Perceptions of extended concurrent speech in Mandarin

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In this paper, we adopt Kádár and Haugh's (2013) discursive-interactional approach to argue that extended concurrent speech for floor taking or topic switching can be perceived as normal and *qiàdàng* (appropriate). Spontaneous mundane conversations and interviews in Mandarin were collected and transcribed by means of interactional sociolinguistic methods. A close analysis was conducted on participants' responses to the extended concurrent speech for floor taking or topic switching and their retrospective thoughts. Results show that the participants did not view the speech as inappropriate. They produced the speech to achieve relational goals, clarify things, collaborate on a topic, claim participatory rights or display high involvement. They enjoyed conversing around a trivial topic in informal settings. This challenges the argument of long overlapping, floor taking or topic switching as problematic in the literature. The findings indicate the importance of embracing different perspectives from varying sources to understand perceptions of turn-taking mechanisms in Mandarin conversation. This study can contribute to our understanding of interpersonal pragmatics and the conventional views/norms that might cause communication misunderstanding in cross-cultural contact.

Keywords: simultaneous speech, floor, topic, perception, *qiàdàng* (appropriate), Mandarin

1. Introduction

Turn-taking mechanisms have been well discussed from Conversation Analysis (CA) perspectives (e.g. Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson 1974). This has led to the conclusion that people, at least native English speakers, tend to follow the rule of one party at a time. Brief overlaps might occur but should be resolved fewer than three syllables away from the first speaker's utterance completion place (Schegloff 2000). However, what would happen if the second speaker cuts in to produce

simultaneous speech that is longer than brief overlaps? How would the first speaker assess and respond to that? Little research has addressed these questions.

In this paper, we make a preliminary attempt to answer the above questions from non-CA perspectives, based on spontaneous conversations among relatively equal-status, non-familial Mandarin speakers and follow-up interviews with some of the participants. We explore the participants' perceptions of extended concurrent speech that emerged for floor taking or topic switching. The concept 'extended concurrent speech' captures the feature of long simultaneous speech initiated by the second speaker more than three words away from the first speaker's utterance completion point. *Word* here means *cí* instead of *zì* (character) in Chinese. This definition highlights the meaning of the *extendedness* of the concurrent speech under study. Extended concurrent speech differs from overlap discussed in the CA literature in that overlap is brief (e.g. Levinson 1983; Schegloff 2000). Overlap is often resolved to one single speaker when all other interactants stop talking before the third syllable of simultaneous speech (Schegloff 2001). To our best knowledge, extended concurrent speech has rarely been discussed previously.

We focus on extended concurrent speech that allows the second speaker to take the floor or change the current topic in ongoing conversation because unexpected floor taking or topic switching has been implicitly associated with inappropriateness (e.g. Coon and Schwanenflugel 1996; Covelli and Murray 1980; Goldberg 1990; Murata 1994). The floor is "the cognitive entity which develops between/among the interactants…in a conversational activity" (Hayashi 1988: 272), or the coherent content of a conversation. Floor taking means that the second speaker develops the first speaker's topic-in-progress but gains control of the content. Topic switching refers to the second speaker bringing up a new topic to replace the current topic. These definitions help us categorize tokens into extended concurrent speech for floor taking and extended concurrent speech for topic switching respectively.

It is important to uncover Chinese speakers' pragmatic perceptions of extended concurrent speech for floor taking or topic switching. This effort could help prevent miscommunication in the cross-cultural interaction that involves China. Since there is a paucity of research on this issue, we intend to contribute to extant knowledge on it. A close analysis of the data collected shows that the participants perceived extended concurrent speech for floor taking or topic switching as appropriate, or *qiàdàng* in Mandarin. In what follows, Section 2 discusses Kádár and Haugh's (2013) discursive-interactional approach and relevant research on Chinese pragmatics. Section 3 introduces data and analytical methods employed in this study. Section 4 analyzes and discusses the participants' responses to extended concurrent speech for floor taking or topic switching in ongoing conversations and their retrospective thoughts on the speech revealed in follow-up interviews. Section 5 is a conclusion.

2.   Understanding extended concurrent speech from different perspectives

We attempt to demonstrate whether extended concurrent speech for floor taking or topic switching is viewed as appropriate or not. Understanding politeness issues like this should rely on varying perspectives, as proposed by Kádár and Haugh (2013). Comprehensive perspectives about politeness cannot be derived from an ideal native speaker's single utterances, as a traditional school of thought suggested (e.g. Lakoff 1973; Leech 1983; Brown and Levinson 1987). Participants' evaluative perspectives can be disclosed by a postmodern discursive approach to politeness that emphasizes the fluidity and relativity of politeness (e.g. Eelen 2001; Mills 2003, 2011; Watts 2003, 2005; Locher 2004, 2006; Locher and Watts 2005). This approach discourages generalizations beyond small-scale communities of practice. But it might not meet the needs of the studies that require attention to relational history and culture in addition to local specificities.

To gain diverse insights, Kádár and Haugh (2013) advanced a holistic discursive-interactional approach to politeness analysis that welcomes a broad range of methods and data types, such as historical texts, spontaneous conversations, discussion boards, interviews and diaries. Politeness would be better comprehended with "(i) participant/metaparticipant understandings (first-order), (ii) emic/etic conceptualisations (first-order), (iii) analyst/lay-observer understandings (second-order), and (iv) theoretical/folk-theoretic conceptualisations (second-order)" (Kádár and Haugh 2013: 6). Politeness needs to be understood with reference to the time and space concerning the language used or the actions involved. This indicates the necessity to investigate both historically and locally situated contexts of language or social actions. Also, understanding politeness requires a look at the relationships among participants and the cultural environment where they live. Humans are autonomous social beings who develop cultural expectations of how to speak and act appropriately; meanwhile, their perceptions, speech and behavior are shaped by their social surroundings. Politeness engages a set of expectancies of social actions and meanings that are open to evaluations.

Understanding politeness from varying perspectives is vital because the same utterance may assume "different readings and interpretations based on interpersonal context" (Nodoushan 2012: 134). We should consider the "unfolding of understandings and interpretations" regarding the goals, emotions and relationships of interactants (Bennett 1981: 184), and include both analysts' and participants' perspectives. Analysts' perspectives alone might not accurately reflect interactants' insights concerning how linguistic forms are expected and interactional norms are shaped within communities of practice (see Mills 2009; Garcés-Conejos Blitvich 2013). Similarly, participants' perspectives alone may not be conclusive, systematic and comprehensive (Haugh 2007). Therefore, in this paper, we look into the

perceptions of extended concurrent speech for floor taking or topic switching through both analysts' and participants' lenses. Along with the participants' viewpoints, we, the viewers, provide metaparticipants' insights. We also discuss theoretical conceptualizations in the literature and folk-theoretic conceptualizations derived from follow-up interviews. We present etic perspectives as outsiders of the participants' community, and emic perspectives of the community members revealed in the interviews.

Whether extended concurrent speech for floor taking or topic switching is appropriate or inappropriate has not attracted attention in Chinese politeness research. Studying it has to be situated in the theoretical conceptualizations of Chinese sociopragmatics. The word 'appropriate' may be equivalent to *qiàdàng* in Mandarin. According to *Xiàndài Hànyǔ Cídiǎn* (Modern Chinese Dictionary), *qiàdàng* is an adjective describing the properness of speech and behavior. In hierarchically structured historical China, it was expected for people to comply with *lǐyí* 'rituals' (Gou 2002; Kádár 2013). On any occasion, it was *qiàdàng* for low-ranking people to show reverence for high-ranking people. Those with lower status should employ other-elevating forms of address and expressions, such as *dàrén* 'your honor', *zūnfūrén* 'your respectable wife' or *guìfǔ* 'your precious home', towards those with higher status. Conversely, they used self-denigrating terms, such as *xiǎorén* 'this humble person', *yúqī* 'my humble wife' or *bìshè* 'my shabby place', to depict themselves or their families (Kádár and Pan 2011). Along with honorifics, people emphasized others' long-term interest when delivering refusals in words that have other-elevating and self-denigrating meanings (Kádár 2012). They recognized rank differences and followed the rule of *zūnbēi yǒuxù* 'pecking order'. Young or lower-ranking people yielded to old or higher-ranking people in turn taking (Gao 1998; Lin 1939). All those helped the elite to keep social order (*jǐngrán yǒuxù* or *zhìxù jǐngrán*). Violating the expected rules of *lǐ* 'social hierarchy or politeness' in historical China would not be considered *qiàdàng*. A serious violation would result in severe punishment (Gu 1990) such as *bōluàn fǎnzhì* 'to suppress the rebellion and restore normal order'.

Nevertheless, what is deemed *qiàdàng* in Chinese has changed in some way since China went through drastic sociocultural evolution. After the Communist takeover in 1949, anti-traditionalism prevailed. During the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), *jiùsīxiāng* 'old thinking', *jiùxíguàn* 'old customs', *jiùwénhuà* 'old culture' and *jiùchuántǒng* 'old tradition' were eradicated, with which conventional politeness expressions were removed. Interestingly, a call for restoring Neo-Confucian ideologies (Chan 1963) and traditional practices emerged, after the initiation of the Open Door Policy in 1978 allowed the influx of Western ideologies in China. In 1981, a campaign called *wǔjiǎng-sìměi* 'five stresses and four beautifications' was proposed. Six of them were relevant to politeness, encompassing

jiǎngwénmíng 'be civilized', *jiǎnglǐmào* 'be polite', *jiǎngzhìxù* 'be orderly', *jiǎng-dàodé* 'be ethical', *yǔyánměi* 'beautify your language', *xīnlíngměi* 'beautify your heart' and *xíngwéiměi* 'beautify your behavior'. Later, the Smile Campaign prior to the Beijing Olympics was launched to improve civilians' etiquettes (Chong 2011). All those efforts might have helped maintain the tradition of observing the order of speaking among people of status difference in academic, business, official or family settings. In these situations, higher-status Chinese speakers take more speaking turns and speaking time. Speaking out of turn in the hierarchy would transgress tacit politeness rules and be judged as not *qiàdàng* (Pan 2000a). However, previous research has not disclosed whether relatively equal-status, non-familial Mandarin speakers would consider extended concurrent speech for floor taking or topic switching in informal conversations a breach of politeness rules or not.

Despite the *wǔjiǎng-sìměi* campaign, conventionally mandatory politeness expressions such as honorifics have declined and been substituted by new ways of thinking and social practice that embrace the ideal of equality. Pan and Kádár (2011: 90) posited that subtle discursive strategies, including "the use of tone words, topic introduction, order of speaking, question-answer pattern, turn-taking, small talk, code-switching, joking tone, bantering, irony, teasing or mocking", seem to be used systematically in contemporary Chinese politeness practice. Unfortunately, they did not describe how relatively equal-status, non-familial Chinese speakers take turns. Other researchers (Zhu and Boxer 2013; Zhu 2014a, 2014b) have found flat tone, low pitch and soft volume useful to make strong disagreement sound *qiàdàng* in everyday life. What would not be considered *qiàdàng* in historical China is that Chinese people in Beijing employed direct requests more frequently than indirect ones (Lee-Wong 1994, 2000). Those living in Xi'an, China, overwhelmingly accepted compliments (Chen and Yang 2010), instead of rejecting compliments. Cantonese perceived compliment acceptance as appropriate or preferred (Rose and Ng 2001). Native Chinese speakers praised themselves or their families (Wu 2011, 2012). Chinese businessmen ignored facework with new customers (Pan 2000b) or exploited strategic embarrassment to regular customers (Chang and Haugh 2011). All these findings mean that politeness expressions have changed in China to some extent, which may affect the perceptions of extended concurrent speech for floor taking or topic switching in everyday conversation.[1]

As a part of turn-taking mechanisms, extended concurrent speech in Mandarin has not been well studied despite the research already conducted on

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1. It is important to note that recent campaigns for the study of Chinese classics, i.e. *guóxué cháo*, have led to the restoration of some traditional rituals and formal ceremonies such as weddings and funerals (Jin 2007, 2008; Jiang 2008; Kádár 2013). No similar claim has been made about informal face-to-face conversations in Mandarin, though.

turn taking. For instance, Liu (1992, 2004) and Ma (2014) defined the construct of turn in Mandarin. Wu (1997, 2014) examined Chinese speakers' turn-entry devices. Yang (2011) and Li (2014) portrayed the nonverbal aspects of turn taking. Gu (1999) pointed out the functions of the current turn in relation to the previous turn and the following turn. Liu (2007) summarized how to grab a turn or keep the floor. Gao (2012) described varying signals of yielding the floor. Ulijn and Li (1995), Li (1999, 2001) and Liao (2009) presented interruptions in different discourses. Liu (2004) and Kuang (2005) teased out the varieties of interruptions in Chinese. Kuang (2006) discussed different types of overlapping, causes of overlapping and solutions to overlapping, assuming that long overlapping is problematic. Nevertheless, few researchers have investigated whether extended concurrent speech for floor taking or topic switching in mundane conversation in Mandarin is *qiàdàng* or not. Therefore, we attempt to uncover the participants' perceptions by analyzing their responses to this type of simultaneous speech in ongoing conversational interactions. The perceptions are corroborated by the participants' insights disclosed in follow-up interviews.

3.   Method

We adopt interactional sociolinguistics (Gumperz 1982, 2005, 2006) to analyze and interpret participants' perceptions of extended concurrent speech for floor taking or topic switching. This approach, sometimes "known as a microethnography, is a methodological approach to interactional analysis using video-taped data and taking into account non-verbal behavior such as facial gestures, postural shifts, and proxemics" in addition to verbal behavior (Boxer 2002: 13). It strives to achieve accurate inferences and illustrate why a particular utterance is used in a particular way and how that affects interaction. Watts (2003: 217–218) also contended that contextual cues such as "consultative devices", "play-downs", "politeness markers", "hedges", "understaters", "downtoners", "committers" and "forewarnings" are crucial for the interpretation of whether certain behavior is appropriate or not.

The first part of the data was drawn from approximately 97 hours of recorded spontaneous conversations in Mandarin in a southeastern city of mainland China.[2] These mundane conversations occurred in various places such as a restaurant, a condo or a community center where relatively equal-status, non-familial

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[2]   Although recording spontaneous conversations might have caused an observer's paradox (Labov 1972), the participants seemed to forget the existence of a recorder as they became more and more engaged in their conversation. The data were transcribed following Schiffrin's (1987) conventions (see Appendix A) and glossed according to Li and Thompson (1981) (see Appendix B).

interactants chatted about trivialities. Participants were approached through friends and acquaintances. They were told that this project aimed to investigate native Chinese speakers' communication style in everyday life and that they should speak the way they normally do. Before data collection, we had no idea what would appear as salient interactional features that would be worth researching. When examining the data, we found extended concurrent speech for floor taking or topic switching salient and made it the unit of analysis. Simultaneous speech beyond the third syllable, floor taking or topic switching has been implicitly associated with impoliteness in the literature (e.g. Schegloff 2000; Goldberg 1990), although the interactants in the conversations collected seemed to deem it normal. Due to space limit, only six instances of extended concurrent speech were selected for detailed analysis in this paper.[3]

Interactants often make assessments about each other in ongoing conversations and respond accordingly (Mori 1999). If they assess the previous speaker's words as appropriate and inviting, they may well enjoy the conversation and actively contribute to it; otherwise, they are likely to show signs of unhappiness or respond negatively (Culpeper 1996, 2005; Culpeper, Bousfield and Wichmann 2003; Culpeper et al. 2010; Langlotz and Locher 2012). Therefore, we identified and analyzed participants' perceptions through their interaction before, when and after extended concurrent speech for floor taking or topic switching was delivered. We compensate analysis of our conversational data with follow-up interviews because metapragmatic data could be valuable tools for achieving knowledge about extended concurrent speech for floor taking or topic switching. They give us access into first-order understandings of politeness (Jaworski et al. 2004; Schneider 2012; García and Terkourafi 2014).

The second dataset came from recorded semi-structured interviews with ten of the participants conducted in the week after their conversations were collected. The interviewees might be the first speaker whose speech was overlapped by the second speaker, the second speaker who initiated extended concurrent speech, or "side participants" who were not directly addressed (Kádár and Haugh 2013: 88). They were invited to watch three clips of conversations involving extended concurrent speech for floor taking (Excerpts 1, 2 and 3) and another three clips involving extended concurrent speech for topic switching (Excerpts 4, 5 and 6). Right after watching each clip, they were asked whether they had noticed anything abnormal in the conversations. Then, they evaluated the instances of extended concurrent speech for floor taking or topic switching that emerged in the clips, and justified their evaluations. They also explained why they thought the instances

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3. Token selection was discussed with a Chinese-speaking college teacher in the city of data collection.

appeared that way. The interviewees provided us with retrospective perceptions of the speech and enlightening insights. Each of them was interviewed alone in Mandarin for about thirty minutes and promised anonymity.

4.   Results and discussion

In this section, we present understandings of extended concurrent speech for floor taking or topic switching from various perspectives. The analyst's understanding is displayed in the analysis of the speech in prior, current or subsequent talk. The participants' reactions can demonstrate their momentary assessments and perceptions of previous utterances. Their understandings are also reflected in their judgements of the six instances of the speech in the follow-up interviews. Three examples from each category are presented for close analysis. It is important to note that a few participants deployed extended concurrent speech to switch the topic and take the floor at the same time in some situations. Detailed analysis showed that the participants assessed the six instances in ongoing conversations as normal. They responded to the occurrence of the speech without any negative evaluations, emotionally loaded words or nonverbal signs of unhappiness. The ten interviewees stated that they were unaware of extended concurrent speech for floor taking or topic switching until it was pointed out. They overtly commented on the six instances as *qiàdàng* in everyday conversations in their community. Examples and comments follow.

4.1   Extended concurrent speech for floor taking

Since the participants' assessments in ongoing conversations can be reflected by how they responded to extended concurrent speech, six instances are analyzed in detail to display the participants' assessments in ongoing conversations in Mandarin. Excerpts (1)–(3) exemplify the participants' reactions to extended concurrent speech for floor taking. In the first excerpt, Wáng, a female college English teacher, and Xióng, a male state employee, were in their forties. Jiàn was a female Ph.D. student in her thirties. Wáng and Xióng were friends who met regularly. Wáng and Jiàn were also friends for many years. On the day of data collection, Wáng arranged a dinner at a restaurant for Jiàn to meet Xióng for the first time, hoping that they could become acquainted. This is typical for social network expansion in China (Yang 1994). Since Xióng often served as a correspondent of his workplace, Jiàn asked him what he would do if he and his co-worker disagreed on a news article. He tried to avoid answering this question by claiming that this never happened in his real life. But Jiàn was persistent in seeking an answer from him.

(1) (Xiong)

1   *Jiàn:(looks at Wáng and then Xióng)*
    Duì   ya. Xiànzài wǒmen jiùshì
    right RF now   1PL   just

2   *láiyuán-yú shēnghuó ér   gāo-yú   shēnghuó. Láiyuán-yú*
    come:from life   but high:than life   come:from

3   *[wǒ de   jiào-xué   jīngyàn,   gāo-yú]*
    1SG GEN teach:learn experience high:than

    'Jiàn: (looks at Wáng and then Xióng) Right. Now it does come from life
    and larger than life. It comes from my teaching experiences but larger
    than'

4   *Xióng: (looks at Jiàn)*
    [Dànshì dànshì dànshì qǐmǎ   nǐ] nàge
    but   but   but   at:least 2SG that:CL

5   *jiǎshè   yào   yǒu shēnghuó jīchǔ a, duì   ba?*
    hypothesis must have life   basis RF right SA

    'Xióng: (looks at Jiàn) But at least your hypothesis needs a basis from
    life, right?'

6→ *Jiàn: (looks at Xióng)*
    Ài, wǒ de   shēnghuó jīchǔ a. Wǒ
    INT 1SG GEN life   basis RF 1SG

7   *[jiāo xuéshēng. Wǒ gēn nǐ   shuō le.*
    teach student   1SG with 2SG talk PFV

8   *Wǒ jiāo wǒ de   xuéshēng jiù]*
    1SG teach 1SG GEN student   just

    'Jiàn: (looks at Xióng) Ài, it's based on my life experience. I teach students,
    as I told you. I teach my students just'

9   *Xióng: (looks at Jiàn)*
    [Méi-yǒu shēnghuó jīchǔ. Nǐ   zěnme jiù
    not:have life   basis 2SG how   just

10 *hǎoxiàng kōngzhōnglóugé yíyàng. Wǒ cónglái] méi-yǒu, wǒ*
    like   castle:in:the:air same   1SG ever   not:have 1SG

11 *méi-yǒu méi-yǒu zài nà   lóugé zhù guo, nà   wǒ*
    not:have not:have in that castle live PFV then 1SG

12 *[jiù méi zhège   tǐhuì   ma.]*
    just not this:CL experience RF

    'Xióng: (looks at Jiàn) I don't have that life experience. You were just like liv-
    ing in a castle in the air. I've never lived there, so I don't have that experience.'

13→*Jiàn: (looks at Xióng)*
    [Méi-yǒu, méi-yǒu, yǒu jīchǔ,] wǒ yǒu
    not:have   not:have have basis   1SG have

14 *de   jīchǔ, suǒyǐ yǐndǎo nǐ   wǎng   nàbiān zǒu.   @@ Hái*
    NOM basis   so   lead   2SG toward there   walk   still

15 *méi-yǒu huídá   wǒ de   wèntí.   @@*
    not:have answer 1SG GEN question

    'Jiàn: (looks at Xióng) No, no, I have basis. I have basis. So I'm trying
    to lead you that way. (laughs) But you haven't answered my question.
    (laughs)'

16 *Wáng: (looks at Jiàn)*
    Éi,   suǒyǐ [zhè shì]
    INT so   this   be
    'Wáng: (looks at Jiàn) Éi, so this is'

17 *Jiàn: (looks at Wáng)*
    [Tā zhè] háishì shǔyú   bǐjiào
    3SG this still   belong:to relatively

18 *jiànjiē de.   (turns to Xióng) Shì-bú-shì?*
    indirect NOM   be:not:be

    'Jiàn: (looks at Wáng) He is relatively indirect. (turns to Xióng) Isn't it?'

19→*Xióng: (looks at Jiàn)*
    Shì, shì, shì. (smiles)
    be   be   be
    'Xióng: (looks at Jiàn) Yeah, yeah, yeah. (smiles)'

In Excerpt (1), Jiàn and Xióng do not seem to share the understanding that Jiàn's
hypothetical question was based on life experience. In lines 4 and 9–10, Xióng pro-
duces extended concurrent speech to express strong disagreement with Jiàn's un-
derstanding of the question. He does not appear to act like a supportive secondary
speaker who only provides brief comments or asks clarification questions (Hayashi
1990, 1991). Instead, he takes over the floor to make the point that he does not have
real-life experiences to answer Jiàn's hypothetical question (lines 4–5 and 9–12). It
is more interesting to see that Jiàn responds to the first extended concurrent speech
for floor taking with a patient explanation (lines 6–8) but the second one with an-
other extended concurrent speech (lines 13–15). Xióng reacts to Jiàn's speech that
takes away his floor by answering her question lightheartedly (line 19). Jiàn's and
Xióng's con-constitution of and reactions to extended concurrent speech for floor
taking suggest that they assess the speech as *qiàdàng*. This might result from their

relational goal of rapport establishment and enhancement (Spencer-Oatey 2008). In the follow-up interview, Xióng explained that they could not avoid long simultaneous speech when actively engaged in showing their disparate understandings. This indicates their excitement in both chatting and making new friends.

> I work at the Tax Department of the province, which requires me to meet with all kinds of people. I like to make new friends and expand my social network that I might be able to use to my advantage in the future. Talking with Jiàn was fun and helped me understand her field of study. When I got excited, I intervened to express my opinion because it was relevant to what had just been said. Jiàn also did that because she was very engaged too. Although we disagreed sometimes, it didn't hurt our face at all. We supported each other in making our points clear. We talked, interacted and built our relationship. I don't think that was not *qiàdàng*. If you didn't point out the simultaneous speech to me, I wouldn't have noticed that.   (Xióng's explanation in an interview)

The following conversation occurred outside of a condo where Juàn and Hǔ were waiting for their elementary school boys to finish spoken English practice. Juàn was a Ph.D. student in her early thirties, and Hǔ was a sales representative in his late thirties. They lived in different school districts but became acquainted when their sons joined the same learning center a couple of months ago. They had met twice before they took their sons to the center to practice speaking English again that day. Since Hǔ mentioned earlier that he spent much time teaching his son extracurricular English materials above grade level, Juàn was curious about how he did it in addition to having a full-time job.

(2)   (Xiaohu)

1   *Juàn:*
    Duì. Nǐ jiāo nǐ érzi, nǎ   yǒu nàme duō   shíjiān ne?
    right 2SG teach 2SG son where have so   much time   Qne

2   *Wǒ juéde wǒmen liǎngge rén   zài nàbiān tèbié*
    1SG think 1PL   two:CL person at   there   very

3   *máng a, yālì   tèbié dà,*
    busy RF pressure very big

4   *[wǒ juéde méi-yǒu shíjiān]*
    1SG think not:have time

    'Juàn: Right. How do you find so much time to teach your son? I think we're so busy there and our pressure is so big that I don't think we have time'

5   *Hŭ:*
    [*Wŏ găo xiāoshòu de,   wŏ] găo xiāoshòu de*
    1SG do   sales   NOM   1SG do   sales   NOM

6   *gōngzuò, wănshàng kěyǐ jīběnshàng bú-yào   shàngbān ma.*
    job   at:night   can basically   not:need work   RF

7   *Dào   wănshàng gàn má   ne? Wănshàng hěn qīngxián,*
    arrive night   do   what Qne at:night   very leisurely

8   *méi-yŏu nĭmen nàme_ jiézòu nàme kuài, zhīdào ba? Wŏmen zhè*
    not:have 2PL   so   pace   so   fast   know SA 1PL   here

9   *wănshàng shíjiān yìbān   dă-xià-pái.*
    night   time   generally play:cards

    'Hŭ: I'm a salesman. Basically, I don't need to work at night. So what do I do in my free time? My life pace is not as fast as yours, you know. Generally, we play cards at night.'

10→*Juàn:*
    O, dă-pái   jiù bùrú   jiāo háizi le.
    Oh play:cards just worse:than teach kids CRS
    'Juàn: Oh, playing cards is not as good as teaching kids.'

Upon hearing about how busy Juàn and her husband are (lines 1–4), Hŭ is eager to show his sympathy by pointing out that he has free time at night (lines 5–9). He acknowledges Juàn's fast-paced lifestyle. He explains his preference of teaching his son over playing cards, although his colleagues prefer the latter in their leisure time. To do all these things, Hŭ produces extended concurrent speech in line 5 and grabs the floor from Juàn. Although this would be deemed problematic (e.g. Schegloff 2000), it confirms the previous finding that interruption can function to clarify things (Kuang 2005). Moreover, Hŭ's expression of understanding Juàn's situation is comforting. His sacrificing entertainment for his son's education seems to resonate with Juàn. As a response to the extended concurrent speech that takes away her floor, Juàn agrees with Hŭ for his choice. This alignment indicates that they have reached the same understanding and that Juàn does not consider extended concurrent speech for floor taking not *qiàdàng*. Interactants can "interrupt and compete for the floor without intending to cause offence" (Holmes 1995: 66).

I don't know Juàn very well, but I do know that it isn't easy to work on a Ph.D. degree and a job while taking care of a kid. When I sensed that she felt guilty about not having time to teach her son extra stuff, I jumped in to clarify that my job is different from hers. I don't need to study for exams or sell things at night. I have nothing else to do when I don't want to play cards with my colleagues. So it's

very fulfilling for me to help my son study additional English books and get ahead of the game. I don't think Juàn was upset about me starting to talk while she was talking. Cutting in for clarification is normal and typical in Chinese. I couldn't have waited till later because I would have forgotten what I was going to say.

(Hŭ's remark during the playback)

Now consider another example. Péng was a senior researcher in his late forties working at a local education bureau, after he had taught English in a college for many years. Huáng was a math teacher of a middle school in his late thirties. Wèiqí was a natural science teacher of an elementary school in her early forties. Péng and Wèiqí were friends whose families regularly dined out together for over ten years. Wèiqí and Huáng were acquaintances for about four years. Since Huáng had the skills of fixing computers and Péng's computer often broke down due to malicious software, Wèiqí introduced Huáng to Péng two years ago. On the day of data collection, Huáng went with Wèiqí to Péng's condo to solve a computer problem. They began to talk about web space that some universities gave to students free of charge.

(3) (Weiqi)

1   *Péng: (looks at Huáng)*
    Zhè shì zhèngcháng de.   Wŏmen yĭqián
    this be normal   NOM 1PL   former

2   *xuéxiào [dōu gěi de,   suŏyŏude xuéshēng.]*
    school   all give NOM all   student

    'Péng: (looks at Huáng) This is normal. Our former school gave it to all the students.'

3   *Huáng: (looks at Péng)*
    [Nĭmen méiyŏu   méiyŏu   yòng.]
    2PL   not:have not:have use

4   *Bĭrúshuō,   wŏ gěi   nĭ yìbăi zhào, shíjìshàng nĭ*
    for:instance 1SG give 2SG 100   MB   actually   2SG

5   *zhĭ yòng le   shí zhào.*
    only use PFV 10 MB

    'Huáng: (looks at Péng) You wouldn't need it. For instance, I gave you 100MB, but actually you only used 10MB.'

6   *Wèiqí: (looks at Huáng)*
    Duì. Tā yòngbuliăo zhème duō.
    right 3SG cannot:use so   much
    'Wèiqí: (looks at Huáng) Right. He cannot use that much.'

7→ *Péng: (looks at Huáng)*
   Nǐ   zhège   zhège   zhè kōngjiān bù
   2SG this:CL   this:CL   this space   not

8   *hái   zài zhèlǐ,   duìbuduì?   Hái yǒu jiǔshí zhào hái zài nàlǐ.*
   still at   here   right:not:right still have 90   MB   still at   there

   'Péng: (looks at Huáng) You still have that much space left, right? You still have 90MB there.'

Before Péng finishes saying that the news about free web space is not news (lines 1–2), Huáng offers his distinctive perspective that people generally do not need big web space (lines 3–5). Although this perspective is presented in the form of extended concurrent speech for floor taking, Péng does not respond with emotional words, negative evaluation or signs of unhappiness in line 7. He follows Huáng's lead and continues to elaborate on Huáng's example. The extended concurrent speech for floor taking in line 3 seems to result from the speakers' collaboration on the development of the current conversation topic. It discloses their successful endeavor to develop coherent content collectively despite the change in floor holders (Ng, Brooke and Dunne 1995). This behavior can accentuate their "shared goals and values" and signal "solidarity" (Holmes 1995: 67). The three interactants seem to be trying to achieve an understanding about the use of web space.

> I believed that everyone was entitled to some free web space, whereas Huáng thought it was a waste of resources for ordinary people to own a large amount of web space. He just couldn't wait to give me a specific example and make a point. I didn't mind him talking with me at the same time because his point was valid. I didn't feel bad at all. Instead, he made me reconsider how to make the best use of my personal web space. We worked together on the topic and heard different viewpoints, although we talked over each other sometimes. That happens very often to us Chinese people. I wasn't aware of the overlapping thing, but I paid attention to the content. The conversation sounds *qiàdàng* to me.
>
> (stated by Péng in the interview)

4.2   Extended concurrent speech for topic switching

Likewise, extended concurrent speech for topic switching can be viewed as *qiàdàng*, although unexpected topic switching has been found impolite (e.g. Covelli and Murray 1980). Take Excerpt (4) as an example. Jiàn was a Ph.D. student in her thirties. Wáng was a college English teacher in her forties from a different university. They were friends for about fifteen years. Hèpí was a businessman in his thirties who became acquainted with Jiàn at a social event one month ago. On the

day of data collection, Hèpí invited Jiàn to have some ice cream at a shop because he needed some information about her university. Jiàn took Wáng with her and introduced Wáng to Hèpí. They began to talk about their different career paths after they sat down.

(4) (ChinCorn08-5)

1 *Jiàn: (looks at Hèpí and Wáng)*
 …*Wǒ zhīdào wǒ xiǎng-yào shénme.*
 1SG know 1SG want what

2 *Tāmen yǒuderén jiù bù zhīdào tā xiǎng-yào gàn shénme.*
 3PL some:people just not know 3SG want do what

3 *Tā zhǐshì yìzhí zài zhège fāngxiàng, zài zhège*
 3SG only always at this:CL direction at this:CL

4 *[xuéxiào guò de, tā jiù méi-yǒu guò]*
 school experience NOM 3SG just not:have PFV

 'Jiàn: (looks at Hèpí and Wáng) …I know what I want. Some of them don't know what to do. They only know this direction. They have stayed only at school. They haven't '

5 *Hèpí: (looks at Wáng)*
 [Xiànzài xiànzài nǐmen zuò dàxué] lǎoshī yě
 now now 2PL do college teacher also

6 *búcuò a. Xiànzài dàxué lǎoshī gōngzī mán gāo de*
 good RF now college teacher salary fairly high NOM

7 *Yǒu sān sì qiān kuài qián yíge yuè ma?*
 have three four thousand CL money one:CL month Qma

 'Hèpí: (looks at Wáng) It's also good to be a college teacher these days. Their salary is fairly high. Do you have three or four thousand RMB each month?'

8 *Wáng: (smiles at Hèpí)*
 Wǒ hěn xiǎng gěi nǐ dǎgōng.
 1SG very want for 2SG work
 'Wáng: (smiles at Hèpí) I'd like to work for you.'

9 *Hèpí: (looks surprised)*
 Nábúdào ma? Bù kěnéng ba?
 get:not Qma not possible SA
 'Hèpí: (looks surprised) You don't get that much? How is that possible?'

10→*Jiàn: (smiles at Hèpí)*
    Hǎo cǎn   de,   suǒyǐ rénjiā yào   gěi nǐ   dǎgōng.
    very tragic NOM so   other want for 2SG work
    'Jiàn: (smiles at Hèpí) That's very sad. So she wants to work for you.'

In the middle of Jiàn's utterances (lines 1–4), Hèpí seizes the floor by making a comment that is irrelevant to Jiàn's words, and switches the topic to college teachers' salary (lines 5–7). Some of his words appear in the form of extended concurrent speech. Also, the unexpected question is incoherent with the previous content. All these would be deemed inappropriate (e.g. Goldberg 1990). But the interactants apparently accept the change. Wáng jokes about the possibility of working for Hèpí to earn the amount of the money Hèpí suggested (line 8), and Jiàn aligns with her (line 10). Jiàn's response is presented in a joking tone along with a smile on her face. None of these indicates any negative impact caused by Hèpí's production of extended concurrent speech for topic switching (and floor taking at the same time in this case). Hèpí's speech seems *qiàdàng* to Jiàn. This might be due to the fact that Jiàn has finished talking about her own career choice and begun to compare herself with others that Hèpí has no interest in (lines 2–4). She respects Hèpí's participatory rights (Bennett 1981; Edelsky 1981; Murray 1985) to start a new topic that involves Wáng who has been quiet.

> I was very happy to get to know Jiàn and Wáng who are successful academically. I wanted to know how they started their careers and hoped to learn something from them. When Jiàn talked about her experiences in her field, Wáng didn't say anything. Later, Jiàn digressed into other people's choices that I wasn't interested in. So I rushed to comment on Wáng's career and direct my question to her. Then she was engaged. I know I talked at the same time with Jiàn, but that was *qiàdàng*. Both she and Wáng did that in our conversations too. We were just chitchatting. We jumped from one topic to another, following our random thoughts. The good thing is that you don't have to face consequences in everyday talk like this.
>
> (Hèpí during the playback)

Likewise, in Excerpt (5), Xīn also switched the current topic and took over the floor when she started to talk simultaneously with Jiàn. This did not seem to be assessed as impolite either. Xīn, Yí and Jiàn were three female acquaintances from different universities in their thirties. Xīn was an associate professor, Yí was a lecturer, and Jiàn was a Ph.D. student. Xīn and Yí shared the experience of working as visiting scholars at an American university for half a year. The three of them became acquainted through a professor they knew a couple of months before the day of data collection. Prior to this part of the conversation, they talked about their surprising discovery that Americans do not heat drinking water in winter, whereas most Chinese people would.

(5) (ChiScho2)

1 *Jiàn:*
   Duì   ya. Bú-cuò bú-cuò, lái   le   cái
   right RF not:bad not:bad come   PFV   only

2 *[yíge   duō   yuè   jiù   yǐjīng   shìyìng   le.]*
   one:CL more month then   already accustomed   CRS

   'Jiàn: Right. It's good that you've gotten used to it although you've been
   here only a little over one month.'

3 *Xīn:*
   [Jiù juéde qíshí   tǐng hǎowán de,] jiù   juéde
   just think actually very fun   NOM   just think

4 *měicì   dōu jīngcháng huì pèngdào yíge   wèntí.*
   every:time all often   will run:into one:CL problem

   'Xīn: I just thought it actually fun. I often run into a problem (like this).'

5→ *Jiàn:*
   Xīnxiān de   dōngxī ha, hǎo xīnxiān de   dōngxī,
   fresh   ASSOC stuff   RF very fresh   ASSOC stuff

6 *nǐ   kěnéng yào pèng   hǎojiǔ   nǐ   cái néng*
   2SG maybe need run:into very:long 2SG then can

7 *pèng-wán. Wǒ hái bù-yídìng   pèngdewán.*
   run:out   1SG still not:necessary run:out

   'Jiàn: It might take you a very long time to stop running into those prob-
   lems. I might not even be done with that.'

8 *Yí:*
   Duì.
   right
   'Yí: Right.'

9 *Jiàn:*
   Píngcháng   chūqù zhuànyōu
   on:week:days go:out stroll

10 *[zhuànyōu, kànkàn biérén zěnme zuò.]*
    stroll   look   others how   do

    'Jiàn: You should get out and walk around on weekdays. Take a look at
    how others do things.'

11 *Xīn:*
    [Ránhòu wǒ nàtiān   nàtiān   pèngdào] yíge
    then   1SG that:day that:day run:into   one:CL

12 *fǎngwèn   xuézhě, ránhòu   zhènghǎo   zài   chē*
    visiting   scholar then   coincidentally on bus

13 *shàng pèngjiàn tā,   wèn   tā   gàn   má.*
    above run:into 3SG ask   3SG do   what

14 *[yíge   fǎngwèn xuézhě]*
    one:CL visiting   scholar

    'Xīn: Then, that day, I ran into a visiting scholar on the bus coincidentally.
    I asked him what he was up to, a visiting scholar'

15→*Jiàn:*
    [Nǎ   gè xì   de?]
    which CL department NOM
    'Jiàn: Which department?'

16 *Xīn:*
    Hǎoxiàng shì gè, shì lǐkē   de   nàzhǒng
    seem   be CL be science ASSOC that:CL

17 *shénme shénme dōngxī…*
    what   what   stuff

    'Xīn: He seems to be in a science department or one like that…'

Xīn's comment in line 3 overlaps with Jiàn's words in line 2. This extended concurrent speech results in a change in the floor holder but does not seem to annoy Jiàn because she sympathizes with Xīn (lines 5–7). When she makes a suggestion in lines 9–10, Xīn produces another extended concurrent speech to take over the floor and also switch to a new topic about a visiting scholar (lines 11–14). As a response, Jiàn embraces the abruptly changed topic and asks a question about the scholar (line 15). She appears to perceive Xīn's behavior as *qiàdàng*. Jiàn's question overlaps with Xīn's words in line 14. But Xīn does not seem to view it as not *qiàdàng* either. She simply answers the question. All these might result from their "joint enthusiasm" (Natale, Entin and Jaffe 1979: 875), high involvement (Tannen 1984), and shared understanding of how to interact. It could also be related to the fact that the conversation revolves around trivialities that do not involve conflicts of interest. The choice of topic affects people's informal reasoning (Kuhn 1991) and can also influence people's perceptions of interrupters (Chambliss and Feeny 1992).

> We had very interesting experiences in the U.S. We just had to share the fun trivia and our feelings. The topics weren't confrontational and didn't cause any face loss. We laughed about the eye-opening incidents resulting from cultural differences. We all wanted to tell what happened to us unexpectedly. It was natural for us to intervene in each other's story telling because we were eager to share or were curious with questions. Wasn't it a good thing for us to get engaged despite the

resulting overlapping talk? I was so interested in the content that I didn't notice overlapping. We should get together more often because topics like this are educational as well. We can learn about everyday life in foreign countries from those incidents. (uttered by Xīn during the interview)

In addition to interesting topics, informal setttings could eliminate the negative effect of extended concurrent speech for topic switching. In Excerpt (6), Zhì and Qiàn were acquaintances in their thirties who met at their high school reunion in the city of data collection. They had participated in class reunions a few times over the years before. Although they had gone to the same middle school and high school, they had communicated very little until they had stable jobs in different cities many years later. Zhì was a male secretary of a Youth League Committee and Qiàn was a female college teacher. Prior to this part of the conversation, Qiàn talked about her visit to a cancer patient at a hospital before he died, which made her realize the importance of appreciating things and having peace of mind.

(6) (ZhiQian2)

(1) *Qiàn:*
…Ránhòu juéde wǒ zìjǐ kāixīn jiù hǎo, yīnwèi
then think 1SG self happy just fine because

2 *nàge tāmen zuì kànzhòng de shì jīngshén shēnghuó*
that:CL 3PL most value NOM be spirit life

3 *ma. Wǒ jiù juéde [tèbié yǒuyìsī yě tèbié hǎo.]*
RF 1SG just think very interesting also very good

'Qiàn: …Then, they think everything is fine as long as I'm happy, because they value their spiritual life most. I think that's very interesting and very good.'

4 *Zhì:*
[Nǐ shì kàn zhǒngliú bìngrén]
2SG be see cancer patient

5 *dào nǎge dìfāng? Shànghǎi?*
arrive which place Shànghǎi

'Zhì: Where did you go to see a cancer patient?'

6→ *Qiàn:*
Wǒ nà cì kàn zhǒngliú bìngrén shì zài
1SG that time see cancer patient be at

7 *Jiāngxī, Jiāngxī zhǒngliú yīyuàn.*
Jiāngxī Jiāngxī cancer hospital

'Qiàn: I went to the Jiāngxī Cancer Hospital to see the patient.'

Before Qiàn finishes sharing her other friends' values (lines 1–3), Zhì suddenly cuts in to ask her where she went to see a cancer patient (line 4). The mention of death might have made Zhì wonder where the tragedy happened. His curiosity results in the construction of extended concurrent speech that switches the current topic about values to the old topic about cancer. However, Qiàn does not seem to evaluate Zhì's behavior as not *qiàdàng* because she follows the flow to answer his question (lines 6–7). Her response signals that she does not expect Zhì to take turns speaking in such an informal setting. In different contexts, any points on the continuum of orderly turn-taking and extended concurrent speech could be sanctioned. "Which point on the scale is 'optimum' depends partly on pragmatic contextual variables and partly on culturally-based sociopragmatic preferences" (Spencer-Oatey and Jiang 2003: 1635). Qiàn's peaceful reaction also shows that interactants' judgments can occur on the spot. They "draw from certain sets of expectancies in co-constructing interaction in localized, situated contexts" (Kádár and Haugh 2013: 137). Qiàn's and Zhì's relational history as old classmates could help us understand Qiàn's familiarity with Zhì's production of extended concurrent speech for topic switching.

> In formal contexts, interrupting and switching topics like that are not *qiàdàng*. But in informal contexts, we don't usually wait for people to complete their sentences. We often jump in when we want to express our opinions on the issue under discussion, help the speaker clarify the issue, need more explanation on the old topic, among other things. We might not be able to remember our point if we wait until the current speaker finishes. In this case, I didn't mind Zhì's interruption to change the topic because we were just catching up, nothing serious. I know what kind of person he is. I understand that he was eager to ask his question because we would have gone too far from it.   (commented by Qiàn during the playback)

5.   Conclusion

In this paper, we argued that our participants construed extended concurrent speech for floor taking or topic switching as normal and *qiàdàng*. The argument was based on the participants' reactions to the occurrence of the speech in the ongoing conversations and their retrospective perceptions of the speech revealed in the follow-up interviews. This indicates that extended concurrent speech might be another "type of practice that is open to evaluation as face-threatening, yet appears difficult to characterize as either polite or impolite" (Chang and Haugh, 2011:2961). From the perspectives of Kádár and Haugh's (2013) discursive-interactional approach to politeness analysis, we triangulated conversational data with post-interaction interviews to present empirical evidence. We discussed emic/etic

and theoretical/folk-theoretic conceptualisations, and provided analyst/lay-observer and participant/metaparticipant understandings. The findings can enhance our understanding of the interactional functions of this type of speech, since it has rarely been explored before, and turn-taking mechanisms in Mandarin conversation. We aimed to contribute to the research on conventional views and norms associated with floor taking or topic switching, actual use of extended concurrent speech in spontaneous conversations, and interactants' assessments and perceptions thereof. However, we acknowledge that the interviewees' comments might be limited by sensitivity to face. Also, in other regions including Taiwan and Hong Kong, people might have different assessments and perceptions of extended concurrent speech for floor taking or topic switching.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix A

Transcription conventions (adapted from Schiffrin 1987)

Speaker turn start	:
Overlapping utterances	[ ]
Contiguous utterances after an interruption	=
Omission	…
A short untimed pause	_
Long untimed intervals	(pause)
Laughter	@
Emphasis	*italics*
Characteristics of the talk	(coughs)
Items in doubt	(indistinct)

Appendix B

Glossing abbreviations (adapted from Li and Thompson 1981)[4]

ASSOC	associative de
BA	bǎ (a marker for object promotion)
BEI	bèi (a coverb of the passive construction)
CL	classifier
CRS	currently relevant state le
CSC	complex stative construction de
GEN	genitive de
INT	interjection[4]
NOM	nominalizer de
PFV	perfective aspect
PRT	particle
QM	question ma
QNA	question na
QNE	question ne
RF	reduce forcefulness
SA	solicit agreement ba
1PL	first person plural pronoun
1SG	first person singular pronoun
2PL	second person plural pronoun
2SG	second person singular pronoun
3PL	third person plural pronoun
3SG	third person singular pronoun

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4. This came from Tao (1996).