
--- A: ... [Uhm.
   B: ... some simply beautiful clouds.

(2) backchannel, bdINC, interactional (A22:9)

A: ... Ergle vo juede,
A: ... Wemen Zhongguo ren,
--- A: ... [dui hen duo dongxi de guannian huezhe lishi shang suo xie-,
--- B: ... [Uhm.
   A: ... ding le de yixie,
   A: ... (0.8) dongxi,
ENGLISH TRANSLATION:
   A: ... Also I feel,
   A: ... We Chinese,
--- A: ... [(with regard) to the concepts of a lot of things or (those things that) history,
--- B: ... [Uhm.
   A: ... has given a,
   A: ... (0.8) firm opinion,

(3) reactive expression, internal, interactional/current (B22:4)

A: ... Na ta shi yige,
A: ... zhui,
A: ... feichang zhuiqiu ziji,
Biq: Overlap

A: .. nei xin shi jie de yige ren.
---> B: [Dui.

ENGLISH TRANSLATION:
A: .. So he's (someone who),
A: .. searched,
A: .. was searching himself,
A: .. looking for his inner [world.
---> B: [Yeah.

Among these prototypical placement types in terms of turn projection cues, the most striking is the fact that internal overlaps (59%, n=137) outnumber the two boundary types combined (41%, n=94). Does this mean that the occurrence of an overlap is not sensitive to the presence or absence of turn projection cues such as IU-boundaries and syntactic completion? It is probably too early to jump to such a conclusion before other aspects of overlap are considered.

4. SPEAKERSHIP NEGOTIATION, FULL TURNS, AND REACTIVE TOKENS

In this section we examine the relationship between speech overlap and speakership negotiation. We investigate the extent to which the second speaker’s overlapping speech attempts to take over the speakership from the first speaker, or to indicate her supportive listenership. We distinguish primary speaker from non-primary speaker in a conversation in terms of the form that realizes a speaker’s speech. The primary speaker and the non-primary speaker in a conversation have differentiated contribution to the development of their talk. A primary speaker makes contentful contributions. Her turn is a "full turn" (FT hereafter). In the following excerpt, B’s arrowed talk is a FT:

(4) full turn, internal, non-interactional (continuous) (B13:1)

   B: .. Ni xiang zhe ge shi- shijie bu bu jiu hen,

---

3 FTs are prototypically substantial and lengthy. However, they may consist of just short IUs which, in turn, consist of simple grammatical words, such as a pronoun, a numeral plus a classifier, etc. This is particularly common in overlaps, as in which FTs are often truncated halfway.
Biq: Overlap

A: ... jiu meiyou [taiyang le ma?

--> B: [hen hen hen pinfa le ma?

**ENGLISH TRANSLATION:**

B: .. Don't you think uh the world would just be uh,
A: ... would have no [sunshine?

--> B: [very plain?

In this study, when the second speaker in an overlap uses an FT, she is interpreted as to have attempted to take over the primary speakership.

In contrast to the primary speaker, the non-primary speaker plays a listener's role, providing short and non-floor-taking utterances to display her attentiveness to the primary speaker's speech. Utterances made by a non-primary speaker are termed "reactive tokens" (RT hereafter) in Clancy et al. (1996). In this study, when the second speaker in an overlap uses an RT, she is interpreted as to have indicated her intention to remain a listener. We follow Clancy et al. (1996) in distinguishing five categories among reactive tokens.

First, backchannels (BC hereafter) are non-lexical vocalic forms that signal the listener's understanding of or interest in the primary speaker's speech (Schegloff, 1982). Goodwin (1986) calls BC a continuer, used by the listener to encourage the speaker to go on with more talk. Mandarin BCs include forms like uhm, en, ao, etc. In example (1) given above speaker A's talk consists of a BC.

Second, reactive expressions (RX hereafter) are short lexical words or phrases that a listener utters to signal her non-floor-taking assessment of the primary speaker's speech (Goodwin, 1986). Mandarin RXs include words like dui 'right, yeah', shi 'a 'yeah', zhende 'a 'really', etc. In example (3) given above, speaker B's talk consists of an RX.

Third, a collaborative finish (CF hereafter) is used by a listener to finish the speaker's syntactically incomplete utterance in order to show her understanding (Lerner, 1991). In the following excerpt, B's arrowed talk consists of a CF:

(5) collaborative finish, internal, interactional/current (C16:16)

B: ... (1.7) Yao,

B: ... hui zi yifu,
Biq: Overlap

B: ... hui xi niaopianr,
A: ... (0.9) hai yao hui [dai haizi.

--> B: [hui zuo fan.

ENGLISH TRANSLATION:
B: ... (1.7) (You) have to know,
B: ... how to wash clothes,
B: ... how to wash diapers,
A: ... (0.9) and (you) have to know how to [take care of kids.

--> B: [how to cook.

Fourth, repetition (RP hereafter) in this study refers to the other-initiated type of repetition: the listener reiterates a portion of the speaker’s speech. Repetitions have been described in literature as being used to acknowledge or confirm the receipt of information (Tannen, 1989). In the following excerpt, B’s talk consists of an RP:

(6) repetition, internal, interactional/current (D4:3)
A: ... Keshi,
A: ... jiu shi shuo hai shi hen bu fangbian.

--> B: [hen bu fangbian a.

ENGLISH TRANSLATION:
A: ... But,
A: ... uh it’s still rather inconvenient.

--> B: [inconvenient.

Finally, resumptive openers (RO hereafter) are BCs or RXs that appear at the beginning of a new turn but are followed by an FT. The speaker intends to deliver an FT but prefaces her new turn with a BC or an RX in response to her interlocutor’s prior speech so that she is “attending while shifting”, in Jefferson’s (1993) term.\footnote{In Clancy et al. (1996) an RO can only be a BC followed by an FT. In our classification, an RX followed by an FT is also an RO. What matters is that the BC or RX is there to make a transition into an FT.}

\[\]
following excerpt, B’s arrowed talk consists of an RO:

(7) resumptive opener, internal, interactional/current (C16:5)

    A: ... Ta shuo ye xu shi yinwei,
    A: ... (1.4) xiafang de guanxi,
    A: .. zijide yao,
    A: .. zhaogu [ziji.

    --> B: [Dui.
    --> B: .. Gangcai wo gen tamen hai tan zhe yige shu.

ENGLISH TRANSLATION:

    A: ... He said it was probably because,
    A: ... (1.4) when sent down to the countryside,
    A: .. one had to learn to,
    A: .. take care of [one's self.

    --> B: [Yeah.
    --> B: .. And just now I was talking with them about this.

We now examine the distribution of FTs and RTs for the second speaker’s speech in the 231 overlaps. Overall, 52% of all tokens (n=121) are realized with one of the five RTs, while 48% of all tokens (n=110) are realized with an FT. Please see Table 2.

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>FT</th>
<th>RT</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bdCP</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bdINC</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
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<td>internal</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>231</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Speakership negotiation (FTs and RTs) in relation to placement types

The ratios of FT and RTs, as shown in Table 2, in the three placement types are about the same (53:47, 49:51, and 45:55). Thus, it appears that speakership negotiation is not
associated with placement types in any significant way.

The distribution of the five RT forms is further shown in Table 3. There appears to be some associations between the use of an RT form and the placement type of an overlap. BC and RP are preferred in bdCP, while BC and CF are preferred in bdINC. In the internal overlap, all five forms of RT appear to be used frequently, with BC again the most preferred one.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>BC</th>
<th>RX</th>
<th>CF</th>
<th>RP</th>
<th>RO</th>
<th>RT TOTAL</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
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<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bdINC</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>39</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Distribution of the various RT forms in relation to placement types

To sum up, so far we have not been able to see any association between speakership negotiation and placement types. In other words, whether the second speaker wants to negotiate for the primary speakership or not does not appear to be directly associated with the first speaker’s formal turn projection cues such as IU boundary, intonation, and syntax. On the other hand, some RT forms, i.e., BC, RP, and CF, have been found to display preferred status at certain placements. The two observations so far are somehow contradictory, since if speakership negotiation has nothing to do with the placement, why would certain forms that indicate listenership show strong correlation with certain placement types? In order to refine our investigation, we need to turn to functional types.

5. FUNCTIONAL TYPES OF OVERLAP

While FT is taken to function as a signal of the second speaker’s attempt at obtaining the primary speakership, speaker change is different from topic change. In other words, the second speaker may take over the primary speakership by using an FT, but she may very well be responding to what the first speaker just said. The question we
Biq: Overlap

need to ask at this point is whether there are functional distinctions with respect to the second speaker's overlapping speech.

First, in many cases the second speaker's speech is apparently motivated to handle locally significant interactional tasks: The second speaker utters something primarily to react to her interlocutor's speech. We call this type interactional overlap. Example (1) - (3) and (5) - (7) given above all illustrate interactional overlaps.

RTs are interactional by definition: They are used to respond to what the interlocutor just said.5 The second speaker's FTs, on the other hand, are not always interactional. The non-interactional overlap refers to cases in which the second speaker's utterance is not a direct reaction to the first speaker's speech, current or prior. The majority of this type of overlap takes place because the second speaker says something in an overlap that is a continuation, a repetition, or a rephrase of what she just said prior to the overlap. This "continuous" overlap typically occurs when the second speaker did not finish what she wanted to say in a prior turn and the turn was intercepted (at least in her view) by the first speaker. What this second speaker attempts to do in the overlap is to take her turn back (cf. "delayed completion" in Lerner (1989)). Consider example (4) given above, in which B overlaps with A's speech in order to complete his own utterance, which he started in the first IU.6

Let us go back to interactional overlaps now. Within the interactional type, we further distinguish two subtypes. However, these subtypes are applicable to internal overlaps only. In an internal overlap, the second speaker's utterance may be a reaction to the first speaker's speech just uttered in the current IU that is still being produced. Alternatively, the second speaker's utterance is a reaction -- a "delayed" response -- to the first speaker's speech uttered in a prior IU. We shall call these two subtypes

5 However, a small number of RT tokens (i.e., two RPs) in the database do not function interactionally. Again, we concentrate on the prototypical samples.

6 Some non-interactional overlaps occur because the second speaker says something which neither reacts to her interlocutor's speech nor resumes/continues her own prior speech, but rather opens up a new (sub-) topic for the conversation. Since the "move-on" non-interactional sub-type is rare in our database, we will not make a further distinction between the continuous and the move-on subtypes in the non-interactional type.
"interactional/current" and "interactional/prior" overlaps respectively. Example (3) and (5) - (7) given above illustrate the interactional/current type.

The following example illustrates the interactional/prior type. Speaker B’s speech is a delayed response directed toward what A just informed him in her prior IUs.

(8) full turn, internal, interactional/prior (C7:14)

A: ... Wo shi-,
→ A: ... dangchu weile jianfei,
→ A: ... wo mai de,
  A: ... yinwei ta gaosu ni zeme [jianfei.
→ B:                                  [Ni zai, jianfei ma?

ENGLISH TRANSLATION:
  A: ... I was-,
→ A: ... at first for going on diet,
→ A: ... I bought this,
  A: ... 'cause it tells you how to [do it.
→ B:                                  [Are you on diet?

To sum up, a two-way distinction, i.e., interactional vs. non-interactional, is made in terms of the type of communicative function the overlapping speech accomplishes in the sequential context. The current vs. prior distinction is further made for those internal overlaps in which the second speaker’s overlapping speech is identified as interactional functionally.

The new tabulation of the overlap tokens in terms of three categories – placement, function, and speakership negotiation – is provided in Table 4.

Table 5 provides the distribution of FTs across functional types and placement types and contrasts it with the overall (FT and RT) distribution. For both the bdCP and bdINC placement types, when FT is used by the second speaker, it is used fairly evenly for both interactional and non-interactional functions, with the interactional slightly more likely than the non-interactional (roughly, 60% vs. 40%). By contrast, in the internal placement type, FT is also used fairly evenly for both functional types, but with the non-interactional type slightly more likely than the interactional (55% vs. 45%). So FT
Biq: Overlap

seems to display an opposite functional tendency that appears to be associated with placement choice. However, we need to pre-empt the possibility that, regardless speakership negotiation, the interactional function has a less likely chance to occur at the internal placement type as compared with the non-interactional type. The overall figures show that this is not the case. We find that, overall, at both the bdCP and the bdINC placement types, the interactional function is more likely to take place than non-interactional function in a rough 80:20 ratio. At the internal placement type, the same pattern maintains, although the ratio is slightly reduced to 74:26. In other words, when differences in speakership negotiation is not considered, the interactional function is consistently much more likely to occur than the non-interactional function in all three placement types. In view of this consistency, we can say now that FT’s behavior in the internal type is outstanding. The non-interactional function’s dominance is due to the speaker’s need to reclaim her lost or about-to-be-lost speakership, as illustrated by example (4).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Interactional</th>
<th>FT</th>
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<th>TOTAL</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>bdINC</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
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<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-interactional</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SUB-TOTAL</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>internal</td>
<td>Interactional/current</td>
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<td>59</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interactional/prior</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-interactional</td>
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<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SUB-TOTAL</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRAND TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
<td>110</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>231</td>
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</table>

Table 4. Placement, function, and speakership negotiation

Finally, let us consider how FTs and RTs are used to accomplish the interactional...
function for different placement types. Table 6 provides the distribution of FT and RT for the interactional function across placement types. We notice that for both the bdCP and the bdINC placement types, the interactional function are realized by FT and RT in a roughly 40:60 ratio. However, for the internal placement type, there are two opposite distribution patterns. For the interactional/current function, RT is much more preferred to FT (FT:RT=8:92); for the interactional/prior function, FT is preferred to RT (FT:RT=62:38). FT is clearly favored as a delayed response to the first speaker’s prior speech, as illustrated in example (8). The non-floor-taking RTs, on the other hand, are clearly favored to convey the listener’s attentiveness while the first speaker is in the middle of her talk, as illustrated in examples (3), and (5)–(7).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>FT</th>
<th>FT &amp; RT TOTAL</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FT</td>
<td>FT &amp; RT TOTAL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Interactional</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>non-interactional</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bdINC</td>
<td>Interactional</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>non-interactional</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>internal</td>
<td>interactional/current</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>interactional/prior</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>non-interactional</td>
<td>34</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>62</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 5. FT and overall (FT & RT) distribution across placement and function types

Thus, we can say that speakership negotiation is sensitive with respect to both the first speaker’s (lack of) turn projection cues and the function of the second speaker’s overlapping speech in its sequential context. Speakership negotiation is highly unlikely when the first speaker is in the middle of her speech, except for the following two conditions: (1) when the second speaker delivers her delayed response to the first
speaker’s prior speech, or (2) when the second speaker reclaims/rescues her lost or about-to-be-lost speakership.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PLACEMENT</th>
<th>FUNCTION</th>
<th>FT</th>
<th>RT</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>non-interactional</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SUB-TOTAL</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bdINC</td>
<td>interactional</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>non-interactional</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SUB-TOTAL</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>37</td>
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<tr>
<td>internal</td>
<td>interactional/current</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>64</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>interactional/prior</td>
<td>23</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>34</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SUB-TOTAL</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6. FT and RT distribution for the interactional function across placement types

Chui (1996) is an important study of overlap in Mandarin conversation. It examines overlap from a number of perspectives: IU, turn beginning, function, syntactic category, and word number. Minor disparities aside, Chui (1996) and this paper agree that internal overlaps are more frequent than IU-boundary overlaps. On the other hand, contrary to this paper’s findings, Chui (1996) finds no significant differences in the distribution of the interactional function and the non-interactional function in both boundary overlaps and internal overlaps. It needs to be pointed out that the definition and categorization of the interactional and the non-interactional functions in the two studies are not exactly the same. For instance, neither the interactional/prior vs. interactional/current distinction for internal overlaps, nor the FT vs. RT distinction with respect to speakership negotiation, were considered in Chui (1996).

6. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have investigated overlap by examining the distributional patterns
in each of the following three aspects and the associations among these aspects: (1) the placement of an overlap with respect to the first speaker's turn projection cues such as IU-boundary (and prosody) and syntax, (2) the speaker change form that realizes the second speaker's turn with respect to the negotiation for speakership, and (3) the function of an overlap in terms of the relationship between the second speaker's speech and its immediately preceding context.

We have found that the three aspects are related to one another in various ways. First, overlap placement and function. While the interactional function is consistently more frequent than the non-interactional function in all three placement types, two interactional subtypes are recognized in internal overlaps. Second, speakership negotiation is associated with the function of the second speaker's overlapping speech. While the non-interactional function is overwhelmingly accomplished through full turns, the interactional function can be accomplished either with a full turn or with a reactive token. Last, speakership negotiation is sensitive to the first speaker's turn projection cues. While for IU-boundary overlaps (i.e., both bdCP and bdINC) speakership negotiation may go either way (i.e., FT:RT = roughly 50:50), its operation is highly constrained in internal overlaps. When the first speaker is still speaking, the second speaker is likely to remain a listener. The two exceptions to this tendency are when the second speaker offers a delayed response to the first speaker's prior turn, or when the second speaker reclaims/rescues her lost/about-to-be-lost speakership.

Overlap is supposedly an “anomaly” given the usual smooth, clear speaker transition, which dominates naturally occurring conversation. However, in this study we have seen that even in overlap, prosodic and syntactic completion (and incompleteness) are critical turn projection cues which constrain, to a significant extent, when and how speakership can be negotiated. On the other hand, we have also seen, in many cases, that pragmatics may override syntactic and prosodic cues. One of the ways pragmatic cues operate differently from syntactic and prosodic cues is that the former often requires us to take into consideration the sequential, “global” context instead of just the local environment right around the point where the overlap takes place. We have certainly not explored this aspect adequately in this paper. Further research on overlap needs to address the relationship between pragmatic inference and the systematics of conversational turn-taking.
Biq: Overlap

APPENDIX: Conversation Transcription Conventions
key intonation unit -->
speaker identity and intonation unit :
word {space}
truncated intonation unit -
truncated word -
beginning of speech overlap []
final intonation 
continuing intonation ,
appeal intonation ?
long pause ...(N)
medium pause ...
short pause ..
foreign language <L2 L2>
researcher’s English paraphrase ()
researcher’s comments ((( ))

REFERENCES
Biq: Overlap

analysis and natural rhetorics, ed. by V. D'Iorso & P. Leonardi, 11-38. Padua: Cleup Eelitore.


