

What you need to know is what I argue:

On the (inter)subjectivity of Mandarin Chinese discourse marker *yàozhīdào*

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Recent studies on the (inter)subjectivity of modal expressions and discourse markers (DM) highlight the relationship between (inter)subjectivity and textuality (e.g., Narrog 2012, Ghesquière et al. 2012, Traugott 2022). This paper analyzes the development of the (inter)subjective and textual functions of the Mandarin Chinese DM *yàozhīdào* from the perspective of (inter)subjectification. *Yàozhīdào* originates from the combination of the modal verb *yào* for ‘need,’ and the verb *zhīdào* ‘to know’, which literally means ‘(you/we) need to know something,’ as in (1) below. Previous studies have identified *yàozhīdào* as a DM used to introduce some background information and to remind the hearer to pay attention to it (e.g., Liu 2013, Li 2015), as in (2).

(1) Wǒmen yídìng **yào zhīdào** wǒmen de shāngpǐn shì mài gěi shéi de.
we certainly need know we GEN good COP sell DAT who EMP
‘We must know to whom our goods are sold.’

(2) Dāngshí Sòng Qīnglíng xīnzhōng de kǔchǔ, jīhū bú yàoyú jǐnián qián zhàngfū Sūn Zhōngshān qùshì gěi tā de jùdà dǎjī. **Yàozhīdào**, Sòng Qīnglíng duì zìjǐ de zhège dàdìdi céngjīng shì duōme de qìzhòng, bìngqiě jìtuō le duōdà de xīwàng a!
‘The pain in Soong Ching Ling’s heart at that time was scarcely less than the huge blow from her husband Sun Yat-sen’s death a few years before. **Yàozhīdào** (you need to know this), because of how highly Soong Ching Ling used to think highly of her brother, and how much hope she placed in him!’

The interpersonal (intersubjective) and textual dimensions of *yàozhīdào* have received the most attention in the literature (e.g., Liu 2013, Li 2015). However, as shown in (2), by introducing the background information (i.e., Soong Ching Ling used to think highly of her brother and had invested high hopes in him), and by attracting the hearer’s attention with *yàozhīdào*, the speaker’s ultimate purpose is to provide a basis for the assertion made in the previous sentence (i.e., the loss of her brother deeply hurt Soong Ching Ling) and thereby make the argument more persuasive. In other words, *yàozhīdào* essentially functions as a device for justifying the speaker’s assertion, conveying the speaker’s subjective attitude toward the content of the discourse (see also Zhu 2019).

Moreover, as is also pointed out in the literature, *yàozhīdào* has acquired some functions in creating casual or adversative relations between the discourse units, which contributes to the coherence of the discourse. For example, in (2), the unit introduced by *yàozhīdào* can be seen as the reason why the speaker makes the assertion in the previous discourse, with *yàozhīdào* functioning as a causal connective.

The case of *yàozhīdào* shows that, synchronically, the subjective, intersubjective and textual dimensions are inextricably linked, although the subjective one seems to be more essential in *yàozhīdào*. Diachronically, the development of the DM *yàozhīdào* manifests the extension from the intersubjective imperative ('you need to know') to subjective and textual meanings, which indicates the limitations of the unidirectional hypothesis of (inter)subjectification (Traugott and Dasher 2002, Traugott 2003) and the diversity of the extension among the three dimensions.

Abbreviations

| | | | |
|-----|---------|-----|----------|
| COP | copular | EMP | emphatic |
| DAT | dative | GEN | genitive |

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