

## GENDER, SOCIETY, AND THE CHINESE LANGUAGE<sup>1</sup>

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### 0. Introduction

There has been an explosion of research during the past three decades on language and gender across languages, and on English especially, beginning with the 1970's in the United States, where such research was prompted by the women's movement. For the Chinese language and its dialects, during the 1970's and into the 1980's, there was scarcely any interest in this topic, except in sociolinguistic, language variation research, in which gender is one important independent variable. The topic of language and gender is a fascinating one, but it is largely uncharted territory for Chinese, despite strong, gender-differentiated roles and expectations in both modern and traditional Chinese society. The paucity of Chinese linguistic research on this topic is reflected in the conspicuous absence of references to it in general studies on language and gender. The index in Suzanne Romaine's 1999 book, *Communicating Gender*, for example, contains one entry, pointing to just one page, for Chinese, namely, "Chinese culture." The reference is to China's patriarchal society that prefers sons over daughters. For comparison, in that same index, for Japanese, there are six subheadings: (1) asymmetry in (the language), (2) gossip terms, (3) politeness, (4) pronouns, (5) social sensitivity of (the language), and (6) spousal address. The contrast is striking, given six linguistic entries for Japanese and none for Chinese. There are some very interesting gender-linked differences with respect to the Chinese language and its use in modern Chinese society. We are only just beginning to explore such differences, and only just beginning to address the many issues pertaining to gender, society, and the Chinese language.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This lecture was prepared as a late replacement for the original conference-ending keynote lecture to be delivered by James H-Y. Tai (National Chung Cheng University), who was unable to attend the conference. I thank my host, He Baozhang, for his gracious hospitality, and Rosie Cortese for her helpfulness in every way. Thanks also go to Hu Wenzhe, Wu Suemei, and others who had helped with the conference. This lecture interlaces recent studies with research findings presented at the Ninth North American Conference on Chinese Linguistics (NACCL-9) in Chan (1998a). In putting this invited lecture together, I have in places relied upon my other conference papers, in order to provide the audience with a general overview of the research on this topic. The colloquial flavor of the oral presentation is retained in this published version.

<sup>2</sup> A fairly extensive bibliography of what has been published in English in North America – and to a lesser extent what has been published in Chinese in Asia – is available from my online Chinese language and gender bibliography. The URL is: <<http://deall.ohio-state.edu/chan.9/g-bib.htm>>.

### 1. Three Early Studies

In the general literature on language and gender, there have been two main approaches noted by Jennifer Coates (1993): the Dominance Approach and the Difference Approach. The Dominance approach sees women as an oppressed group and interprets linguistic differences in women's and men's speech in terms of men's dominance and women's subordination. This was the early focus that was part of the women's movement. The Difference Approach emphasizes the idea that women and men belong to different subcultures, and is the newer approach. Needless to say, many scholars adopt a compromise position by combining the two approaches. Research to date on the Chinese language has mainly focussed on gender-linked differences. In any case, for the Chinese language, studies devoted specifically and entirely to issues involving language and gender were pretty much non-existent in the 1970's, and extremely rare in the 1980's. Notable exceptions include the following three studies.

One is an article entitled, "On *deing*," by Timothy Light (1982), published in *Computational Analyses of Asian and African Languages* in Japan, edited by Mantaro Hashimoto. That article was among the first, if it is not in fact, *the* very first, publication to approach the topic in Chinese linguistics. It is on some sentence-final particles in Cantonese spoken in mainland China and Hong Kong, with a few corresponding, Mandarin examples. Those of us who were regular participants of the International Conference on Sino-Tibetan Languages and Linguistics in the 1980's were fortunate to receive free issues of that publication.

A general overview of language and gender in Chinese in the Taiwan setting is Shih Yu-hui's 1984 article, "Cong shehui yuyanxue guandian tantao Zhongwen nan-nyu liang xing yuyande chayi" (A sociolinguistic study of gender differences in male and female's language in Chinese"), published in *Jiaoxue yu Yanjiu* in Taiwan.

The third study is a general overview in English for Mandarin Chinese by Catherine Farris, "Gender and grammar in Chinese, with implications for language universals." It was published in 1988 in the journal, *Modern China*, and includes references to Shih's 1984 article.

These and other early studies paved the way for subsequent exploration into gender-related differences in Chinese. In today's talk I will expand on part of I had written earlier for NACCL-9 in 1997, and will bring in some new studies since my write-up of that paper, including published and unpublished works. I will present gender differences in the Chinese language – including both Cantonese and Mandarin (I'd include other dialects also, except that I haven't encountered any so far) – gender

differences that have been observed with respect to three main areas: (1) gendered voices, (2) pragmatics, and (3) conversational interaction, including the study of sentence-final particles.

## 2. Gendered Voices

In the general literature, there have been many observations of speech differences between men and women. The most fundamental difference is the average pitch of voice of females versus males that is largely, but not entirely, due to differences in the vocal anatomy. Much of the differences in pitch of voice between males and females is socially learned. We know that there is a great deal of overlap between males and females in their pitch range; speakers actually use only a small part of that range.<sup>3</sup> Cross-cultural studies, for example, show that pitch and voice quality vary from culture to culture. Majewski's (1972) study on 103 Polish men gives their average speaking pitch at 137.6 Hz; a comparable, though much smaller, group of American men's average speaking pitch was 118.9 Hz. At the same time, studies have also shown that prepuberty boy's voices can be correctly distinguished from their female peers. Gender differences, as reflected in pitch of voice, are part of our socially-constructed selves and social identity in the multiple roles that we occupy in our everyday interactions and communications in society.

To the best of my knowledge, to date, there have been no studies conducted on determining pitch differences between Chinese men and women. I suspect, although I have no empirical evidence, that the average pitch of Chinese female voices has probably dropped somewhat during the past few decades. At the same time, there seems to be pitch differences associated with different socio-cultural contexts for women, with formal situations, such as public speaking, possibly dictating a slightly higher overall pitch and clear enunciation. Future research is needed for a systematic investigation into these proposals.

As far as I know, we do not have information on what is the average pitch of Chinese males and females – whether we are referring to speakers of Mandarin, Cantonese, or any other dialect of Chinese. What we have to date is Professor Cheng Chin-chuan (1995) software, *Speech Analysis for Windows*, which can very accurately identify the gender of speakers of Mandarin Chinese. The gender-identification capability of the program is based on analyzing F0's along the time dimension in a given stretch of recorded speech and obtaining an average fundamental frequency (F0, perceived as pitch) for that sequence. From his test with numerous Mandarin speakers during the

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<sup>3</sup> Studies on gender differences that are socially learned and not attributable to anatomical differences between the sexes are reported in Smith (1979:123ff), Graddol and Swann (1989:18ff), and Coates (1993:146ff), among others.

development of his software program, he arrives at the ultimate selection of 150 Hz as the F0 that distinguishes male and female Mandarin speakers. A speaker's utterance of Mandarin that yields an average above 150 Hz would be identified by the software as the speech of a female speaker, and anything at or below 150 Hz would be identified as that of a male speaker.<sup>4</sup> Gender of speaker is an important part of research on voice recognition, and I think it is only a matter of time when there will be published information on the average, or pitch range, of male and female speakers of Mandarin, Cantonese, and Taiwanese, if not any other subvarieties of Chinese.

Aside from average pitch differences, there are other pronunciation differences between Chinese men and women. Lehman et al. (1975:35), for instance, reported on the American Linguistics Delegation that visited the People's Republic of China in late 1974. They noted that while very few speakers had mastered the standard pronunciation of Putonghua, those who did fell into three groups: (1) some university professors, (2) some female high school teachers of Chinese, trained in Beijing, and (3) female guides as at museums and exhibition halls. Thus, on the whole, women were generally more sensitive to the prestige standard pronunciation than men, exhibiting patterns that are found in the U.S. and other countries (James 1996). In contrast, those who paid least attention to the standard pronunciation were younger men who were leading members of Revolutionary Committees in charge of educational institutions. It appears that men with position and authority may be in less need of elevating their status by learning correct, standard pronunciation. The power and prestige of China's national leaders have never been diminished because of strongly accented Putonghua. There may well be covert prestige for men of status *not* to spend hours trying to master standard Chinese pronunciation.

Worth noting in connection with these observations is Zhang Qing's presentation<sup>5</sup> at this conference. Her paper, "Empirical and theoretical contributions of China to sociolinguistic variation: a Beijing study," was on the interaction between phonological variation and the construction of gender and professional identity. She compared and contrasted a new occupational group that has emerged in China, namely, Chinese professionals who work for international businesses, with those who work in the domestic, economic sector. Zhang studies two main phonological variables. The first is a small set of local Beijing variables. These include "glibness" and "smooth talk" (*jingyouzi* 'Beijing wheeler-dealer') – in the use of r-suffixation and lenition of intervocalic retroflex initial; as well as the more stigmatized, "alley saunterer" (*hutong-*

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<sup>4</sup> Professor C.C. Cheng's pitch of voice ranges from 90 to 170 Hz in speaking Mandarin. His average is usually around 130 Hz (e-mail of 8/25/97), which would be unambiguously identified as 'Male.' Where his software had made errors in judgment, so had human beings.

<sup>5</sup> A special note of thanks to Zhang Qing for kindly providing me with a copy of her conference paper so that I could include some of her findings. See the full version in Zhang (this volume).

*chuanzi*), in the replacement of ‘s’ with interdental ‘th’ in the dental sibilant, [ts]. The second phonological variable is what she terms the “Cosmopolitan variable”; namely, the full-tone realization of the neutral tone in unstressed syllables – a pronunciation of Mandarin that is found in Taiwan Mandarin as well as in Cantonese-accented Mandarin. This is part of the more general Gang-Tai (Hong Kong - Taiwan) influence on China.

Among Zhang’s findings is that whereas women typically enter the international business market as secretaries – where their foreign language skills in being able to serve as interpreters/translators were selling points rather than their professional qualifications – men enter the international market directly. As a result, companies focus on their professional qualifications and experiences, and their language skills are of secondary importance. As a result, although no one can become a manager by being an alley saunterer using stigmatized, local Beijing speech, having a bit of that – though not too much, of course – is acceptable. The same is not true for women: they *do not* get to be managers by being a wheeler dealer. Instead, they draw on the more conservative, standard speech of Putonghua (i.e., less local Beijing speech) as well as the more innovative, international, cosmopolitan variety of speech. In both cases, there is greater avoidance of local Beijing speech that is stigmatized.

Not discussed in Zhang’s study is whether there is gender-linked differences in her subjects’ phonetic realization of the phonological variable, /w/, at syllable onset position. The labiodental approximant is in Beijing speech and not in Putonghua, and has been studied by Shen Jiong in his 1987’s investigation published in *Zhongguo Yuwen*. Shen’s large-scale variation study reveals that the labial approximant is used significantly more frequently by female speakers than by male speakers. While the labiodental variant is often used by female news broadcasters in China, male news broadcasters sometimes use it, also. Interestingly, in Taiwan as well, one frequently hears news broadcasters using in their speech, and this is typically (though not exclusively) produced by females.

### **3. Pragmatics, Conversational Interaction, and Sentence-Final Particles**

Gender differences in pronunciation may also be studied in association with a particular communication style, such as *sajiao*, analyzed by Farris (1995) in present-day Taiwan’s setting. The *sajiao* style, which she describes as “the adorable petulance of a spoiled child or young woman who seeks material or immaterial benefit from an unwilling listener,” is analyzed as being marked for the feminine gender. Farris (p.16) reports on a friend’s observation of a very nasal style in young unmarried women’s use of *sajiao* with their boyfriends. In her article, Farris argues that the *sajiao* style indicates women’s indirect and informal power in Chinese society; at the same time, it serves as a means to create and maintain that form of power.

Zhang Aiping, in a 1995 Ohio State University manuscript, observes that in both mainland China and Taiwan, *sajiao* is a communication style that is typically used by children to their parents (to refuse things demanded of them or to get permission to do things prohibited by them), and by adults to their lovers or spouses (as a kind of romantic play). Zhang also identifies two additional features of *sajiao* speech, namely, the prolongation of the vowels and “softening” of the consonants. Vowel lengthening is self-explanatory. For consonant softening, she describes three manners of articulation that would produce this. One, aspirated consonants may be articulated with less (i.e. weaker) aspiration so that the aspirated-unaspirated distinction becomes blurred. Two, the contact between two articulators may be softer (or less abrupt). Three, the contact between articulators may be shorter in duration. Zhang also notes that this consonant softening effect is most apparent with the dental sibilants, [ts], [tsʰ] and [s]. (The aim then is to produce sibilants that are less strident and hence sound less harsh.)

Often accompanying *sajiao* is the sentence-final particle, *ma*, a particle that is used to “soften” the tone of an utterance and is generally regarded as more typical of women’s speech. (It should not be confused with the grammatical particle, *ma*, that is used in yes-no interrogative sentences.) In the *sajiao* style, the entire sentence is uttered slowly and when *ma* is added, the syllable is nasalized and noticeably lengthened. As Shen Haibing observes in her 1995 Ohio State University manuscript, such manner of pronunciation may be scorned as unmanly when it is produced in public by males, and given the scornful label of *niangniangqiang* ‘womanish accent.’ *Niangniangqiang* speech, as noted by Shen, is marked with high pitch and thinness of voice quality. It is a style that one normally associates with female speech and is not stereotypically male speech, which has lower pitch and deeper resonances. Adding of the “softener” *ma* particle with vowel lengthening and nasalization only further mocks such speech as womanish. Men do occasionally produce sentences with this *ma* particle, as it is by no means gender-exclusive. However, a man using it too frequently would certainly raise eye-brows, as in a case reported to the author of native speakers’ amusement when a young man who had learned Chinese from his girlfriend loaded his sentences with *ma*!

It is worth noting that native speakers from the PRC have remarked on Taiwanese men sounding more effeminate than those on the mainland. For example, one female student who had never met anyone from Taiwan and only heard them over the telephone when they called long-distance to her father, identified some features that made these speakers sound effeminate to her: the Taiwanese men were very polite, spoke slowly and enunciated very distinctly, and delivered sentences with rising intonation where PRC males would not have.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the more prototypical male speech should be relatively quicker in tempo than women’s speech rate; their voices should be deep and low-pitched;

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<sup>6</sup> This observation was made by a graduate student during my trip to China in summer 1996.

their intonation should be flatter, steadier, and falling rather than rising. These characteristics combined together contribute to the perception of speech that is manly, spoken with authority, confidence, and decisiveness. Grown men speaking in public with heavy nasalization, high pitch, slow speech rate and thin voice quality, as in *sajiao* or whining, would be scorned as being *niangniangqiang*, and deemed untrustworthy!<sup>7</sup> Stereotypical Chinese male speech is succinct, direct, confident, and definite, in contradistinction to stereotypical women’s speech (Shih 1984:221).

A difference in style between males and females with respect to direct and indirect forms of communication has been observed in the literature, as can be observed in Liao Chao-chih’s 1997 book, *Comparing Directives: American English, Mandarin and Taiwanese English*. One of the studies involved conventional requests to turn down the volume. Everything else being equal, as shown in Table 1 (from Liao 1997:116), women opted for indirect requests in 28 out of 44 of their requests, or 63.64% of their total requests. Men, on the other hand, preferred direct requests, using them in 32 of them out of 51, constituting 62.75% of their requests. The results are statistically significant.

	<b>CONVENTIONAL INDIRECT REQUEST</b>	<b>CONVENTIONAL DIRECT REQUEST</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
Women Taiwan	28 <b>(63.64%)</b>	16 (36.36%)	44
Men Taiwan	19 (37.25%)	32 <b>(62.75%)</b>	51
Total	47 (49.47%)	48 (50.53%)	95

Table 1. Preference for request forms (Loud volume: Mandarin).  
(Fisher’s exact test (two-tailed), p-value = 0.0137)

Males and females also differ in other areas of communication. One obvious area pertains to compliments, Ye Lei’s 1995 article, “Complimenting in Mandarin Chinese,” reveals some gender-differentiated patterns with respect to both *types of compliments* based on topic and sex of the participants (including taking into account same-sex versus mixed-sex situations), and *types of responses* to those compliments.

<sup>7</sup> For English, noteworthy is the case of Margaret Thatcher, former British Prime Minister, who needed to improve her public image by taking training lessons both to lower her average pitch and to reduce her pitch range, in addition to keeping a steady pitch (Romaine 1994:105).

Other ways in which males and females differ also show up in something as mundane as use or non-use of repetition; that is, of reduplication. In *The Strategies of Politeness in the Chinese Language*, Zhan Kaidi (1992) proposes that reduplication is a positive politeness strategy for intensifying interest to the hearer, as in telling a story, making the description more vivid (p.24ff). I conducted a small pilot project that is reported in Chan (1998a), my article published in the NACCL-9 proceedings. In that article, "Gender differences in the Chinese language: A preliminary report," I analyzed some data from the perspective of possible gender differences. The data are been part of a Ph.D. dissertation written by Matthew Christensen (1994), *Variation in Spoken and Written Narrative Discourse*. Christensen uses Wallace Chafe's so-called "pear film" to obtain a corpus of oral and written narratives from ten subjects. Six of the subjects were female (BCEGHJ) and four were male (ADFI). While the subject pool is small for a cross-gender study, some preliminary observations can be made. Note first that all subjects watched the same film, which is seven minutes in duration, contains sound but no dialogue, and depicts a series of simple events that can be easily understood in any cultural context. As a result, all subjects were exposed to the same stimulus. They were then asked to give their own renditions based on recall, first orally and then in writing. I had chosen to look into reduplication, based on the hypothesis that females will use more reduplication than males. The premise is that such forms sound more polite and more tentative, and also sound more expressive in narrating the events in the film.

Details are presented in (Chan 1998a). Here, I will only present a summary of the results. In the oral narratives, all the female subjects produced *some* reduplicated forms, while one of the four males did not produce *any*. A total of 21 reduplicated forms were produced, of which 18 (86%) were uttered by the six female subjects, and only 3 (14%) by the four male subjects. The females produced more than their share: they averaged 3 reduplicated forms per female, in contrast to .75 per male. Even in the corresponding written narratives, where one would expect the more formal style to yield few or no reduplicated forms, females once again out-produced males, this time with a ratio of 7 to 1. The 7 reduplicated forms are in 4 of the six females' written narratives. While the pool of male and female subjects is very small, the results are revealing in confirming, tentatively at least, the hypothesis that females use more reduplicated forms in narratives than males. A larger study is needed to determine if the results obtained in this preliminary study have validity.

We turn next to a 1997 study by Shen Haibing, *Gender and Conversational Interaction in Mandarin Chinese: A Corpus-Based Study of Radio Talk Shows*. This is an M.A. thesis completed by my advisee two summers ago at the Ohio State University. It is based on a corpus of radio talk/phone-in shows recorded off the World Wide Web, Shen's thesis is part of the new direction of linguistic research on conversational interaction. Such research recognizes the importance of sociocultural contexts in the

construction of gender. Shen conducts a systematic, quantitative study of gender differences and analyzes such discourse variables as amount of speech, turn-taking and floors, interruptions (dominant versus supportive), and functions of utterances (assertive vs. supportive). A number of the results are statistically significant.

Even though there were roughly the same proportion of males and females in the corpus, men talked a greater amount of time than women did overall, as shown in Table 2 (from Shen 1997:39). Out of 10.5 hours of talking time that were recorded, males spoke for 375.4 minutes (59.4% of the time), whereas females spoke for 256.1 minutes (40.6%) of the time.

	<b>AMOUNT OF TALK</b> (in minutes)
Male	375.4 <b>(59.4%)</b>
Female	256.1 (40.6%)
Total	631.5 (100%)
Table 2. Distribution of amount of talk (in minutes) by gender. (Total of 10.5 hours of talking time recorded.) (p < 0.01.)	

As one might expect, there is a difference in distribution of amount of talk by gender, based on topic. This is shown in Table 3 (from Shen 1997:45). Note, however, that females only dominate in one of the eight topics, namely, that of Family and Education (that is, the primary and secondary education of children), the traditional areas of women's domain. Males, on the other hand, dominate in five topic areas: Politics, Economy, Health, Nature, and *even* Love and Marriage! It might, at first glance, seem odd that females participated to a very limited degree on the topic of love and marriage. Shen suggests the possibility that Chinese women may not be expected to, or be allowed to, talk about highly sensitive topics with people who are not closely related to them. Or perhaps women are simply not used to talking about sexuality in a "public" mixed-sex setting.

	MALE	FEMALE
T1 Politics **	74.3 <b>(86.8%)</b>	11.3 (13.2%)
T2 Economy **	50.5 <b>(79.8%)</b>	12.8 (20.3%)
T3 Society	35.7 (49.5%)	36.5 (50.5%)
T4 Health *	87.7 <b>(59.9%)</b>	58.7 (40.1%)
T5 Family and Education **	20.4 (26.5%)	56.7 <b>(73.5%)</b>
T6 Nature *	34.1 <b>(62.6%)</b>	20.3 (37.4%)
T7 Love and Marriage *	46.6 <b>(65.8%)</b>	24.2 (34.2%)
T8 Songs	26.1 (42.3%)	35.6 (57.7%)

Table 3. Distribution of amount of talk by gender and topic.  
 \*\* statistically highly significant ( $p < 0.01$ )  
 \* statistically significant.  
 The gender with the percentages in bold type did the greater amount of talk.

One other finding of interest in Shen’s study that I’ll report here is the distribution of interrupters; that is, who interrupts whom, and the nature of those interruptions. This is given in Tables 4 through 6. Table 4 shows that males are more frequent interrupters than females did: they produced 75.4% of the interruptions.

	NUMBER OF INTERRUPTIONS
Male	135 <b>(75.4%)</b>
Female	44 (40.6%)

Table 4. Distribution of interruptions by gender. ( $p < 0.01$ )

However, not all interruptions are of the same type. Some are dominant interruptions, such as taking over the floor, so to speak; others are interruptions that show the hearer’s support of what the speaker was saying. As shown in Table 5, while both genders produced more dominant interruptions, males produced significantly more dominant interruptions than supportive ones.

	<b>MALE</b>	<b>FEMALE</b>
Dominant Interruption	<b>81</b>	20
Supportive Interruption	54	24

Table 5. Distribution of interruption types by gender of interrupter.

It is interesting to observe in Table 6 that males interrupt other males more frequently than they interrupt females. That, of course, might fall out from the fact that males spoke more than females. The table also shows that females don't tend to interrupt other females, with respect to either kind of interruptions. Whether this is also true when females who are friend talk among themselves remains to be investigated. I rather suspect that the results may be different. There may be more attention paid to observing proper behavior in the public arena in talking to strangers.

	<b>M-m</b>	<b>M-f</b>	<b>F-m</b>	<b>F-f</b>
Dominant Interruption	<b>56</b>	25	16	4
Supportive Interruption	32	22	19	5

Table 6. Distribution of interruption types by gender of participant.  
M, F = interrupter; m, f = interruptee

The above only scratches the surface of what we still need to learn about gender differences in speech production and communication. Farris (1991:201) aptly states that cultural stereotypes play a crucial role in developing and maintaining gender differences, and that speech stereotypes in particular serve to characterize the way that native speakers perceive how men and women normally speak. These stereotypes reinforce what is expected of speakers and the roles they play in society. Much is yet unclear as to the degree to which speech stereotypes reflect actual language use, and to what extent the two diverge. We also do not have a clear idea of what cultural differences may exist with respect to how well stereotypes accurately reflect gender differences in language use. I suspect that there may be stronger pressure in the Chinese environment for individuals to conform to social expectations, such that stereotypical behavior as cultural norms may dictate language behavior to a greater extent in Chinese society than in western, English-

speaking society. However, I have not seen studies that would verify my personal impressions.

### 3.1. Sentence-Final Particles

We turn lastly to a study of gender-differentiated use of sentence-final particles. These have also been referred to as ‘modal particles,’ which signal a speaker’s attitude and/or sentiment s/he wishes to convey toward the addressee. They do not have some primary grammatical function, such as marking a sentence as a yes-no question using *ma*. One sentence-final particle already mentioned above involves *ma* in *sajiao* style. In analyzing sentence-final particles as an East Asian areal feature, Mary Erbaugh (1985:88) remarks that there exists a general assumption that women use them more than men.<sup>8</sup> This common view has linked the greater use of sentence-final particles by women to their need to be more polite. Light (1982:29) addresses, in particular, confirmation-seeking particles in connection with the use of high pitch, and notes that such particles are “the mark of intentional politeness and nonassertiveness, and higher tonations indicate greater politeness and nonassertiveness.”

In Beijing speech, Hu (1981:419; 1991:71) identifies *ba* as one particle that female speakers often use in recent years. It marks pauses, as exemplified the following sentence, which Hu heard one day on the bus: *Wo ba, zuor ba, gei ta dale ge dianhua. Ta ba, shei zhidao, bu zai jia!* ‘I *ba*, yesterday *ba*, telephoned her. She *ba*, who knows, is not at home!’ Hu suggests that as a result of adding *ba*, the speaker seems less definite, and thus sounds more tactful, so that it became popular among females.

Besides its use as a hedge in discourse, *ba* has also been described as a sentence-final particle that is used to soften the tone of speech, making it less blunt, or less definite, in interrogatives and imperatives.<sup>9</sup> The use of sentence-final particles to soften an otherwise bare statement, question, or request can readily be seen as a politeness strategy that women might employ more than men, in response to prescribed social norms for women in Chinese culture. Shih (1984:219, 221), in fact, mentions that women

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<sup>8</sup> For Cantonese, Chan’s (1996) study of the naturally-produced corpus of *je* and *jek* sentence-final particles reveals that females use *je* and *jek* (and especially *jek*) more frequently than males do. A full-scale study will likely show that females use sentence-final particles more often than do males. However, there may also be gender-differentiation in choice of particles that should not be overlooked.

<sup>9</sup> *Ba* is discussed in Hu (1981, 1991), Li and Thompson (1981), Zhan (1992), and others, though it is not normally identified as a gender-preferential particle. Using *ba* as a softener to convey less certainty would make the utterance stereotypically more feminine in speech style.

uses a great deal of sentence-final particles, and identifies such sentence-final particles as *ma*, *ya*, *ne*, *la*, and *ye* as ones that are more frequently used by women.

In addition to Mandarin sentence-final particles that might be more gender-linked, it is interesting to note that there may also be gender differences in the use of sentence-final particles that one normally treat as fairly neutral. In Liao Chao-chih's (1997) book, *Comparing Directives: American English, Mandarin and Taiwanese English*, there is a difference between males and females in their use or non-use of particles *le*, *le ba*, *ba*, and *la* in making requests. This is shown in Table 7 (from Liao 1997:78). Of the 125 subjects in Liao's study, 75 of them (or 58.4%) used one or more of these sentence-final particles. The 125 subjects were composed of 50 women and 75 men. With respect to the women in the study, 34 out of 50 women (or 68%) uttered one or more of the sentence-final particles. The results are statistically significant. For the men, only 39 out of 75 (or 52%) uttered one or more of these sentence-final particles; that is, just barely over half of them used any of the particles *le*, *le ba*, *ba*, and *la*.

	UTTERING IT	NOT UTTERING IT	TOTAL
Women	34 (68%)	16 (32%)	50
Men	39 (52%)	36 (48%)	75
Total	73 (58.40%)	52 (41.60%)	125

Table 7. Preference for using sentence-final particles in making requests  
Two sexes in Taiwan.

As indicated in Table 7, among the women, 34 out of 50 used one or more of those particles. Of those particles – *le*, *le ba*, *ba*, and *la* – the one that was most frequently used was *le*. Table 8 shows that 31 out of 50 women (62%) used *le* in their request, again, with statistically significant results. Among the men, on the other hand, only 36 out of 75 (48%) used *le* in their requests. So, even for a particle as neutral as *le*, there are gender-linked differences! Utterances lacking sentence-final particles can sound quite abrupt. *Le* may have a pragmatic function as a “softener” that isn't obvious. Table 8 (based on Liao 1997:78) also suggests *ba* as a potentially interesting particle to study, given that *ba* was noted earlier as a softener, and yet it is two men and no women in Liao's study who used it in making requests. Perhaps, as shown in Table 1 earlier, a greater avoidance of direct requests by women is a factor here.

	<b>WOMEN</b> ( <i>n</i> = 50)	<b>MEN</b> ( <i>n</i> = 75)	<b>TOTAL</b> ( <i>n</i> = 125)
<i>le</i>	31 (62%)	36 (48%)	67 (53.6%)
<i>le ba</i>	3 (6%)	0	3 (2.4%)
<i>ba</i>	0	2 (2.67%)	2 (1.6%)
<i>la</i>	0	1 (1.33%)	1 (0.8%)
Total	34 (68%)	39 (52%)	73

Table 8. Sentence-final particle usage in Mandarin request.

Could it be that *ba* is in fact a sentence-final particle that tends to be used more by males than by females, and if so, why? Conducting a small-scale study,<sup>10</sup> again using Christensen's (1994) oral narratives from the pear film, the results are given in Table 9. Notice that three of the four male subjects (75%) used sentence-final *ba* in their oral narratives, producing a total of 5 tokens. In contrast, only two of the six female subjects (33%) used that particle, producing a total of only 3 tokens among them. The gender-linked difference is not limited to difference in proportion of male versus female subjects using *ba*; there is also a gender-linked difference in overall frequency of usage of that particle. Even though the oral narratives produced by the female subjects were, in total, longer than those produced by the male subjects, based on the number of Chinese characters in the transcripts of their narratives, *ba* was used less frequently in the female corpus. This can be seen from the character count (from Christensen's (1994:81) Table 2, 'Length of narratives.'). Since Chinese characters are monosyllabic, character count equals syllable count. The results in Table 9 yield a ratio of 1 occurrence of *ba* for every 445 syllables in the male corpus, versus a ratio of 1 occurrence of *ba* for every 1,227 syllables in the female corpus. Hence, in this small, exploratory study, not only does a larger proportion of males use *ba*, but these male subjects also use that particle three times more frequently than do the female subjects.

<sup>10</sup> My small study was conducted after the presentation, in the process of writing up the lecture.

MALES			FEMALES		
Subject	No. of characters	BA	Subject	No. of characters	BA
A	539	3	B	375	0
D	287	1	C	454	0
F	852	1	E	599	1
I	546	0	G	862	0
			H	864	2
			J	527	0
Total	2,224	5	Total	3,681	3
Ratio	1:445		Ratio	1:1227	

Table 9. Total character count and sentence-final particle *ba*.

While more in-depth studies using larger corpora are needed, the distribution of *ba* in Table 9 suggests possible gender-linked differences in the use of the sentence-final particle. As a result, although *ba* may potentially function as a “softener” in making direct requests, its use in retelling the plot in this case may be due to the narrators’ attempt to draw the listeners into the narration, by soliciting their listeners’ agreement on the accuracy of their recall (such as on the number of children in the film and their gender), or the correctness of their conjectures (such as whether the boy riding the bicycle was the worker’s son).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Sentence-final particle *ba* is not used by either gender in the corresponding written narratives, and this may precisely be because there was no direct, speaker-hearer interaction for soliciting agreement.

### 3.2. Gender-linked Differences in Use of Sentence-Final Particles in Cantonese

My own personal interest in phonetics and phonology as well as in research on Cantonese; I have, as a result, been conducting some studies in the past few years on sentence-final particles in Cantonese. The Cantonese variety of Chinese is especially interesting to study in this regard, precisely because sentence-final particles are ubiquitous in very colloquial spoken Cantonese. There are some thirty or so basic forms (Kwok 1984, Ouyang 1993), which may occur singly or in clusters of two or three at the end of an utterance. Mandarin, in contrast, has only seven common sentence-final particles (Matthews and Yip 1994:338), or at most about seventeen (Chao 1968:795ff). Sentence-final particles serve to add further nuance to what the speaker is saying beyond the actual content words themselves.

Among the Chinese dialects, Cantonese is particularly interesting to investigate because it is a tone language with three contrastive level tones in addition to rising and falling tones, and no stress accent system. Hence, every syllable has a tone, including sentence-final particles. This, it should be noted, is not true of Mandarin, where sentence-final particles are toneless, and are in the so-called ‘neutral tone.’ The tonal system of Cantonese, with its contour tones and tonal register, further curtails the use of intonation to overall raised pitch (Wu 1989:174ff, cited in Matthews and Yip 1994:409) and simple rising intonation for most types of interrogative sentences. Cantonese also relies more heavily on sentence-final particles than does Mandarin, which has fewer tones to constrain pitch height and pitch contour. Mandarin differs from Cantonese in having a partially-developed stress system. As unstressed syllables are toneless, they can more readily accommodate pitch changes demanded by intonation patterns.

Cantonese, by contrast, has more sentence-final particles, uses them more frequently in speech, and produces them with a greater range of pitch and duration differences. For example, in Chan (1998b:103), where I reviewed Matthews and Yip’s 1994 *Cantonese: A comprehensive Grammar*, I note that open syllables in Cantonese average 300 milliseconds, while sentence-final particles can have duration of up to one full second! When two or three sentence-final particles are concatenated at the end of an utterance, they can easily exceed one second. This dramatic syllable-lengthening is not observed in Mandarin. The striking differences between these two varieties of Chinese offer much potential for further research with respect to the study of pragmatic meanings of sentence-final particles in general. At the same time, studies of gender-differentiated usage of these two varieties of Chinese in their sociocultural settings can also contribute to the larger canvas of cross-linguistic studies of gender, society, and language.

Various studies on pragmatics and discourse analyses have used such data as role-playing and discourse completion tasks with written responses from subjects. My research investigating into gender-linked differences in the use of sentence-final particles in

Cantonese has been based on a corpus of twelve, videotaped episodes of a very popular, mid-1980's, half-hour weekly television series, *Maanfa Tung* 'Kaleidoscope. The Kaleidoscope television series was filmed by the Guangdong Television Company on location in Guangzhou (Canton City), China, in an actual residential area that is referred to in the episodes as Maanfa Hong 'Maanfa Lane.' That television series is known for being the first mainland Chinese television production that used everyday, colloquial Cantonese. The underlying spirit behind the series was that it be "as close to real life as possible," and the entire production team – producer, directors, actors, actresses – all worked under that assumption.<sup>12</sup> The actors and actresses in that television series had a two-year period during which they acted in 103 episodes, one per week from July 1986 to July 1988. Consequently, the performers had extended, weekly role-play, in their multiple roles as husband, father, and neighbor in some cases, or wife, mother, and friend in other cases, and so forth, and in natural settings in a genuine, residential area of Guangzhou, with all the background noises that a real setting offers. It is this corpus that I have used in conducting several studies in exploring language and gender differences in Cantonese.

Being very colloquial, everyday speech, the language used in the Kaleidoscope series is very natural and filled with sentence-final particles. I have conducted three studies thus far: Chan (1996) on the sentence-final particles *je* and *jek*, Chan (1998c) which is a follow-up study of *je* and *jek*, and my most recent study (Chan, this volume) that was reported at this conference. Because of virtually no prior research conducted to explore gender-linked use of sentence-final particles in Cantonese, I have used the Kaleidoscope television series as a starting point to see what interesting phenomena might emerge, and what questions and issues might arise. And from there, other corpora might be used for further research.<sup>13</sup>

Here, I will briefly report on only one particle, *a.33*, the most common sentence-final particle in Cantonese. The corpus is based on two of the Kaleidoscope episodes, namely,

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<sup>12</sup> I learned this from Professor Jian Xiaobin (personal communication), who was the first Project Director of the Ohio State University Cantonese Project (1993-1996) that made use of the television series as the centerpiece for the set of multimedia Cantonese teaching and learning materials. These materials were produced under my colleague, Professor Galal Walker, as series editor (1994-1997), and are commercially available through our Ohio State University's Foreign Language Center. These include videotapes, audiotapes, as well as lessons and romanized transcriptions of twelve episodes from the Kaleidoscope television series. The producer of the TV series was Professor Jian's brother-in-law, and from him, Professor Jian learned of the entire production team's efforts to make the dialogues "as close to real life as possible."

<sup>13</sup> In the interest of space, only one sentence-final particle is presented here. Highlights of findings on other Cantonese particles discussed in Chan (1996, 1998c, this volume) that were presented at the lecture are omitted in this paper.

Episodes 3 and 8 because, for both episodes, there exist not only a romanized transcription of the actual television production (in Fung 1996), but also a corresponding Cantonese script, prepared by the television company and typed in Chinese (i.e., monosyllabic, monomorphemic Chinese characters). A comparison of the romanized scripts and the character scripts reveals some interesting differences in distribution. This is summarized in Table 9 (from Chan, this volume).

SCRIPTS	FEMALES	MALES	TOTAL
Character scripts	47 (51%)	45 (49%)	92
<b>Romanized scripts *</b>	<b>75 (60%)</b>	<b>51 (40%)</b>	126

Table 9. Distribution of *a.33* in the scripts across gender. (\*  $p < .05$  level)

In the table, the character scripts distributed *a.33* almost equally between the two genders: 47 were scripted for the females and 45 for the males. However, the romanized scripts that reflect what was actually said in those two television episodes, show females producing the particle *a.33* proportionately more frequently than males: of the total production of 126 *a.33*'s, 60% were uttered by females, and only 40% were uttered by males, with statistically significant results. In comparing the two scripts, what was intended to be a fairly gender-neutral sentence-final particle based on the character script turns out to reveal gender differentiation in what was actually said in the final television production. Sentence-final particle *a.33* is so frequently used by both genders in colloquial speech that no obvious gender-linked differences have been noted in the literature. Particle *a.33* serves to soften an utterance, much as it does in Mandarin; the addition of *a.33* makes an utterance sound less abrupt and less assertive. In imperative sentences, *a.33* lends a more intimate, gentler tone to a command. If females are stereotypically expected to be more polite and more soft-spoken in Chinese society, then these expectations are met in the two episodes, even though the character scripts had intended gender-neutral usage of that particle.

#### 4. Conclusion

There are many sociolinguistic as well as pragmatic issues and related research questions that arise in examining gender and language use in Chinese society. In recent years, we have only begun to explore this much neglected area of Chinese linguistics, to contribute to a growing body of cross-linguistic, interdisciplinary research on the topic.

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