

The Sentence-final Particle *ba* (吧) in Mandarin Chinese

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It has been widely claimed in the literature that the sentence-final particle *ba* in Mandarin Chinese is a modal element. This paper argues that the claim is incorrect, and that *ba* should be interpreted as a mitigating element, having scope over the utterance as a whole. Using the grammatical framework of Functional Discourse Grammar, and more specifically its hierarchical, layered organization, the paper provides the following arguments that support this new classification of *ba*. Firstly, *ba*, like mitigators in general, but unlike modal elements, can occur in sentences with different basic illocutions. Secondly, *ba* may co-occur with modal elements of all different subtypes, and thus cannot be a modal element itself. Thirdly, *ba* may occur in sentences in which the speaker is highly confident of the propositional content. Fourthly, unlike modal elements, *ba* may occur in certain types of non-propositional utterances. And fifthly, the position that *ba* occupies with respect to other sentence-final particles shows that it has scope over the utterance as a whole. After thus arguing for the status of *ba* as a mitigator, we go on to show how the general mitigating value of *ba* can acquire the more specific values that have previously been attributed to it in the literature through the examination of its use in specific contextual conditions.

1. Introduction

One of the prominent properties of the grammar of Mandarin Chinese is that it has a set of sentence-final particles, the meanings and uses of which have proven to be hard to define. One of these particles is *ba* (吧). Its use is illustrated in (1):

- (1) *Mei shi ba* .
No affairs MIT
'Nothing happened, I suppose.' (7377.1¹)

Without the particle *ba*, the sentence in (1) would be a direct statement transmitting certainty of the speaker. With the particle *ba*, the speaker transmits less certainty and makes it easier for the addressee to disagree.

In view of observations like these, *ba* has often been characterized in the literature as a modal particle (Li 1924/2007:274–276; Wang 1943/1985:174; Zhu 1999:234–241; Hu 1981:416; Lu 1984:334; Chu 1998:139; Zhou 2009:16–22; Zhao & Sun 2015:121–132; Zhang 1997:19). It has also been characterized in many other ways, for instance as a particle soliciting agreement (Li & Thompson 1981: 307–311), encoding a suggestion (Wiedenhof 2015: 241–242), expressing estimation (Li 1924/2007: 274–276; Wang 1943/1985: 174), or undetermined intention (Zhao & Sun 2015:121–132). We will take the position here that *ba* may receive a unified treatment if it is analyzed as expressing mitigation. From this it can be concluded that it is neither modal in nature, nor does it derive its specific functions in discourse from the context in which it occurs. In order to substantiate our claims, we will make use of the theoretical framework of Functional Discourse Grammar (Hengeveld & Mackenzie 2008). By using this empirically-based framework, we will be able to study

¹ All the examples, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Peking CCL Corpus (http://ccl.pku.edu.cn:8080/cd_corpus/). Each example is assigned a number automatically according to the order of appearance with 吧 as the keyword for searching. This number is given in brackets.

the Mandarin data from the perspective of the cross-linguistic generalizations that are the empirical basis of this theory.

In what follows we will first give a brief outline of some relevant aspects of Functional Discourse Grammar, and further motivate the use of this framework for the purposes of our research. Section 3 then lists the predictions that follow from our claim that *ba* is a mitigator and describes the methodology used to test those predictions. In Section 4 we check the predictions that follow from the fact that we do not treat *ba* as a modal element. Section 5 further explores the issue of how the more specific interpretations of *ba* mentioned in the literature can be clustered together to relate to the contexts in which *ba* is used. We round off with our conclusions in Section 6.

2. Functional Discourse Grammar²

Functional Discourse Grammar (FDG, Hengeveld & Mackenzie 2008), is a typologically-based theory of language structure. FDG recognizes four different levels of linguistic organization. The Interpersonal (pragmatic), Representational (semantic), Morphosyntactic and Phonological Levels. These levels are organized in a top down fashion, as shown in Figure 1. This figure shows that the Interpersonal Level dominates the other three levels, the Representational Level, the Morphosyntactic and Phonological Levels, while the Morphosyntactic Level dominates the Phonological Level.

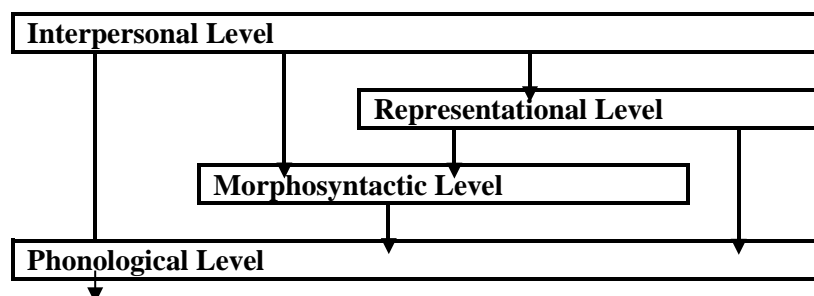


Figure 1. The top-down organization of FDG

Each level has a hierarchical organization, in the sense that it contains a series of layers that are in a scopal relationship. In this paper, we will focus on the Interpersonal and Representational Levels only, as these are the ones that are relevant for the analysis of *ba* as mitigator. The layers at these levels and the scope relations between them are shown in Figure 2.³ In this figure, scope is indicated by the symbols ‘>’ reading from left to right and ‘V’ reading from top to bottom, which both mean ‘has scope over’.

² This section is partly taken from Hengeveld & Fischer (forthc.).

³ We exclude the Referential Subact here, as it is not relevant for the purposes of this paper.

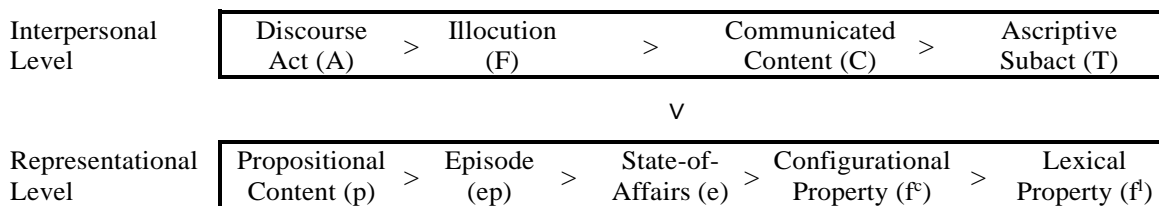


Figure 2. Layers and scope relations in FDG

The Interpersonal Level comprises different pragmatic layers, with scope relations between them. The lowest one relevant here is the Ascriptive (T), which represents an act of predication. The next layer is the Communicated Content (C), which encapsulates the message transmitted in an utterance. Then there is the Illocution (F), which captures the communicative intention of the speaker; and the highest layer relevant here is the Discourse Act (A), which represents the basic unit of communicative behavior.

At the Representational Level, different semantic layers are distinguished, again with scope relations between them: the lowest one is the Property (f^l) expressed by a lexical element. The next is the Configurational Property (f^c), which consists of the lexical element and its argument(s) and as such provides the basic characterization of a State-of-Affairs. Then comes the State-of-Affairs (e) itself, which is the situated real or hypothesized situation the speaker is describing. The Episode (ep) is the next layer, which is a thematically coherent combination of States-of-Affairs that are characterized by unity or continuity of time, location, and participants, while the highest layer is the Propositional Content (p), which is a mental construct entertained about an episode.

As mentioned above, the levels themselves are also hierarchically related, with the Interpersonal Level having higher scope than the Representational Level, as indicated in Figure 1.

In FDG, non-relational⁴ grammatical categories are treated as operators. This wide definition of operators opens up an enormous range of grammatical categories. Table 1 gives an overview of all the relevant categories at the clausal level as presented in Hengeveld & Mackenzie (2008), but including the modifications proposed in Hengeveld & Fischer (forthc.) for aspect, Hengeveld & Hattner (2015) and Hengeveld & Fischer (forthc.) for evidentiality, Hattner & Hengeveld (2016), Olbertz & Gasparini Bastos (2013) and Olbertz & Honselaar (2017) for modality, Mackenzie (2009) and Hengeveld & Mackenzie (2018) for polarity, and Olbertz (2012) and Hengeveld (2017) for mirativity.

It is important to underline two important aspects of the system presented in Table 1. Firstly, it is predicted in FDG that the scope of operators will be reflected in the ordering of operators within the clause. Operators with lower scope are expected to occur closer to the predicate than those with higher scope. Secondly, the table shows that mood, polarity, evidentiality, tense, aspect, and localization are categories that can be divided into subtypes with different scope properties and thus the category itself cannot be used as a unified tool for analysis. The ordering of the elements expressing these subtypes are again expected to reflect the scope relations within the overall category.

⁴ This excludes relational grammatical categories such as adpositions and conjunctions.

Table 1. Tense, aspect, mood, evidentiality, mirativity, polarity, and localization categories in FDG

	Interpersonal Level				Representational Level				
	Discourse Act (A)	Illocution (F)	Communicated Content (C)	Ascriptive Subact (T)	Propositional Content (p)	Episode (ep)	State-of-Affairs (e)	Configurational Property (f ^c)	Lexical Property (f)
Mood	illocutionary modification	basic illocution; illocutionary modification			proposition-oriented modality	episode-oriented modality	event-oriented modality	participant-oriented modality	
Polarity	rejection	negative basic illocutions	denial	metalinguistic negation	disagreement	co-negation	non-occurrence	failure	local negation
Evidentiality	quotative		reportative	reportative	inference	deduction	event perception		
Mirativity			mirative						
Tense						absolute tense	relative tense		
Aspect							event quantification	qualitative aspect, participant-oriented quantification	property quantification
Localization							event location		directionality

It is outside the scope of this paper to give a full motivation of the categorization presented in Table 1, but we will provide more detail on the categories that play a central role in the remainder of this paper, i.e. the ones listed under ‘mood’. Within this category, a further distinction is made between illocution, which applies at the Interpersonal Level, and modality, which applies at the Representational Level.

As seen in Table 1, the category of illocution can be further subdivided into basic illocution and illocutionary modification. Basic illocutions are conventionalized expressions of communicative intentions, and include declarative, interrogative, directive, etc. Illocutionary modifiers express modifications of basic illocutions, such as their mitigation and reinforcement.

Illocutionary modifiers may operate at the layer of the Illocution or at the layer of the Discourse Act. They operate at the layer of the Illocution when they are restricted to certain basic illocutions, as in e.g. A’ingae (Fischer & Hengeveld forthc.), which has a specific expression for mitigated Directives. They operate at the layer of the Discourse Act when they apply to all basic illocutions that a language disposes of, as in the case of Spanish, a language that allows the use of the reinforcing particle *que* with declarative, interrogative, and Directive basic illocutions alike (Hengeveld & Mackenzie 2008: 67).

The category of modality is subdivided in four different categories: proposition-oriented modality, episode-oriented modality, event-oriented modality, and participant-oriented modality. An example containing all four types of modality is given in (2).

- (2) It is *certainly possible* that a person one *has to be able* to swim in order to gain entrance to the swimming pool.

Proposition-oriented modality, also known as subjective epistemic modality, expresses the degree of commitment of a speaker with respect to the truth value of a Propositional Content, a function executed in (2) by the adverb *certainly*. Episode-oriented modality, which is also known as objective epistemic modality, characterizes Episodes in terms of the degree of likelihood of their occurrence. In (2) the modal expression *possible* describes such a degree. Event-oriented modality, as expressed by *have to* in (2), characterizes a State-of-Affairs as a whole as feasible or desirable. Finally, participant-oriented modality describes a relation between a participant in a State-of-Affairs and the realization of that State-of-Affairs, as illustrated by the modal expression *be able to* in (2), which ascribes ability to a participant.

Note that the fact that four different modal expressions can be used in a single sentence such as (2), shows that there must indeed be four different subtypes of modality, which belong to different paradigms. Otherwise, it would be hard to account for the co-occurrence of modal expressions such as *certainly* and *possible* in a single sentence. Furthermore, it is important to note that (2) illustrates that the scope of the modal categories determines their order with respect to the predicate, a point we made above. In (2), *certainly* is furthest away from the predicate, followed by *be possible*, *have to* and *be able to*, an order that directly reflects the underlying scope properties of each modal element. Note also that any ordering of the modals other than the one in (2) would lead to an ungrammatical sentence.

Among the four types of modality, subjective epistemic modality and objective epistemic modality are most difficult to classify. We adopt Hattner & Olbertz's (in press) content question test to distinguish subjective modality from objective modality in our sub-corpus. Subjective modalities occur in propositional contents that cannot be located in space or time while objective modalities occur in episodes that can be located in space or time. We use content question words of time such as *shen-me shi-hou* ‘when’ or content words of space such as *zai na-er* or *shen-me di-fang* ‘where’ to test each Declarative in which an epistemic modal occurs. If the sentence becomes unacceptable after the insertion of the relevant question words, the modal expression is categorized as expressing

subjective epistemic modality. If the sentence is acceptable, it is considered to be an objective epistemic modal. To distinguish between event-oriented, and participant oriented modality, it is necessary to determine whether the state of affairs involves/concerns external circumstances or participants.

3. Predictions and methodology

In this article we investigate the claim that *ba* is a mitigator rather than a modal element. This claim leads to a number of predictions that we will test in the remainder of this article.

The first prediction is that *ba* shows grammatical behavior that one would not expect from a modal element. This general prediction can be refined in a number of more specific ones. If *ba* were a modal element, it should not be possible for it (i) to occur in sentences with different basic illocutions; (ii) to co-occur with modal elements of all different subtypes; (iii) to occur in sentences in which the speaker is highly confident of the propositional content; (iv) to occur in certain types of non-propositional utterances; nor (v) to occupy a position in which it has scope over the utterance as a whole, including the modal elements that it contains. These five specific predictions are tested in Section 4.

The second prediction is that, if it is a general mitigator, *ba* will receive more specific interpretations that can be explained in terms of the properties of the type of speech act in which it occurs and of the properties of the wider context that this speech act is embedded in. This prediction is tested in Section 5.

In testing the predictions we make use of corpus data. The corpus used in this study is the Peking Corpus by the Center for Chinese Linguistics (CCL), which contains a sub-corpus of Vernacular Mandarin and a sub-corpus of Modern Mandarin. The latter, which is the one we used, is made up of 509,913,589 words and covers both spoken and written Mandarin in various text types, including novels, plays, stories, TV programs, movies, newspapers, cybertext, and translated works. Searches with *ba* as the keyword in the Modern Corpus resulted in 104,276 instances on 2086 pages with approximately 50 instances per page. 16 pages were randomly selected, giving 879 instances in total. Of these, 116 occurrences were removed because they were homonyms of *ba* (as a topic marker, a noun, or an onomatopoeia), as well as a non-propositional use and several instances of repetitions and typos, the removal of which led to 763 instances of sentence-final use. They constitute the corpus for this study.

4. *Ba* as a mitigator

4.1 Introduction

In this section we test the predictions concerning the non-modal nature of *ba* listed in the previous section. The results show that *ba* can indeed not be a modal element, as it occurs in contexts in which modal elements would not be allowed.

4.2 *Ba* and basic illocution

Modal elements are generally restricted to Declarative sentences, but also occurs in Interrogative sentences, albeit with restrictions. *Ba*, however, may occur in sentences with all basic Illocutions encountered in Mandarin Chinese. The basic Illocutions identified in Mandarin are the Declarative, Interrogative, Directive, Exclamative, and Prohibitive, which have distinct intonational features. The

Declarative intonation consists of a flat intonation (Huang & Liao 2011: 99) and a fall added to the end of an utterance (Duanmu 2000: 235), while Interrogative intonation usually has an overall higher phrase curve, higher strengths of sentence final tones and a final-tone-dependent mechanism (Yuan 2006; Liu *et al* 2016). Directives usually have a low tone range similar to Declaratives, but a stronger command is distinguished by an overall forceful tone as well as a short and intense sentence-final tone (He & Jin 1992: 71 – 96). In addition to a high frequency of degree adverbs, the Exclamative has a distinct prosodic contour characterized by one or multiple strong stress positions, a wide pitch range, and a low ending boundary (Chen 2007). The Prohibitive requires the use of negative words such as *bie*, *bu*, and *bu-yao* with a stressed intonation, among which *bie* is a negative particle used exclusively in directives (Li & Thompson 1981: 455).

In our corpus, *ba* occurs in all five sentence types, as exemplified in (3).⁵

- (3) a. *nin she-ji de zuo-pin yue you 2000 duo zhong ba.*
 2.SG.POL design of works about have 2000 more kind MIT
 ‘You have designed more than 2000 kinds of works, I suppose.’ (6495.1)
- b. *ni ming-bai wo-de yi-si ba?*
 2.SG.FAM understand 1.SG-ATTR meaning MIT
 ‘You understand what I meant, right?’ (748.1)
- c. *ni jiu gei wo shuo shi-hua ba,*
 2.SG.FAM at_once give me say truth MIT
ni duo-da sui-shu?
 2.SG.FAM how old age
 ‘Tell me the truth immediately, OK? How old are you?’ (63.1)
- d. (Three tax inspectors investigate the tax-paying history of the factory. The factory director telephoned the head of the tax department, complaining angrily:)
wo bu shi shuo ni-men mei you quan-li cha,
 1.SG NEG COP say 2-PL NEG have right investigate
dan zhe-zhong cha fa de bao-fu-xing
 but this_type investigate way of revenge
ye tai ming-xian le ba!
 as_well too obvious MIR MIT
 ‘I am not saying that you people don’t have the right to investigate, but the revenging way you did it is **far too** ostentatious as well, isn’t it?’ (9628.1)
- e. *bie diao le ba.*
 PROH sling MIR MIT
 ‘Don’t sling it any more, OK?’ (7009.1)

(3a) is a Declarative in which the speaker asserts the propositional content about the number of the kinds of works that the addressee has designed. With *ba*, its assertiveness is reduced. The Interrogative in (3b) questions a propositional content. By using *ba*, the speaker is trying to solicit confirmation from the addressee. The first clause in (3c) is a Directive in which the speaker is pushing a woman to tell the truth. The use of *ba* reduces the harshness of this command. (3d) is an Exclamative in which the speaker is complaining angrily. The presence of *ba* mitigates the negativity of the speaker’s complaint. (3e) is a Prohibitive in which *bie* indicates that the speaker wants the addressee to stop. By using *ba* the speaker makes the prohibition sound less forceful.

⁵ Zhu (1999:234-241) believes that *ba* is a marker of interrogative and directive illocutions. Our examples show that this cannot be the correct analysis.

Through manual annotation of each instance in our sub-corpus, we obtained the absolute frequency and percentage of each illocution combined with *ba* as shown in the second column in Table 2. To get an overview of the relative percentage of each Illocution in the CCL Modern Corpus, regardless of the presence or absence of *ba*, we randomly selected two hundred sentences from each of the spoken and literary sub-corpora, which are the only data in CCL accessible by text type. After the irrelevant sentences had been removed, and the remaining sentences annotated, the frequency and percentage of the Illocution in each of the text types were calculated, as seen in column three and four in Table 2. The overall results from the two text types are found in column five. On the basis of this information the relative frequency of *ba* per illocution could be calculated. By dividing the percentage of a certain sentence type with *ba* by the percentage of the sentence type in general we get the rates and ranks given in the sixth column.

Table 2. Frequency and percentage of basic illocutions

Basic illocution	With <i>ba</i> in corpus	Frequency in spoken CCL	Frequency in literary CCL	Frequency overall	Rate/Rank
Declarative	235/30.8%	93/51.9%	176/96.2%	269/74.3%	0.41/4
Interrogative	147/19.3%	56/31.3%	3/1.6%	59/16.3%	1.18/2
Directive	376/49.3%	25/14.0%	0/0	25/6.9%	7.14/1
Exclamative	4/0.5%	3/1.7%	4/2.2%	7 /1.9%	0.26/5
Prohibitive	1/0.1%	2/1.1%	0/0	2/0.6%	0.5/3
Total	763/100%	179/100%	183/100%	362/100%	

Table 2 shows important differences in the overall presence of basic illocutions, of which the Declarative is the highest in frequency. On an even distribution, it would be expected that *ba* would most frequently occur with the Declarative. However, as shown in Table 2, the Directive use of *ba*, not the Declarative use, is dominant in our sub-corpus of *ba*, to the extent that *ba* is used in Directives over seven times more often than would be expected on an even distribution. This reveals that the primary use of *ba* is mitigative, not modal, as epistemic modality targets a proposition as expressed in a Declarative or Interrogative sentence, whereas Directives are proposals that involve the non-verbal exchange of goods-&-services (objects or actions) that cannot be affirmed or denied (Halliday 1994: 68–71). Hence, in the case of directives, it would be impossible for the speaker to use *ba* as a modal to show his epistemic commitment towards a proposal. Rather, as the basic function of a Directive is to issue an order or a request, which is potentially face-threatening, the speaker uses *ba* to mitigate this effect.

The second most frequent Illocution with which *ba* combines is the Interrogative. There is a little difference between the frequency of Interrogatives with *ba* and the frequency of the Interrogative in the overall corpus. Interrogatives are similar to Directives in being requests albeit for information, and might therefore also be expected to be mitigated. This also holds for Prohibitives, the third most frequent Illocution, whose strong imperative force tends to be mitigated by the speaker. As Directives, Interrogatives and Prohibitives are demanding in nature, either demanding an action or a piece of information, they are likely to be mitigated. In comparison, Declaratives and Exclamatives are informative in nature, either conveying a statement or expressing strong emotion. These two illocutions are consequently less face-threatening than the other illocutions and thus less in the need of mitigation.

Owing to the low frequencies of Exclamatives and Prohibitives and the lack of available raw data of more text types, what is presented in column six of Table 2 may not reflect the actual rate of *ba* per illocution. Nevertheless, the significant differences are still revealing, especially the overwhelmingly higher frequency of *ba* in Directives, which shows that the Directive use, not the Declarative use, appears to be *ba*'s basic and primary use. This is also confirmed by diachronic

research done by Tantucci (2017), who points out that in recent history *ba* has witnessed a progressive shift from the Directive use to the Declarative use. In other words, the mitigating use in Directives is the original one, and has diachronically expanded to Declaratives, functioning to reduce the Declarative's assertiveness.

As argued in Section 2, in FDG, a mitigator that co-occurs with all possible Illocution types is treated as an operator at the layer of the Discourse Act, thus modifying the Discourse Act as a whole. As shown in (3), the presence of *ba* reduces the force of all types of illocution. Therefore, *ba* may be analyzed as operating at the Discourse Act layer rather than at the layer of the Illocution. This stands in contrast to much of the existing literature, in which *ba* is often regarded as modifying some specific illocutionary force, such as estimation (Wang 1943/1985:174; Li 1924/2007:274–276), soliciting agreement (Li & Thompson 1981: 307–311), suggestion (Lü 1999: 56–57; Wiedenhof 2015:241–242), etc.

4.3 *Ba* and modality

95 of the 235 declarative sentence with *ba* co-occur with one or two modal elements. Table 3 presents the classification and frequency of the four types of modal elements which were defined in section 2.

Table 3. The frequency of co-occurrence of *ba* with four types of modality

Type of modality	Modal elements	Frequency	Percentage
Subjective epistemic modality	<i>da-gai</i> (大概) ‘probably’ ⁶	21	22.1%
	<i>ye-xu /huo-xu</i> (也许/或许)	19	20.0%
	‘perhaps’	5	5.2%
	<i>da-yue</i> (大约) ‘probably’	1	1.1%
	<i>bu-yi-ding</i> (不一定) ‘uncertainly’		48,4%
Objective epistemic modality	<i>ke-neng</i> (可能) ‘possibly’	14	14,7%
	<i>yi-ding</i> (一定) ‘certainly’	4	4,2%
	<i>ken-ding</i> (肯定) ‘certainly’	1	1,1%
			20%
Event-oriented modality	<i>gai</i> (应该/该) ‘should’	11	11,5%
	<i>ke-yi</i> (可以) ‘may’	1	1,1%
	<i>bu-neng</i> (不能) ‘cannot’	8	8,4%
	<i>neng</i> (能) ‘can’	1	1,1%
			22.1%

⁶ Among the 21 sentences of *da-gai*, there are two that can be changed into a content question, but in both cases, the meaning of *da-gai* changes into a non-epistemic meaning ‘approximately’; therefore, we still categorize *da-gai* as a subjective epistemic modality.

Participant-oriented modality	<i>ke</i> (可) ‘can’	1	1,1%
	<i>hui</i> (会) ‘will’	7	7,3%
	<i>ke-yi</i> (可以) ‘can’	1	1,1%
			9.5%

As Table 3 shows, *ba* co-occurs most frequently with modal elements of epistemic modality, especially with *da-gai*, *ye-xu* and *ke-neng*. *Da-gai*, *ye-xu* and *ke-neng* function differently in that *da-gai* and *ye-xu* cannot be modified further while *ke-neng* can be modified by degree adverbs such as *hen* ‘very’. According to the principle that if a linguistic element cannot be modified, it must be grammatical, *da-gai* and *ye-xu* are grammatical elements whereas *ke-neng* is a lexical element. If *ba*, as a grammatical element, were to express a subjective epistemic modality, it would be incompatible with *da-gai* and *ye-xu*, as no two elements of the same category can occur in a single sentence. The fact that there are 21 cases of co-occurrence of *ba* with *da-gai*, and 19 with *ye-xu* shows that *ba* itself cannot be a modal marker of uncertainty. This is exemplified in (4a) and (4b).

- (4) a. *zhe da-gai jiu-shi dong-wu he ren de yi ge*
 this probably exactly animals and humans of one CLF
hen da de qu-bie ba
 very big of difference MIT
 ‘Probably this is indeed a big difference between animals and human beings, I suppose.’ (1137.1)
- b. *ye-xu, zhe zheng shi you-mu wen-hua de yi da*
 perhaps, this indeed COP nomadic culture of one big
te-se ba
 characteristic MIT
 ‘Perhaps, this is indeed one big characteristic of the nomadic culture, I suppose.’ (7783.1)

Ba can also co-occur with the three other types of modality as shown in (5). *Ke-neng* in (5a) expresses an objective epistemic modality; *gai* in (5b) an event-oriented modality; and *hui* in (5c) a participant-oriented modality.

- (5) a. *ke-neng shi bu xiang he wo zheng-bian ba.*
 possibly COP NEG want and me argue MIT
 ‘Possibly she doesn’t want to argue with me, I suppose.’ (1138.1)
- b. *ni shi zai Beijing shi-jian zui-chang de da-shi,*
 2.SG.FAM COP at Beijing time longest of ambassador
fen-shou shi zong gai shuo sheng zai-jian ba.
 depart when always should say CLF goodbye MIT
 ‘You are the ambassador who has stayed the longest time at Beijing. When you leave, you should at least say goodbye, I suppose (because if you don’t, it would be impolite).’ (7776.1)
- c. *dao-ci ni-men jiu hui ming-bai wo dui*
 until_now 2-PL immediately will understand 1.SG towards
gai ju de guan gan yu ping-jia le ba
 this movie of see feelings and comments MIR MIT

‘Now you will immediately understand how I feel towards and comment on this movie, I suppose.’ (7358.1)

In the corpus, there are five cases of *ba* occurring with two modal elements in a single declarative sentence. Each type of modality pertains to a different layer, so it is theoretically legitimate for them to co-occur in the same sentence. In (6a), *ba* co-occurs with the subjective modal *da-gai* and the event-oriented modal *neng* whereas in (6b), with the objective epistemic modal *ken-ding* and the participant-oriented modal *hui*.

- (6) a. *xian shi zong-shi shui da jiao, da Ma-Jiang, da-gai*
 free time always sleep big sleep play Ma-Jiang probably
bu neng suan-shi zui-hao de xuan-zhe ba
 NEG can considered best of choice MIT
 ‘In your free time, you always sleep or play Ma-Jiang, which probably cannot be considered to be the best choice, I suppose.’ (8480.1)
- b. *zhe-xie di-fang ken-ding bu hui zai-hu shen-me Beijing*
 these places certainly NEG will concern what Beijing
hu-kou de ba
 Hu-Kou CERT MIT
 ‘These places certainly won’t be concerned about any Beijing Hu-Kou, I suppose.’ (1110.1)

In our corpus, there were no cases of three modal elements co-occurring with *ba*. Despite this, the fact that *ba* can occur with each type of modality and even co-occur with more than one modality in a single sentence demonstrates that *ba* cannot be a modal. If it were a modal, the combination with at least one of these types would lead to ungrammaticality.

4.4 *Ba* in expressions with strong truth commitment

If *ba* were a modal marker of uncertainty (Hu 1981:416; Lu 1984:334; Chu 1998:139; Zhou 2009:16–22; Zhao & Sun 2015:121–132), then a speaker could use *ba* to show he/she is uncertain about what he/she is asserting. However, *ba* can occur in sentences in which the speaker displays a high degree of confidence in the truth of the statement (Tantucci 2017). In (7), the village head is highly confident of Chen Yue-Qing’s reluctance to sell the orchard because no one would sell something that is very profitable.

- (7) (Chen Yue-Qing owned an apple orchard. She wanted to sell it because she thought she couldn’t handle this alone after her husband died in a traffic accident. The village head persuaded her not to sell it and lent her some money. After some time, she began to gain profit from the orchard. On a visit to her orchard, the village head said in a happy voice to her,
‘xian-zai ni ke she-bu-de zhuan-rang le ba!’
 now 2.SG.FAM REINF reluctant make over MIR MIT
 ‘Now you are reluctant to sell the orchard, I suppose.’ (8492.1)

There are even cases in which the speaker explicitly expresses high confidence by using expressions such as *yi-ding* and *ken-ding* as shown in (8a). In these cases, *ba* cannot encode uncertainty because it would be contradictory for the speaker to have high confidence in what he/she said and at the same

time present it as being uncertain. This can be confirmed by replacing *ba* in (8a) by an expression of subjective possibility such as *ye-xu* ‘perhaps’, which would render the sentence unacceptable, as shown in (8b).

- (8) a. *Na yi ye, Dong Wen-Hua ye yi-ding shui le ba.*
 That one night Dong Wen-Hua too certainly sleep PERF MIT
 ‘At that night, Dong Wen-Hua must be asleep, I suppose.’ (3856.1)
- b. **Na yi ye, Dong Wen-Hua ye-xu ye yi-ding shui le.*
 That one night Dong Wen-Hua perhaps too certainly sleep PERF
 ‘At that night, Dong Wen-Hua must perhaps be asleep.’

The sentence now becomes ungrammatical, as there is a clash between the modal expression *yi-ding* ‘certainly’ and the modal expression *ye-xu* ‘perhaps’, which expresses the opposite modal value. The fact that *ba* does not have such an effect shows it cannot itself be modal.

However, *ba* cannot occur in all Declaratives in which the speaker has strong confidence. For instance, if what is stated is a fact concerning the speaker’s own past behavior, it is unacceptable to use *ba*. Consider the following examples:

- (9) a. *wo zuo-tian qu Beijing le.*
 1.SG yesterday go Beijing PERF
 ‘I went to Beijing yesterday.’
- b. **wo zuo-tian qu Beijing le ba.*
 1.SG yesterday go Beijing PERF MIT
- c. *wo zuo-tian qu Beijing le ba?*
 ‘I went to Beijing yesterday, right?’

In (9a), the speaker’s going to Beijing is presented as a fact. (9b) is not acceptable because when one shows uncertainty about one’s own actions, one doubts one’s own honesty and memory. However, if the fact is presented as a question, not concerning the truth or falsity, but to seek confirmation, it becomes legitimate as in (9c). (9c) not only shows the speaker’s confidence, but is also presented as an invitation for the addressee to agree. Hence, *ba* cannot be a pure epistemic marker but is actually interpersonally motivated. The uncertainty reading in sentences with *ba* should therefore not be attributed to the inherent nature of *ba* but to the perlocutionary effect that *ba* brings about as a mitigator. A perlocutionary reading is insufficient to define *ba* as a modal.

4.5 *Ba* in non-propositional utterances

Ba not only occurs in sentences with strong epistemic commitment but also in non-propositional sentences. The most frequent co-occurrence is with *hao* ‘okay’. For instance,

- (10) (The son is afraid of swinging. His father is trying to encourage him to have a try by showing him how. Seeing that his father is enjoying himself on the swing, the son says,
Hao ba, dan wo bu yao dang de na-me gao
 okay MIT but 1.SG NEG want swing ATTR that high
 ‘Alright then, but I don’t want to swing that high.’ (2735.1)

As mentioned in 4.2, human interactions involve two kinds of exchange, an exchange of propositions and an exchange of proposals. The former refers to statements and questions that can be ‘argued about—something that can be affirmed or denied, and also doubted, contradicted, insisted on, accepted with reservation, qualified, tempered, regretted and so on’ whereas the latter refers to offers and commands that cannot be affirmed or denied (Halliday 1994: 70). A proposition can be related to epistemic uncertainty but a proposal cannot. For instance, in English, propositional (11) is correct, but it is awkward to say (12).

- (11) I am not so sure about whether we should go or not.
 (12) *Let’s uncertainly go.

In Mandarin, *hao* is actional since it reacts to a proposal, not to a proposition. In (10), *hao ba* is a reaction to the father’s suggestion to swing, not an epistemic agreement as to whether the statement is true or not. It is not grammatical to respond with propositional *shi*⁷ ‘yes’ to the father’s encouragement.

- (13) **shi de*.
 Yes REINF
 ‘Yes.’

Hengeveld & Mackenzie (2008: 146–149) point out that *yes* is propositional in nature and can be used to substitute for full Propositional Contents. Hence it is used in reaction to a statement or a question but cannot be used to react to a Directive because a Directive evokes a State-of-Affairs rather than a Propositional Content. The reaction to a Directive would be an actional one like *okay*. So it is incorrect for Zhou (2009:16–22), Chu (1998:132–139) and Zhao & Sun (2015:121–132) to claim that *ba* is used in Directives to show that the speaker is unsure of or dubious about the enactment of the speech act. Actually, when *ba* occurs with actional *hao* ‘okay, it mitigates the willingness to carry out the required action. In (10), without *ba*, the sentence means ‘okay, implying *I would like to do that*; with *ba*, it means ‘alright’, implying *I would do that but I am somewhat reluctant*.

4.6 *Ba* and other sentence-final particles

Mandarin Chinese has a rich inventory of sentence-final particles. two distinguishing features of Mandarin sentence-final particles are that they have a very high frequency of occurrence in daily conversations and that they can occur in clusters which have a highly restricted linear order. The most basic sentence-final particles are the following six: *de* (的), *le* (了), *ne* (呢), *ba* (吧), *ma* (吗) and *a* (啊). They have different degrees of scope over the content of the sentence and can thus cluster hierarchically at the end of a sentence. We searched the CCL corpus, finding that the maximal combination of those basic particles is three in a single sentence. The most frequent one is *de le a*, which is phonetically fused into *de la* (的啦) due to the adjacency of two vowels. The second most frequent one is *de le ma* and the third is *de le ba*. The latter combination is illustrated in (14).

- (14) *ni yi-ding hui yuan-yi gen baba chu lai*
 2.SG.FAM certainly will willing with Dad go come

⁷ *Shi* is propositional except when used in the military forces as a response to an order issued by someone higher in rank. In this case, *shi* is actional as can be proven by the illegitimacy of adding the certainty marker *de* to it.

wan de le ba.
 play CERT MIR MIT

‘You will certainly be willing to go and hang out with Dad, I suppose.’

De in (14) is a modal marker of certainty, which pertains to the layer of the Propositional Content at the Representational Level. *Le* is a mirative marker at the layer of the Communicative Content at the Interpersonal Level (Fang forthc.). The hierarchical order of *de le ba* in (14) shows that *ba* has scope over *le* and *de*. Hence, *ba* has scope over the utterance as a whole and should pertain to a layer higher than that of the Communicated Content. The two layers higher than the Communicated Content are the layer of the Illocution and the layer of the Discourse Act. As mentioned in Section 2, the difference between an operator at the layer of the Illocution and an operator at the layer of Discourse Act is that the former accounts for grammatical emphasis and mitigation of a specific illocution or a limited range of Illocutions, whereas the latter can combine with all types of Illocutions, thus reinforcing or mitigating the Discourse Act as a whole. Accordingly, *ba* is an operator at the layer of the Discourse Act, which can combine with all kinds of illocutions (see 4.2) and has a mitigating effect on any of the illocutions that it occurs with.

Interrogative *ma* and interrogative *ne* are at the layer of the Illocution because both only modify Interrogative illocution. Theoretically, if *ba* pertains to the layer of the Discourse Act, it should be able to combine with particles at the layer of the Illocution such as *ma* and interrogative *ne*⁸. However, *ba* cannot co-occur with either of them. This does, however, not mean *ba* is at the same layer as *ma* and *ne*. The reasons for this lack of compatibility are the following.

Firstly, *ma* and interrogative *ne* only modify interrogatives. *Ma* is used in polar questions as well as rhetorical questions with negative words, while *ne* occurs in content questions such as WH-questions, Verb-not-Verb questions, and alternative questions. *Ba* on the other hand, is functionally equivalent to a tag question marker when used with an interrogative. Tag questions are not real questions but form a mitigating strategy used by the speaker to reduce the unwelcome effect of a speech act, along with hedges, disclaimers, parenthetical verbs, etc. (Fraser 1980). As a mitigator, *ba* behaves differently from *ma* and interrogative *ne* in that the removal of *ba* changes the type of question whereas the removal of *ma* and *ne* does not. This is shown in the following examples:

- (15) a. *ni dong wo-de yi-si ma?*
 2.SG.FAM understand my-ATTR meaning INT
 ‘Do you understand what I mean? Do you?’
 (Hong Ding Shang Ren Hu Xue Yan/ CCL)
- b. *ni dong wo-de yi-si?*
 2.SG.FAM understand 1.SG-ATTR meaning
 ‘Do you understand what I mean?’
- (16) a. *dan-shi shui lai zhao-gu ta ne?*
 But who come take care 3.SG INT
 ‘But who is going to take care of him? Who?’
 (Lu Yu You Yue/CCL)
- b. *dan-shi shui lai zhao-gu ta?*
 But who come take care 3.SG
 ‘But who is going to take care of him?’
- (17) a. *ni bi hei xing-xing yao qiang ba?*
 2.SG.FAM compare black chimp want better MIT

⁸ Particle *ne* can occur in Declaratives and Interrogatives. We use Interrogative *ne* to make a distinction between them.

‘You are better than chimps, right?’ (72.1)

- b. *ni* *bi* *hei* *xing-xing* *yao* *qiang*?
2.SG.FAM compare black chimp want better
‘Are you better than chimps?’

(15a) is a polar question asking whether the addressee understands the speaker. When *ma* is removed, (15b) is still a polar question, though it sounds less inquisitive compared to (15a). The same is true for (16a) and (16b). Without *ne*, (16b) is still a content question asking who the person is that is going to provide the care. The presence and absence of *ma* and *ne* reflect differences in the explicitness of the inquisitive mood⁹. In both (15a) and (16a), the presence of *ma* and *ne* leads to a more saliently marked question, as if the speaker was using *ma* and *ne* as a pointer to guide the addressee through a more effective process of communication. This also explains why sentence-final particles tend to occur more frequently in spoken Mandarin. By contrast, as shown in (17a) and (17b), when *ba* is removed, the question type changes from a request for confirmation into a polar one¹⁰. The harsh and aggressive tone of (17b) is very much reduced in (17a). Therefore, *ba* functions differently from *ma* in terms of polar questions. Hence, *ba* cannot be a marker with the core function of modifying interrogation. The difference in the illocutionary effects brought out by *ma* and *ne* on the one hand, and *ba* on the other reveals that they are not of the same category or layer.

Secondly, it is semantically incompatible to use *ma* and *ne* to seek information and at the same time use *ba* to ask for confirmation of that same information. As the information requested is unknown to the speaker, there is nothing in the utterance that can be confirmed. For instance, in English, one could not say either of (18).

- (18) a. *Have you checked your email, right?
 b. *How did you check your email, right?

5. Contextual interpretation of *ba*

5.1 Introduction

In the preceding section we have shown, using a variety of tests, that *ba* cannot be analyzed as a modal element. In this section, we will argue that *ba* should instead be analyzed as having a generalized mitigating function, which acquires specific effects depending on the context in which it occurs. Since these varying and multiple contextual meanings of *ba* are specifically dependent on the kind of speech act in which they occur, we organize this section in terms of illocutionary values. For each of these, we intend to show how the type of speech act interacts with the general mitigating function of *ba* in producing a specific perlocutionary effect. The illocutionary values that we will discuss are directive (Section 5.2), interrogative (Section 5.3), declarative (Section 5.4), exclamative (Section 5.5), and prohibitive (Section 5.6). We summarize our findings in Section 5.7.

⁹ Interrogative *ma* and *ne* should not be considered as purely Interrogative markers because their absence doesn't lead to the change of the Interrogative Illocution that they combine with. As they occur very often in colloquial Mandarin, their primary function is to make the Interrogative Illocution more explicit to the addressee.

¹⁰ The removal of *ba* alone does not suffice for (17a) to become a polar question. There should also involve a shift from a comparatively flat prosodic contour in (17a) to an Interrogative prosodic contour in (17b), the reverse of which results in a shift from a polar question to a tag question with *ba*.

5.2 Directives

Directives in Mandarin very often overtly involve first person (*wo*; *wo-men*) and second person (*ni*; *ni-men*) pronouns, expressing, depending on the nature of the subject, Imperative and Hortative illocutions. With a subject that includes the first person, they generally involve actions that the speaker expects to carry out without or with the Addressee. The first person singular *wo* indicates that the speaker offers to do something on his or her own, as in (19a); the first person plural *wo-men* can indicate that the proposed action is inclusive or exclusive of the addressee. For instance, (19b) could mean that the speaker invites the addressee to do something together with him/her, or that the speaker tells the addressee which action he/she plans to carry out with another person present. With a subject in the second person, singular or plural, Directives concern actions that the speaker or addressee(s) is/are expected to carry out as in (19c) and (19d). Among the examples in (19), (19a) and (19b) are Hortative while (19c) and (19d) are Imperative.

- (19) a. *Wo zi-ji qu ba*
 1.SG myself go MIT
 ‘Let me go by myself, OK?’ (711.2)
- b. *Wo-men zou ba.*
 1-PL go MIT
 ‘Let’s go, OK?’ (Li & Thompson 1981: 307)
- c. *Ni gei wo-men man-man dao lai ba*
 2.SG.FAM give us slowly say come MIT
 ‘Tell us and speak slowly, OK?’ (701.1)
- d. *Ni-men kan zhe ban ba*
 2-PL see PROG do MIT
 ‘Do whatever you think is right, OK?’ (925.1)

For Li & Thompson (1981: 307), *ba* is used in (19b) to solicit agreement. This is not the correct characterization, as the speaker intends the addressee to carry out the action rather than to agree with a proposition. As argued in Section 4.5, *ba* for that same reason cannot be a modal here, nor is it a marker to encode the Directive mood, as the removal of *ba* does not bring any change to its Directive illocution. The difference between the presence and absence of *ba* in (19) lies in the overtones of the utterances. Without *ba*, the sentences sound like an order or exhortation, whereas with *ba*, a tone of negotiation is built up. The fact that *ba* often co-occurs with expressions of politeness such as *nin* (similar to *vous* in French, Qi & Zhu 2005:62–67) also proves that *ba* is interpersonally oriented. The basic function of a Directive is to order, request, to encourage the speaker or the addressee, sometimes together with the speaker, to perform an act. All these acts are potentially face-threatening; therefore, in order to build up solidarity between interlocutors, a language must equip its users with means to soften the harshness of the speech act, more specifically to prevent loss of face, be polite, leave room for the addressee to refuse or disagree, make the addressee feel more comfortable, etc. (Hengeveld 1989:131). The sentence-final particle *ba* serves this communicative purpose.

In addition to softening a request or a command, *ba* can mitigate the intensity of negative emotions in Directives. A Curse expresses a wish that that something bad such as a misfortune, evil, or doom befall the addressee. A Curse is essentially a Directive because the speaker wishes something negative to happen to the addressee. Both (20a) and (20b) are curses that involve the strong negative emotions of the speaker. The presence of *ba* reduces the intensity of the expression of negative emotions.

- (20) a. *ni qu si ba.*
 2.SG.FAM go die MIT
 ‘You go to hell, OK?’ (*Xiao Li Fei Dao/ Gu Long/CCL*)
- b. *qu ni de ba!*
 go 2.SG.FAM ATTR MIT
 ‘Damn you, alright?’ (*Lin Hai Xue Yuan/ Qu Bo/CCL*)

In conclusion, we may say that the addition of *ba* to a Directive sentence leads to the mitigation of the directive force of the sentence.

5.3 Interrogatives

If a rising intonation is given to a Declarative *ba*, the sentence becomes a request for confirmation. We agree with Li & Thompson (1981:307) that *ba* in Interrogatives has the effect of soliciting agreement from the addressee, as in (21).

- (21) *ta bu hui zuo zhe-yang de shi ba?*
 3.SG not will do this manner of thing MIT
 ‘He wouldn’t do such things; wouldn’t you agree?’ (Li & Thompson 1981:307)

In (21) a positive response is expected, yet at the same time it leaves space for disagreement. Fraser (1980: 342) points out that tag questions are used by the speaker to mitigate the force of a speech act: to soften the effects of an order, ease the blow of bad news, make a criticism more palatable, and the like. In the case of *ba*, as discussed in 4.6, its presence brings a change from a polar question into a tag question, the result of which is a reduction of the Interrogative force. As a tag question marker in Interrogatives, *ba* has the specific mitigating effect of soliciting confirmation from the addressee.

In addition to polar questions, there are three other types of questions in Mandarin, namely WH-questions, alternative questions and Verb-Not-Verb questions. WH-questions request the filling of an information gap by using question words; alternative questions provide an either-or choice for the addressee, usually with the expression *hai-shi* ‘or’; and Verb-Not-Verb questions likewise offer two alternatives of an action, but in this case one is the negative counterpart of the other.

When *ba* occurs in these question types, it conveys a more explicit invitation to provide an answer, as shown in the following examples (Zhu 1982: 211):

- (22) a. *yi-gong duo-shao qian ba?*
 altogether how_much money MIT
 ‘How much altogether? Please tell me.’
- b. *ni shen-me shi-hou lai ba?*
 2.SG.FAM what time come MIT
 ‘Please tell me what time you will come.’
- c. *ni chi fan hai-shi chi mian ba?*
 2.SG.FAM eat rice or eat noodles MIT
 ‘You eat rice or noodles, please tell me.’
- d. *ni qu bu qu ba?*
 2.SG.FAM go NEG go MIT
 ‘Would you tell me you go or not?’

(22a) and (22b) are WH-questions; (22c) is an alternative question and (22d) is a Verb-Not-Verb question. The presence of *ba* leads to the perlocutionary effect of inviting the addressee more explicitly to respond to what has been proposed by the speaker.

No such examples are found in our sub-corpus, so we used the question keywords italicized in (22) to search the Modern Corpus of CCL, finding instances of *ba* in WH-questions and Verb-Not-Verb questions such as (23a), (23b) and (23c) but not in alternative questions parallel to (22d), despite the acceptability of the latter.

- (23) a. *ni da-suan hua duo-shao qian ba?*
 2.SG.FAM intend spend how much money MIT
 ‘How much do you want to spend? Please do tell me.’ (Guo De Gang Xiang Sheng Ji/CCL)
- b. *ni zhi-dao xie shen-me ba?*
 2.SG.FAM know some what MIT
 ‘Please do tell me how much you know.’ (Translated Works/ Ke Ai De Gu Tou/CCL)
- c. *ni shuo bu shuo ba?*
 2.SG.FAM say NEG say MIT
 ‘Would you say that or not? Tell me.’ (Liu Liu/ Lie Huo Jin Gang/CCL)

From the above it can be concluded that the addition of *ba* to an Interrogative sentence creates a more inviting speech act.

5.4 Declaratives

When the speaker makes a statement, he/she can present it as a fact as in (24a), leaving no space for negotiation, or add *ba* to reduce its assertive force as (24b), making it easier for the addressee to disagree.

- (24) a. *ni zai kai wan-xiao*
 2.SG.FAM PROG make joke
 ‘You are joking.’
- b. *ni zai kai wan-xiao ba*
 2.SG.FAM PROG make joke MIT
 ‘You are joking, I suppose.’ (524.1)

When *ba* is added to a Declarative with a regular falling intonation, it mitigates the assertiveness of the statement.

When the assertion is negative rather than neutral, as when it contains a criticism, it is expressed with a prolonged duration on the final syllable. When *ba* is used, this prolonged duration is then expressed on *ba* itself. The addition of *ba* reduces the negative overtone. In (25a), the mother is blaming her son for not listening to her advice. With *ba*, the harshness of this criticism is softened. The same is true for (25b).

- (25) a. (When the son was leaving for a football match, the mother told him that he should carry a thicker jacket but the son wouldn’t listen and came back coughing and sneezing. Then the mother said,)

'gan-mao le ba.'

catch a cold PERF MIT

'You've caught a cold. (I told you to be careful, you just didn't listen).' (Chu & Li 2004: 3)¹¹

- b. (Someone thought he could fix the computer very easily but it turned out that the computer completely broke down. Another one said,)

'ni kan ni, chui-niu-chui da le ba.'

2.SG.FAM look 2.SG.FAM brag big PERF MIT

'Look at yourself, you bragged too much about yourself. (You shouldn't have done that).' (ibid)

To summarize, the effects of *ba* in declaratives are as follows: when the sentence has a regular falling tone, *ba* mitigates the assertiveness of a statement; when the sentence has a falling and prolonged tone, *ba* mitigates a criticism.

5.5 Exclamatives

Mandarin Exclamatives, expressing the speaker's emotions (Gao 1986/2011: 584), can be made explicit by having Exclamative markers such as demonstrative pronouns (*zhe-me* 'like this'; *na-me* 'like that'), adverbs (*zhen* 'really'; *hao* 'well'; *tai* 'too') as well as particles (like *a*), or can be free of any such explicit markers. In the latter case the Exclamative is recognized based on its prosodic contour. Zhao & Sun (2015: 124) claim that *ba* cannot occur in Exclamatives because it is incompatible with its semantic function of the undetermined intention (uncertainty). It is true that modal expressions cannot occur in Exclamatives. The fact that *ba* does occur in Exclamatives once again supports our argument that *ba* is not modal at all. In our sub-corpus, four instances of Exclamative sentences with *ba* have been found. In addition to example (3d) in Section 4.2, two more are exemplified below:

- (26) a. *ye-ye nai-nai xiang du tun bu-cheng? Tai xiao-qi le ba!*
Grandpa grandma want alone take RHET too mean MIR MIT
'How could grandpa and grandma want to take exclusive possession of it? This is too mean, isn't it!' (2709.1)
- b. *ke-shi fa yi ge huo jiang zheng-shu hai yao shou qian,*
but award one CLF get prize certificate still want take money
zhe zuo fa si-hu you-xie tai guo-fen le ba!
this do way apparently somewhat too go too far MIR MIT
'But you have to pay to get the award certificate. That's taking things too far, surely?' (7389.1)

Exclamatives are used to express the speaker's emotions about a particular state of affairs instead of simply asserting its existence (Risselada 1993: 264). Both (26a) and (26b) have a specific prosodic contour to express strong negative emotions of complaint and criticism. According to phonetic experiments by Chen (2007: 50), the explicit marker *tai* 'too' exhibits the highest pitch as well as a longer duration with the word right after it takes a lower pitch. Each sentence ends with a stressed and falling tone on *ba*. All four instances of *ba* in Exclamatives in our sub-corpus express strong negative emotions of the speaker, as *xiao-qi* 'mean' in (26a) and *guo-fen* 'go too far' in (26b). The

¹¹ No similar examples to (25) have been found in CCL.

speaker can use *ba* to soften the expression of strong negative emotions which may be harsh and/or offensive. The use of *ba* reduces the impact of the expression of negative emotion.

5.6 Prohibitives

Prohibitives are used to prohibit an addressee from carrying out the action evoked by the Communicated Content. In Mandarin, negative words such as *bu-yao* and *bie* ‘don’t’ are used to express prohibitive meaning. Prohibitives are similar to Directives in that they are both imperatives and can be perceived as abrupt and bossy. In softening the tone of the communication, the insertion of *ba* serves to mitigate the Prohibitive.

- (27) a. *bu-yao rang wo shi-wang ba!*
 PROH let 1.SG disappoint MIT
 ‘Please don’t let me down!’ (Hu Xiao Shan Zhuang /CCL)
- b. *xian bu-yao mang zhe zuo jie-lun ba.*
 first PROH busy PROG make conclusion MIT
 ‘First, don’t jump to conclusions, OK?’ (Zhan Dou De Qing Chun/ CCL)

The effect of *ba* in prohibitions is thus to mitigate the strength of a prohibition.

5.7 Summary

In this section, we have described in some detail the specific mitigating effects of *ba* in different contexts. These effects may be summarized as follows:

- (i) DIR + *ba*: mitigate a Directive speech act (offer, command, request, curse, etc.)
- (ii) Y/N INT + *ba*: solicit confirmation
- (iii) WH-INT/ALT-INT/VnotV-INT + *ba*: invite a response
- (iv) DECL + *ba* + a falling tone: mitigate assertiveness
- (v) DECL+ *ba* with a falling and prolonged tone: mitigate criticism
- (vi) EXCLAM + *ba*: reduce the harshness of the expression of a negative emotion
- (vii) PROH + *ba* = mitigate the strength of a prohibition

6. Conclusions

Using the grammatical framework of Functional Discourse Grammar and authentic data from the CCL Corpus, we have argued on the basis of five criteria that Mandarin *ba* is not a modal element. Firstly, *ba* can occur in sentences with different basic Illocutions; secondly, *ba* may co-occur with modal elements of all different subtypes; thirdly, *ba* may occur in sentences in which the speaker is highly confident of the propositional content; fourthly, unlike modal elements, *ba* may occur in certain types of non-propositional utterances, and fifthly, the position that *ba* occupies with respect to other sentence-final particles reveals that it has scope over the utterance as a whole. Next, we have shown that *ba* should be treated as having a unified mitigating function – attaining a higher degree of politeness and leaving more space for negotiation. The general mitigating function accommodates the specific values that the literature has previously attributed to the use of *ba* occurring under/in various contextual conditions.

Our findings confirm statements in earlier work on mitigation (Fraser 1980: 341; Hengeveld 2004: 1192; Thaler 2012), in which it is claimed that mitigators modify speech acts. This insight has

also found its way into the theory of FDG, the framework we have applied in this paper, but is not recognized in other grammatical frameworks. The fact that generalized mitigation is treated as an operator on the Discourse Act in FDG helps to explain both formal and functional aspects of the particle. From a formal perspective, it accounts for the position of *ba* with respect to other sentence final particles, as discussed in Section 4.6. From a functional perspective, it explains why the specific contextual uses of *ba* have to be understood in relation to the specific illocution with which it combines. The paper thus also confirms the adequacy of the treatment of mitigation proposed in FDG.

Abbreviations

1 = first person, 2 = second person, 3 = third person, ATTR = attributive, CERT = certainty, CLF = classifier, COP = copula, FAM = familiar, INT = interrogative, MIR = mirative, MIT = mitigation, NEG = negation, PERF = perfect, PL = plural, POL = polite, PROG = progressive, PROH = prohibitive, REINF = reinforcement, RHET = rhetorical question, SG = singular.

Acknowledgements

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