Gender and Conversational Interaction in Mandarin Chinese:
A Corpus-Based Study of Radio Talk Shows

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ABSTRACT

A corpus-based, quantitative study was conducted to examine gender differences in conversational interaction in the Chinese language. The corpus is 10.5 hours of Mandarin live radio talk and phone-in shows recorded off the World Wide Web. Four discourse variables were analyzed: amount of speech, turn-taking and floors, interruption (dominant vs. supportive), and functions of utterances (assertive vs. supportive).

Statistically significant differences are found in the overall distribution patterns by gender as follows: males do a greater share of talking than females, take longer turns, hold the floor for longer periods of time, and interrupt more, with interruptions more likely dominant than supportive. The speech of males shows more features of assertiveness and dominance, while that of females is more featured by supportiveness and cooperation.

Gender differences on the discourse level are further examined in terms of topic of conversation. Men are found to participate more than women in the discussions of politics, economy, health, love and marriage, and nature. They talk more on these topics, take longer turns, hold the floor for longer periods of time, make more dominant interruptions, and produce more utterances with assertive functions. Women show more features of conversational supportiveness in most situations. The topic dealing with family
and education is the only situation that initiates more assertiveness from the female speakers.

The ratio of male to female participants is another factor that has an effect on the language behavior of men and women. The study shows that men tend to become more competitive and to demonstrate more features of conversational assertiveness when there are more male participants present in cross-sex interactions. Women are pushed to an essentially listening role when men seem to be competing for the talking time or the floor.

This study contributes new research in language-gender interaction in Chinese.
To Jizhong
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

The study of language and gender is in its third decade now since the groundbreaking work of Lakoff (1973). Since the mid-70s, sociolinguists have addressed this topic from several different perspectives. Current studies in this field have shifted its focus from single linguistic variables to context-specific connected speech, drawing on approaches from discourse analysis and the ethnography of communication. Recent work also tends to be based more on empirical research rather than on casual observation or introspection. However, the bulk of the studies of sex differences and language have been carried out in English-speaking societies. Relevant research on the Chinese language is still in its infancy, and relies on a very small body of data. Also, very little has been done from the new perspectives on language and gender concerning Chinese. This corpus-based study attempts to make some contributions to the understanding of this issue, as well as to the understanding of linguistic universals.

The research is focused on gender differences in conversational interactions, with tape-recorded data from an on-line, live, Chinese radio broadcast. The corpus consists of 25 talk/phone-in shows, totaling approximately 10.5 hours of talking time. The data is further digitized for the accurate calculation of amount of speech. By transcribing and
analyzing the data, I have found some differences between males and females in selection of certain conversational patterns. Gender differences in producing utterances with supportive versus assertive functions are also observed. The research shows complexity in the phenomena of turn-taking, floor-holding and interruption, and suggests the crucial role that contexts play in verbal interaction.

The remainder of the thesis is organized as follows. Chapter 1 gives an overview of the literature relevant to the subject of the current study, followed by some notes on the corpus of data in Chapter 2 and an introduction to the analytical framework in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 presents and discusses the findings from the analysis of the data. In the last chapter, I’ll give a conclusion and comment on the implications of the study.

1.1 Survey of the Literature

Before proceeding to the core of my study, it will be useful to explore in some detail the theoretical background under which the current research is done. Due to the paucity of studies on language and gender in the Chinese language, I’ll start from a more general review of what has been done in the area of language and gender before I look specifically into the Chinese situation.

1.1.1 Gender-Language Studies in General

By the mid-1970s, a wide range of scholars - linguists, sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists - had already begun to explore the myriad and complex ways in which language and sex are linked. Lakoff’s (1973) article “Language and
Woman’s Place”, published in *Language in Society*, was a jumping off point, but it was not the only one. The published sources on language and gender grew rapidly enough for Thorne and Henley (1975) to pull together a comprehensive bibliography. The contents of the annotated bibliography showed a clear picture of the various dimensions of language from which this topic had been pursued. An important distinction was made between language *about* the sexes (the section of sexist bias of the language), and language *by* the sexes, i.e. differences in the way women and men *use* language (differences in word choice, syntactic usage, and language style; phonology; conversational patterns; speech in multilingual situations; language acquisition; verbal ability). Sex differences in nonverbal aspects of communication, such as touching, smiling and eye contact, were also included.

The early works in the language and gender were carried out at a time when women in the Western world were fighting for their equality and liberation. Thorne and Henley (1975) rightly pointed out that it was the women’s liberation movement that pushed this field of study into prominence, and created atmosphere for its acceptance and legitimization. As a result, lots of attention was focused on the sexist bias reflected in the language, and the devastating social consequences of such a language (the language that deprecates and ignores women and at the same time keeps them in their low social hierarchy). Emphasizing men’s dominance became the most influential theoretical framework in which the gender-language issue was explored, although the title of Thorne and Henley’s (1975) edited volume, “Language and Sex: Difference and Dominance” already suggested ahead of their time that gender difference should also be an important
factor in explaining the issue. I’ll get back to the two diverse theoretical frameworks later in this chapter.

The early investigations of sex differences in language, such as differences in the use of hedges and tag questions associated with the possession of lack of power and authority (Lakoff, 1975), usually arrived at conclusions based on impressionistic accounts of the investigators or informants. The succeeding generations of researchers have been more sophisticated in applying linguistic methodologies. They have gathered data from one or more of the many different sources - texts, observation, introspection, elicitation and experiments. More and more researchers (e.g. O’Barr and Atkins 1980, Baroni and D’Urso 1984, etc.) have tried to quantify the features of men and women’s speech and, towards this end, have produced many empirical studies that have contributed to our knowledge of language-gender interaction. These studies are usually characterized as in the quantitative paradigms that have developed and diversified out of Labovian tradition of variation studies. Also, the current trend in collecting data is to value more of natural spontaneous speech, rather than speech confined in an artificially set-up context.

Early empirical research in sociolinguistics under the Labovian tradition commonly took single linguistic variables as the main unit of analysis (usually a single phoneme, morpheme or lexical item). The contemporary studies of language and gender tend to use this as a point of departure to analyze structures above the level of the word, and with the influence from discourse analysis and conversational analysis, tend to shift focus from individual isolated words to connected speech events (Coates & Cameron 1988). Sociolinguistic work in this area is also paying more attention to the context in which
speech occurs. Most research has reflected an attempt to conceptualize language not in terms of isolated variables nor as an abstract code, but as within contexts of use. Such research looks at features of men and women’s speech within the give-and-take of actual talk (Philips, Steele and Tanz 1987). It has been found that sex differences in speech are not as simple, universal, or unidimensional as much of the early literature suggested.

The early research of language differences between genders focused on the formal structure of language, such as syntax, morphology and pronunciation. The new trend in the study of gender difference shows an interest in language in its broader sense. The new concept that marks the beginning of this trend is communicative competence (Coates 1993). Communicative competence involves knowledge of when to speak or be silent; how to speak on each occasion; how to communicate and interpret meanings of respect, seriousness, humor, politeness or intimacy. Speakers also have to acquire an understanding of the social meaning of different linguistic varieties and different linguistic forms. Recent studies have demonstrated significant differences in male and female usage of such features as interruptions, questions, polite forms, turn-taking, control of topics, all of which are part of communicative competence (Philips, Steele and Tanz 1987). But how to explain such gender difference in communicative norms remains a problem.

Accordingly, there has been a recent tendency to divide the language and gender field into two camps, roughly conceived as the “dominance” approach and the “difference” approach, or “culture” approach (Tannen 1993). The dominance approach interprets linguistic differences in women’s and men’s communicative competence as a reflection of men’s power and women’s subordination at both personal and institutional levels; the
difference approach emphasizes the idea that women and men belong to different culture groups: the linguistic differences are seen as reflecting two distinctive communicative subcultures. However, many scholars have seen that this bifurcation of approaches is unfortunate: it belies the complexity of the issues and the subtlety of their research (Tannen 1993, Coates 1993). Even though they are basically noted for their stands in one of the camps (e.g. Tannen and Coates in the “difference” camp)², they acknowledge that neither of the approaches are wholly adequate. Both the existence of dominance relations and the existence of different patterns of communication should be incorporated into any reasoned account of complex gender-language interaction (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1992).

Moreover, the researchers of both dominance and difference approaches have been influenced by a third perspective - the ethnography of communication. Tannen refers to her own approach as “ethnographically-oriented discourse analysis” (Tannen 1993:3). The concept of ethnography of communication originates in the work of Hymes (1971), who refers to what a speaker needs to know (sociocultural knowledge) in order to be an effectively functioning member of a speech community. The ethnographic concern to chart the communicative norms of different communities was directed initially at working-class and ethnic minority communities. However, the notion that male and female speakers might in some sense constitute separate speech communities led to research in sex differences in communicative competence (Coates & Cameron 1988).

The ethnography of communication sheds new light on the understanding of the interaction between gender and language. It indicates that explanations of sex-
differentiated language need to take a more sophisticated view of social behavior and of
social structure. Gender is just one of many sociocultural factors influencing linguistic
behavior, and should not be analyzed in isolation from other non-linguistic variables.
Eckert and McConnell-Ginet further proposed to think about language, gender and their
interaction as “living social practices in local communities”, and to abandon “assumptions
that gender can be isolated from other aspects of social identity and relations, that it means
the same across communities, and that the linguistic manifestations of that meaning are
also the same across communities” (Eckert & M-G 1992:2). Any single linguistic feature
(such as interruption) may carry different social meanings across culture or even within the
same culture. If we “essentialize” (Mendoza-Denton 1995:52) or “universalize” (Eckert
& M-G 1992:12) all women into one group and all men into another while ignoring their
other social identity (such as ethnicity), it is highly possible that we may mechanically link
one linguistic feature to a certain group (such as, interruption - dominance - male).
Several critical reviews on early literature have pointed out the unreliability of this kind of
one-to-one relationship between a linguistic device and a gender group (James & Clarke
1993 on interruption; James & Drakah 1993 on amount of speech).

The current ethnographic orientation further emphasizes the importance of
studying language behavior within contextualized and situated settings. It also encourages
comparative study of language use with particular attention to the ways in which the social
features of context interact with the form of speech. In order to avoid premature
generalizations across communities about the gender-language correlation, we need to
examine very closely how certain linguistic features interact with the social practices of the
community in which they occur. As Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992) claimed, every informed and detailed study of a single language contributes to our understanding of linguistic universals, and every informed and detailed study of a social group contributes to our understanding of social and cultural universals. As a language that is spoken by the largest population in the world, the Chinese language should be able to contribute a lot in this regard. However, there is surprisingly little literature dealing with the subject of gender differences in the Chinese language (Mandarin as well as various Chinese dialects). To my knowledge, there are only a handful of such publications (e.g. Mandarin: Shih 1984; Farris 1988, 1991, 1995; Cantonese: Light 1982; Chan 1997 and references cited therein). I’ll discuss these works in more details in the next section.³

1.1.2 Gender-Language Studies in Chinese

The earliest work ever done on the language and gender issue in the standard (Mandarin) Chinese is probably Shih Yu-bwei’s (1984) “Cong Shehui Yuyanxue Guandian Tantao Zhongwen Nannu Liangxing Yuyan de Chayi (A Sociolinguistic Study of Gender Differences in the Chinese Language)”. In the article, Shih offers a comprehensive analysis of the various forms sex differentiation takes in the Chinese language. A total of nine dimensions of language and nonverbal communication are discussed, in each of which sex differences can be found (Shih 1984:208-227):

1) The logographic writing system of Chinese

2) Lexical structures

3) Convention of naming
4) Deprecating terms for women in proverbs and classics
5) Word choice
6) Syntactic structure and language style
7) Phonology
8) Conversational topics and patterns
9) Nonverbal behavior

The first four categories deal with what is reflected in the language about sexes (mostly about women), and the rest five talk about the different ways in which men and women use language, both verbal and nonverbal, i.e. language by sexes. While the last eight topics have all been addressed in the studies of many Indo-European languages, the first one - the logographic writing system of Chinese -- is a truly unique feature of the Chinese language. Shih contends that the writing system is a significant part of linguistic encoding of sexist bias in the Chinese language. At the end of the article, Shih (1984:227) concludes that sexism in the Chinese language ties in closely with the patriarchal bias in the Chinese culture, and it will continue to exist until women gain an equal footing with men in the society.

Another article that protests against sexist language is Tan's (1990) short report, "Sexism in the Chinese Language". Tan claims that "The Chinese language has the same sexist vices as English in defining, deprecating, and ignoring women." (Tan 1990:635) After discussing briefly the "profound embedding of sexism in the language" from the aspect of vocabulary and syntax, Tan also leads our attention to the logographic Chinese writing system. Like Shih, Tan examines the pervasive "female" radical found in Chinese
characters that have negative connotations, suggesting that gender inequality is encoded via the lexicon of the language.

While not theoretically oriented, these early works made a valuable attempt at opening up a promising field in the studies of language and gender. More research has been carried out by Catherine S.Farris, who has done a great deal of fieldwork in Taiwan and also drew on native sources like Shih. Farris seems to have published most extensively on sex differences regarding the Chinese language, and most notably on children’s speech. The main concern of her project is “how the meanings of gender are linguistically encoded in Chinese, and how these meanings are learned as part of the sex role socialization process” (Farris 1988:277). The following topics have been covered:

1) gender and grammar in Chinese (Farris 1988)

2) the gender of child discourse (Farris 1991)

3) a semiotic analysis of sajiao as a gender-marked communication style in Chinese (Farris 1995)

4) the acquisition of gendered subjectivities in Taiwanese preschool girls (Farris 1997)

In her study of gender and grammar in Chinese, Farris argues that although the Chinese language has no grammatical gender (e.g. no classifications of “feminine”, “neuter” and “masculine” genders, no pronominal agreement or adjective concord, etc.), it nevertheless possesses a pervasive covert gender system at the lexical level. The theoretical approach of seeing gender as a covert category shows notable insight into the gender-language correlation in Chinese. However, the most interesting part of her study is the discussion
of *sajiao*, a strategy of wheedling with subordination by means of adorable petulance (Farris 1995). Farris analyzes both the verbal and nonverbal features that constitute this gender-marked communicative style, and emphasizes its significance in a male-dominated Chinese society.

Hong's (1987) "Indications of the changing status of women in modern standard Chinese terms of address" and its sequel (1992) "Mrs, Miss and Madam: How to address Chinese Women in Polite Circles" discussed a gender asymmetry found in a set of polite terms of address. While there is basically one term for men (*xiangsheng*), there are two terms for women (*taitai* and *xiaojie*), with a clear distinction of marital status (*taitai* for married, and *xiaojie* for unmarried). It is interesting to note that *xiaojie* is historically the latest import into Chinese terms of address. Hong contends that the dichotomy of *taitai* and *xiaojie* reflects the Western discriminatory treatment of women on the basis of marital status. These two articles, though short and mostly descriptive, have made an insightful point on the Chinese sociolinguistic balance between gender and age. Hong concludes that the traditional Chinese system of kinship terms vigorously expresses deference towards age, and the change in the system has indicated a new emphasis on marital status that takes the place of the traditional emphasis on age.

Ye's (1995) "Complimenting in Mandarin Chinese" explores gender differences on the pragmatic level. Ye designs an empirical study, based on a discourse completion task with written responses from subjects, to investigate the speech event of complimenting in Mandarin Chinese. In the statistical analysis of the overall characteristics of Chinese compliments, a significant difference is found between men and women’s uses of
compliment response types. Ye further examines gendered characteristics in the interaction between the gender of complimenter and complimentee. She concludes that cross-gender complimenting is more restricted than complimenting between interlocutors of the same gender. Also found is a preference of compliment topic in respect to gender. Both genders use compliments on performance as the most frequent topic for males and compliments on appearance the most frequent topic for females. The result of the study reveals the existence of sex-preferential compliment and compliment response strategies. Ye explains the finding within the Chinese cultural context, and sees it as “a result of the interaction between social value and the constraints of compliment across gender” (p. 237). This data-based study has provided very useful information of gender differences in the speech event of complementing -- an important aspect of communicative competence.

In Shih Yu-hwei’s (1984) article, the author offers us a list of sex-preferential sentence particles and interjections. Farris (1995) also mentions the frequent use of certain sentence-final particles (such as ma and le la) in the feminine communicative style sajiao. Unfortunately, neither of them has taken the discussion of this issue very far. In fact, sentence-final particles constitute one of the most significant linguistic features in an analytic, tonal, topic-prominent language such as Chinese. A common remark on final particles in Chinese is that they are analogous to intonation in Indo-European languages in function, importance and elusiveness. Many Chinese dialects have even larger inventories of sentence-final particles than Mandarin. Of these, Cantonese is the most famous for the abundance of sentence-final particles in it. To date, only two papers have discussed in depth and in detail gendered speech in Chinese from the perspective of final particles, and
it is not too surprising that both of them (Light 1982; Chan, forthcoming) are on final particles in Cantonese and not in Mandarin. Light’s (1982) “On Being De-ing: How Women’s Language is Perceived in Chinese” is one of the pioneering studies on gender difference in Chinese. He pursues this topic largely through analysis of several specific final particles. Chan’s (forthcoming) “Gender-Marked Speech and Sentence-Final Particles in Cantonese” re-examines one of Light’s early claims about the gender-related use of two final particles, namely je and jek, in Cantonese speech in the mainland China. One important difference in their treatment of this topic lies in methodology. While Light’s claim is based on observations and reports from informants, Chan’s is a detailed, empirical, corpus-based study.

I have dealt only very briefly with the few articles in this section to show a general picture of the language and gender studies in the Chinese language. I realize that this survey is by no means exhaustive, but it points to the current state of research on the topic of gender and language in the Chinese field. It is clear that some achievements have already been made in exploring new language-specific topics (e.g. sentence-final particles). Further investigation into new topics in Chinese will undoubtedly contribute to the ethnographic studies of gender-language interactions in general. On the other hand, many topics that have been pursued in other languages (e.g. conversational interactions) have not been adequately explored or documented in the Chinese language.

For a more detailed literature survey of gender and the Chinese language, especially of the studies on the various specific linguistic forms (phonetics, phonology, lexicon, grammar, discourse, etc.), readers are referred to Chan’s forthcoming paper
"Gender differences in the Chinese language: a preliminary report". In the next chapter, I will discuss in detail the investigation I have conducted.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 1

1. The term "communicative competence" was first used by Dell Hymes (1972). See Coates 1993:106 for a detailed discussion of it.

2. Coates (1993) actually argued that she used both the "dominance" and the "difference" approach, but in my opinion, her studies on women's language fit more into the "difference" camp.

3. There are several other published works that deal with gender difference in specific linguistic forms of the Chinese language. For example, in Chan's (1996) paper on sound symbolism, gender-marked speech is discussed on the phonological level. Chan also cited in her paper Hu's (1991) study on feminine accent in the Beijing vernacular, and Shen's (1987) observation on the gender-marked labiodental [u] in Beijing Mandarin. These reports of gender-marked speech have contributed to the study of gender and the Chinese language in general. However, since the focus of this literature survey is in studies looking beyond the single phonological level, these articles are not discussed in the following section.
CHAPTER 2
DATA, SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

2.0 Introduction

In order to examine gender differences in conversational interaction with respect to the Chinese language, I analyzed 25 radio talk/phone-in shows recorded from an on-line Chinese radio broadcast. Each show lasts about 25 to 30 minutes long. A total of 11 hours of audiotape were collected. Of these, around 10.5 hours are talking time, which is used as the source of data in this study (the rest are commercials or songs). In this chapter I will provide the basic information concerning the corpus, including method of data collection, genre of speech, topic of conversation, and transcription conventions.1 All examples cited in the following chapters are from the corpus.

2.1 Method of Collection

The data for the study come from 25 episodes of talk/phone-in shows in a Chinese language audio program. This program in turn is part of a 24-hour real-time broadcast from AM 1320 CHMB, a radio station in Vancouver, Canada, that broadcasts locally and on the World Wide Web. The data were collected by recording the program broadcast live off the internet. For more information on the program, the reader is referred to the homepage of the web radio station: http://www.am1320.com/. For the purpose of the
current study, all the data collected here are in Mandarin Chinese, although the majority of the AM 1320 programs are broadcast in Cantonese.

The recordings were first made using a cassette tape recorder. After the tape-recorded data were transcribed, they were further recorded in computerized, digital form. The software program, Sound Recorder, was used to measure the duration of utterances.

2.2 Corpus

The corpus for this study is a set of radio talk shows. The hosts invited one to several guests to the studio to talk about hot topics. Sometimes the listeners of the program also phoned in to contribute their opinions. The genre of speech in this study is mostly conversational, informal and spontaneous. It is significant to use this genre because the focus of the study is on verbal interaction. It is in this kind of discourse where features of conversational interaction can be easily observed.

The tapes of the talk/phone-in shows included bits of narrative (i.e. story-telling), and bits of explanation and information. The vast amount of time, however, was devoted to turn-taking conversations. I will focus on the turn-taking segments of the discourse, because narrating and informing do not contribute much to our understanding of conversational interaction. The transcripts of my corpus attest to the informal and impromptu nature of the speech by frequently showing false starts, fragments of words and phrases, hesitations, unfilled or filled pauses (including um and ah), nonlexical expressions, interruptions and simultaneous or overlapping speech. There is also some unintelligible speech.
2.3 Topic of Conversation

The corpus consists of 25 episodes of talk/phone-in shows, collected over a period of approximately two months in 1997. Each of the episode is 25-30 minutes long. There is one main theme of discussion in each episode. I have further categorized these into 8 topics. The following table outlines the categories:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOPIC</th>
<th>NO. OF EPISODES</th>
<th>EPISODE TITLE AND NUMBER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T1 Politics</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Election (E12); Partisan Fights (E17); Tiananmen (E20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T2 Economy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Gold Mine Scandal (E8); Savings on Cars (E25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T3 Society</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Overseas Students (E1); City Planning (E3); Buddhist Society(E4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T4 Health</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Flu (E6); Psychological Health (E7); Nutrition (E11); Pregnancy (E16); Allergy (E19); Vegetarian Diet (E23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T5 Family &amp; Education</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Computer Class (E2); Raising Kids (E9); Chinese Schools(E13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T6 Nature</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Roses (E21); Earthquakes (E24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T7 Love &amp; Marriage</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Boys and Girls (E5); Men’s Tears (E22); Sexual Attraction (E14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T8 Songs</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Talk w/ Female Singer (E10); Requests for Songs (E15); Folk Songs(E18)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Topics of Conversations
2.4 Subjects of Study

The subjects of this study totaled over 50 native speakers of Chinese. An accurate count of the number of male and female participants is not possible because there were occasional overlaps of participation across the episodes. Two talk show hosts (one male, one female) appeared regularly in most of the episodes, for example, and some of the listeners phoned in more than once in different episodes. But on the whole there is a balance between male and female subjects. It would be safe to estimate their ages to range from approximately twenty to fifty years old. None of the participants were obviously “children” or “seniors”. Most of them were immigrants from China (mainland China, Hong Kong or Taiwan), and a small number of them were Chinese students studying in Vancouver. It was apparent that none of them were born in Canada, or any country other than China. Relationships varied from close friendship to first-time acquaintanceship. Since the subjects can not be interviewed, given the nature of the data collection, education level and social status of the participants can not be ascertained.

All of the episodes involved cross-sex conversations. There were short segments of same-sex interaction in some of the episodes, but they only constituted a very small part of the corpus. Therefore, this study will focus on cross-sex interaction for the purpose of analysis. Both two-party conversations and group talks with three or more participants will be included.

To present a clear picture of the gender pattern in each episode, I’ll give the number of male and female participants in the following table:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EPISODE</th>
<th>TOPIC</th>
<th>HOST/HOSTESS</th>
<th>INVITED GUEST</th>
<th>PHONED-IN GUEST</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E1</td>
<td>T3</td>
<td>M (1), F (1)</td>
<td>M (1), F (1)</td>
<td>M (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E2</td>
<td>T5</td>
<td>F (1)</td>
<td>M (1)</td>
<td>M (2), F (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E3</td>
<td>T3</td>
<td>M (1), F (1)</td>
<td>F (1)</td>
<td>M (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E4</td>
<td>T3</td>
<td>F (1)</td>
<td>M (1), F(1)</td>
<td>M (1), F (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E5</td>
<td>T7</td>
<td>M (1)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>M (2), F (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E6</td>
<td>T4</td>
<td>M (1)</td>
<td>F (1)</td>
<td>M (2), F (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E7</td>
<td>T4</td>
<td>M (1), F (1)</td>
<td>F (1)</td>
<td>M (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E8</td>
<td>T2</td>
<td>M (1), F (1)</td>
<td>M (1)</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E9</td>
<td>T5</td>
<td>F (1)</td>
<td>F (1)</td>
<td>M (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E10</td>
<td>T8</td>
<td>M (1)</td>
<td>F (1)</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E11</td>
<td>T4</td>
<td>M (1)</td>
<td>F (1)</td>
<td>M (5), F (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E12</td>
<td>T1</td>
<td>M (1), F (1)</td>
<td>M (1)</td>
<td>M (2), F (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E13</td>
<td>T5</td>
<td>F (1)</td>
<td>M (2), F (1)</td>
<td>F (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E14</td>
<td>T7</td>
<td>M (1)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>M (2), F (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E15</td>
<td>T8</td>
<td>M (1)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>M (1), F (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E16</td>
<td>T4</td>
<td>M (1)</td>
<td>M (1), F (1)</td>
<td>M (1), F (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E17</td>
<td>T1</td>
<td>M (1), F (1)</td>
<td>M (1)</td>
<td>M (1), F (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E18</td>
<td>T8</td>
<td>F (1)</td>
<td>M (1)</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E19</td>
<td>T4</td>
<td>M (1)</td>
<td>M (1)</td>
<td>M (2), F (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E20</td>
<td>T1</td>
<td>M (1), F (1)</td>
<td>M (1)</td>
<td>M (5), F(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E21</td>
<td>T6</td>
<td>F (1)</td>
<td>M (1), F (1)</td>
<td>M (1), F (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E22</td>
<td>T7</td>
<td>M (1)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>M (2), F (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E23</td>
<td>T4</td>
<td>M (1)</td>
<td>M (1)</td>
<td>M (1), F (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E24</td>
<td>T6</td>
<td>M (1), F (1)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>M (4), F (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E25</td>
<td>T2</td>
<td>F (1)</td>
<td>M (1)</td>
<td>M (1), F (2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

M=Male; F=Female; figures in brackets give the number of participants

Table 2: Gender Pattern of Each Episode
2.5 Transcription Conventions

As noted by many researchers on conversational interaction (Edelsky 1981; Tannen 1992; Coates 1996), the transcription of spontaneous conversation usually involves important decisions (both theoretically and methodologically speaking) that have significant consequences for the ensuing analysis. There are several different sets of conventions to present speakers on the page. Since the corpus included plenty of instances of simultaneous speech, and frequently there are more than two participants involved, it is crucial to find a method of presentation that makes the relationship between different voices easy to grasp. Therefore, I have chosen to use a kind of musical-stave format modeled after that suggested by Coates. The reader is referred to the appendix for a detailed presentation of the transcription conventions.

NOTE TO CHAPTER 2

1. To compare my corpus and hours of recording with some other corpi, a sampling of corpus-based studies are given as follows:
   - Tao’s (1993) Ph.D. dissertation “Units of Mandarin: Discourse and Grammar” studies 1 hour of audiotaped recording of 12 conversations in Mandarin among people who know each other well; all subjects have higher education and almost all are between 25 to 35 years old.
   - Kwok’s (1984) *Sentence Particles in Cantonese* is based on 2 hours of recorded telephone conversations in Cantonese with 8 speakers (3 men and 5 women); all subjects except one are in the 30-35 age group.
   - Chan’s (forthcoming) “Gender-marked speech in Cantonese: The case of sentence final particles *je* and *jek*” has a corpus of about 5 hours of videotaped recordings of 12 episodes of a television series in Cantonese. A corresponding set of audiotaped recording of the soundtrack is also used.
   - Luke’s (1990) *Utterance Particles in Cantonese Conversation* is based of 20 hours of audiotaped recordings from a variety of settings. The subjects vary in terms of age, sex, socioeconomic status, education, etc. The conversations are among 2 to 4 participants, with the majority being cases of 2 to 3 participants. His study focuses on three utterance particles, namely, *la*, *lo*, and *wo*. 
CHAPTER 3

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

3.0 Introduction

In this chapter I will discuss one by one the units of analysis used in this study: amount of speech, turns and floors, interruptions, and utterances with assertive or supportive functions. Previous studies (James&Clarke 1993; James&Drakish1993; Tannen 1994) have shown that the same forms of conversational features may have different interpretations in different (sub)cultural systems. The analysis of the data here tries to provide a source to understand these universal linguistic features from the Chinese cultural perspective.

3.1 Amount of Speech

A large number of researchers have investigated the question of gender differences in amount of speech. According to James and Drakich (1993:281), just between 1951 and 1991, there were already over sixty studies that addressed this issue. These studies vary a great deal as to how amount of talk is measured. It has been measured by the average length of utterance, the average number of words per pause, the total number of turns taken and the mean length of a turn, the mean length of verbalization minus repetitions, the average percentage of word output, the average percentage of time spent in a
conversation, etc. (Thorne & Henley 1975; James & Drakich 1993). Sometimes different measures produced discrepant results, but most of the time the discrepancy was caused by the context or structure of social interaction in which gender differences were observed.

My corpus does not display any noticeable gender differences in speech rate. 

Hence, I will use the measure that has been used in most of the previous studies, namely, the average percentage of time used for talking by each participant. It will be produced by counting the total number of seconds spent talking by each participant, and then calculating each participant's share in the total talking time.

In Western culture there is a widely held stereotype that women talk too much. Nonetheless, in the more than sixty studies on amount of speech that I mentioned above, results have been very inconsistent on the question of which gender talks more. Contrary to the popular stereotype of voluminous female speakers, the bulk of the research findings indicated that men actually talk more than women in mixed-sex interaction. Still, a number of studies found that women produced more speech than men, at least in some circumstances, and some studies claimed that there were no significant difference between the sexes in amount of talk. According to James and Drakich (1993), the inconsistency in research findings can be explained in terms of the relevance of research activity to amount of talk. There is a continuum of different kinds of activities in which amount of talk has been examined. At one end are formal task activities, in which a pair or group of people come together to accomplish specific instrumental goals. At the other end are informal non-task-oriented activities, such as “get to know each other” casual talk. Since different types of activity are usually associated with different social requirements and different
performance expectations, it is reasonable that different results should be produced from studies examining behavior within different contexts.

Therefore, when I investigate the gender-related difference in amount of speech in a Chinese cultural context, it is also necessary to consider the specific situations in which the cross-gender interactions take place. In the design of my study, I will use two independent variables to help examine the gender-specific distribution of talking time - topics of discussion, and the ratio of men to women in the situation. I will also try to understand the results in terms of the social structure of the interaction.

3.2 Turns and Floors

In the language and gender literature, males are usually hypothesized to be more powerful and dominant than females. It is also hypothesized that men tend to exploit this greater power and exercise dominance over women through the control of language, such as holding the floor at length. While the validity of this hypothesis remains to be affirmed by more empirical evidence, it is doubtless that turn-taking and floor-holding in mixed-sex interaction can reveal much about the gender differences in conversational patterns.

How “turn” and “floor” are defined varies from study to study in the literature. In the data analysis of the current study, the definitions of “turn” and “floor” are adapted from Edelsky’s (1981) classic “Who’s Got the Floor?”. “Turn” is defined as “an on-record ‘speaking’ behind which lies an intention to convey a message that is both referential and functional” (p.207). The turn taker’s intention and sense of what constitutes a turn is an important part of the definition. Lone speech, or “one-at-a-time”,

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is not a required criterion here. A turn is not finished until the speaker feels the message is completed. Let’s take an example here (in all examples, F = Female, M = Male, H = Host/Hostess, G = Guest):

(1) Chinese characters:

FH: 先生回来的时候就/或者她可以打电遥控请花店送/= MG: =对/

FH: —

大盆黄色的玫瑰/

Pinyin Romanization:

FH: Xiānshēng huílái de shíhou jiù / huòzhě tā kěyǐ dǎ diànhuà yáokòng qǐng huādiàn sòng /= MG: =Dùi /=

FH: yī dàpén huángsè de méigui/

Translation:

FH: When her husband comes back then/maybe she can call the floral store to send/= MG: =Right/= FH: a large pot of yellow roses/

(E 21)
Example 1 shows that FH is taking a turn when MG makes a feedback remark ("Right"). But it is clear that FH does not feel that her message is completed yet. She goes on to finish her sentence with more information intended ("a large pot of yellow roses"). In this round of speaker exchange, according to the definition taken here, FH has thus taken just one turn instead of two turns. Other participants' behavior does not determine the boundaries of the turn-taker's message. Instead, one has to take into account the turn-taker's intention regarding the boundaries.

According to Edelsky, the definition of turn also requires that one differentiate a "content" from a "feedback message". To be counted as a turn, the utterance has to convey both referential and functional messages. In the example above, MG's utterance "Yes" is not considered a turn because the speaker intends to provide only a feedback and not a referential message. It can be taken as a back channel response or an encouraging remark that means "go on". But if it had been said loudly and emphatically so that it would have been heard as "I agree with you entirely", it would have been categorized as a turn, and in that case, a non-floor-holding turn.

The floor is defined as "the acknowledged what's-going-on within a psychological time/space" (Edelsky 1981:209). What's going on can be the development of a topic or a function or an interaction of the two. It is acknowledged in that, if the participants are asked to describe what's going on, they would say something such as "he's talking about the earthquake" or "we're all answering her question". In example (1), FH is talking about what a wife can do when her husband returns from a long trip (ordering roses on the
phone). She is taking a turn, and at the same time, having the floor. Thus, she is considered to be taking a floor-holding turn.

The following segment of conversation entails all the three different types of turn-taking and floor-holding situations, and demonstrates the difference between floor-holding turns, non-floor-holding turns, and non-turn utterances:

(2) Chinese characters:

MG: “六四”事件发生/政府采取断然措施镇压/

FH: 嗯/

MG: 并没错/只不过手段过于激烈了/

FH: 手段过于激烈了/

MG: 对了/是不是可以这样说/(...)

Pinyin Romanization:

MG: “Liùsì” shìjiàn fāshēng/ zhèngfǔ cǎiqū duànrán cuòshì zhènyā/

FH: ng/

MG: Bǐng méi cuò/

zhī húguò shǒuduàn guò yú jìliè le/

FH: Shǒuduàn guò yú jìliè le/

MG: Duì le/ shì bùshì

kěyǐ zhèyàng shuō/ (...)

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Translation:

MG: The “June 4th Incident” happened/ the government took emergency measures to put it down/

FH: Ng/

MG: There’s nothing wrong about it/ only the measures were too extreme/

FH: The measures were too extreme/

MG: Right/ maybe we can say/ (...) (E 20)

In this segment of conversation, the male guest (MG) holds the floor all the time. What’s going on here (the “floor”) is the discussion of a political event, namely, the “June 4th Tiananmen Incident”. MG is a listener who phoned in to participate in the discussion and express his views. His utterances from the beginning to “only the measures were too extreme” should be counted as one floor-holding turn. Within this turn the female hostess (FH) chimed in with a short feedback utterance “ng”, which is a Chinese equivalent of “mhm”. The function of this utterance is acknowledging what MG is saying, or showing interest in MG’s talk. There is no specific reference of meaning in it. According to the definitions I outlined above, this short utterance of FH can only be taken as a non-turn utterance. Then, after MG finished his turn, FH took a non-floor-holding turn. In this turn, she simply repeated the last few words of what MG had said, withholding her own
opinion or her response to MG’s words. It is clear that she had no intention to grab the floor from MG. MG did not lose the floor to FH, neither did he show any indication that he was going to turn the floor to her. He continued on with his talk, starting a new floor-taking turn (“Right/ maybe we can say/ ...”).

To examine the features of turn-taking and floor-holding in cross-sex interaction, I will measure the gendered distribution of floor-holding turns, as well as that of non-floor-holding turns and non-turn utterances that appear in my data. In the next chapter, I will present the results and discuss in details the significance of these features in the Chinese linguistic-cultural system.

3.3 Interruption

In the language and gender literature, there has been a common assumption that men interrupt women more than women interrupt men. It seems to be an established research finding that men are more likely than women to use interruption as a means of dominating and controlling interactions. However, a review of the gender-related interruptions literature (James & Clarke, 1993) has pointed out that this is not the whole picture; a large proportion of studies have found no significant difference between the sexes in this respect. This result is not too surprising if we take into account the multifunctional nature of interruption.

Interruption has been traditionally associated with a violation of conversational rules, and an attempt to dominate the interaction through control of the floor and the topic of conversation. It is sometimes regarded as a negative or undesirable behavior. The
basic function of such behavior is assumed to be taking over the floor from other speakers and preventing others from being able to finish what they want to say. However, many researchers have found that it is not accurate to take interruption behavior as a measure of dominance. In fact, a significant percentage of interruptions are not dominance-related. And instead of being disruptive or dysfunctional, such simultaneous talk in fact performs useful and constructive functions in conversation, such as to signal and promote solidarity between speakers. Tannen (1994) has argued that simultaneous talk can serve as a way of indicating that one is enthusiastic about and highly involved in the conversation. Coates (1996), in her study of conversations among women friends, also observed the cooperative function in most instances of interruption. She found that interruptions are very frequent, and most of the time they function simply as a sign of active listenership, showing no attempt to take the floor from other speakers.

The conclusion is that it is not sufficient to treat interruptions as only related to dominance and disruptiveness. It is highly possible that interruptions even more frequently perform supportive, collaborative and rapport-building functions. This partly explains the inconsistency in the findings of studies concerning gender differences in interruption behavior. While some studies have excluded simultaneous talk perceived as supportive from their count of interruptions, some have not. (See James & Clarke 1993:238-247 for a detailed discussion of this point.) Further, various subject and situational variables, as well as other aspects of methodological differences, may also have affected the results in these studies. To date no definitive conclusions have been reached as to whether males and females differ in the ways in which they use interruptions, whether of the dominance-
related or cooperative type. More studies need to be done, and they all need to take into account the larger context in which the interruptions occur.

In the current study of possible gender difference in interruption use, I will address the two types of interruption behavior separately. This treatment, in contrast to the practice of generalizing simultaneous talk of different functions into one category, will hopefully reveal more of the potential gender differences in conversational assertiveness and supportiveness. The problem remains that there exists no simple, objective criterion to determine whether an interruption is dominance-associated or cooperative in nature; a continuum is involved. In this respect, I will follow researchers such as Tannen, Edelsky and Coates in considering the larger communicative context in which the interruption occurs. I will take into account the situation of floor-holding before the interruption, the existence or non-existence of turn-yielding signals during the conversation, the semantic contents of both the interrupter and interruptee’s speech, as well as the intentions of the interrupter.

The following two examples taken from my corpus are representative of the two different type of interruptions. Example (3) illustrates dominant interruption, and (4), to be presented shortly, illustrates supportive interruption.

(3) Chinese characters:

FH: 整个大温哥华市/因为我觉得/        [哎/大环境/没错/哎/

MH:                                       [这个大环境/[其实你就住在这个

地方/任何事情发生都跟你 .嗯其实可以说息息相关的/
Pinyin Romanization:

FH: Zhèngge dà Wèngēhuá Shì/ yīnwèi wǒ jué[de/]

[Ài/ dà

huánjìng/ měicuò/ ài/

MH: [Zhè ge dà huánjìng/ qíshí nǐ jiù

zhù zài zhè ge disfáng/ rèn hé shìqǐng fāshēng dōu gēn nǐ. ng qíshí kèyǐ shuō

xīxīxiāngguān de/

Translation:

FH: The whole city of Vancouver/ because I [feel/

[yeah/ large

environment/ correct / yeah/

MH: [This large environment/ [actually you live

in this place/ everything that happens here . eh actually can be said to be closely

linked to you/

(E 3)

This example is taken from the episode of “City Planning”. The hosts and guests were
talking about the reconstruction of Vancouver and the potential contributions each
resident could make to this process. The female hostess (FH) was about to voice her
opinion on this topic when the male host (MH) interrupted her and actually took over the
floor. This interruption clearly demonstrated an attempt on the side of MH to dominate
the interaction through control of the floor and the topic of conversation, so it can be
taken as a dominance-related interruption. It can be further seen from the example that
FH had possibly tried to regain the floor after she was interrupted, but obviously without
any success. She made some utterances ("yeah/ large environment/ correct / yeah/")

which overlapped MH’s talk, but this did not stop MH’s on-going floor-holding speech.

In (4) below, an example of a supportive interruption is given:

(4) Chinese characters:

MG: (...) / zhè zhǒng zuò pǐn yì dàn chū xiàn jiǔ shì fēi fā de/ zhē yào jiǔ shì/

FH: [wò/ jiù shì shuō tā cuàng gāi lǐ shì le =]

MG: = Ai/ dui/ tā cuàng gāi lǐ shì/ (…)

Pinyin Romanization:

MG: (...) / Zhèzhǒng zuòpǐn yìdān chūxiàn jiǔshì fēifā de/ zhēyào jiǔshì/

FH: [O/ jiùshì shuō tā cuànggāi lǐshì le =]

MG: = Ai/ dui/ tā cuànggāi lǐshì/ (…)

Translation:

MG: (...) / This type of work is illegal at its birth / mainly [because/

FH: [O/ because it distorts history=/

MG: = Yeah/ right/ it distorts history/ (…)

(E 20)
This example is taken from the episode of “Tiananmen” again. This time the hosts and guests were talking about some books that appeared after the Second World War in which the authors denied that the fascists were racist or that they had committed acts of genocide during the war. The male guest (MG) had already held the floor and had taken a turn for a long time before he claimed that “this type of work is illegal at its birth”. The female hostess (FH) interrupted his turn before he gave the reason for his claim. But FH’s interruption was simply a repetition, or an interpretation, of MG’s idea, which was already apparent from his previous talk. FH did not offer any independent opinion of her own, nor did she show any intention of grabbing the floor from the other speaker. The main function of her interruption was to signal that she had been attentively following what MG was saying, a way of indicating that she was enthusiastic and highly involved in the conversation. It is obvious that MG would not feel uncomfortable or offended by this type of interruption. The flow of his speech was still smooth as he continued with his floor-holding speech without any difficulty. Therefore, the interruption observed here is not dominance-associated but is actually supportive in nature. It is important to differentiate supportive interruptions, as given in (4), from dominant interruptions, as exemplified in (3).

Moreover, in my study, I am not just concerned with the gender of the interrupter; I am also interested in the gender of the interruptee. The interaction between the two may yield interesting results. According to previous studies, interruptions are more likely to constitute dominance-related attempts to seize the floor when the interruptee is female than when the interruptee is male. Also, the largest number of dominance-related
interruptions might be directed by males to other males. On the other hand, the most
typical function of interruptions in all-female talk is cooperative and rapport-building. (See
James & Clarke 1993: 253-259 for references.) There is not a large proportion of same-
sex interaction in my data, but the examination of interruptions occurring in group
conversations will reveal different patterns of interruptions relevant to the interaction of
sex of interrupter and sex of interruptee.

A distinction has to be made here between “interruption” and “overlap”. Not all
simultaneous talk is counted as interruption in the current study. First, back channel
responses or encouraging remarks are not analyzed as interruptions. An example of this
could be the one-word utterance “right” in example (1), where it were uttered
simultaneously with the first speaker’s talk. This kind of utterance simply indicates the
listener’s interest and attention to the on-going talk, and indicates no intention of usurping
the floor from the speaker. It is typically ignored in the gender-related interruption
literature. Secondly, I will exclude instances of overlapping that occur when one speaker
anticipates the end of another speaker’s utterance. This type of simultaneous talk can be
taken as “a mistiming error” when one speaker believes that another speaker is about to
reach a possible completion point of a turn, and that it is time for his/her own turn. A
typical case of this kind of simultaneous talk is presented in the following example:

(5) Chinese characters:

MH: 她是你老婆了就是你只会在心里头用力地挣扎/ [你说]/

MG: [我说我有

一天一定要拼过你/< laughs >
Pinyin Romanization:

MH: Tā shì nǐ làopo le/ jiùshì nǐ zhǐ huì zài xīnlìtou yōngli de zhěngzhà/[nǐ shuō/

MG: [Wǒ

    shuō wǒ yǒu yìtiān yìdìng yào pīn guò nǐ/ <laughs>

Translation:

MH: She is your wife now / so you can only struggle hard in your heart / [you say/

MG: [I say one day

    I’ll definitely do better than you do/ <laughs>

(E 5)

In this example, the host and the guest were discussing a hypothetical situation: suppose a woman is more capable than her male partner -- for instance, if she earns more money than him, which is highly likely in the modern society -- how should a man do to deal with it?

An overlap of speech occurred when MG mistook a short break between MH’s utterances as the ending point of the other speaker’s turn, and started his own turn. This kind of simultaneous talk is found frequently in people’s daily conversational interaction and has commonly been accepted as no violation of conversational rules. Hence, it is not counted as an interruption in this study.

Previous studies have shown that topic of conversation is one of the situational variables that might potentially affect the results of studies with respect to gender
differences in interruption use. Males and females might have different areas of speech in which they feel more justified to make one or the other type of interruption. (See James & Clarke 1993:263.) In the analysis of my data concerning interruption, I will include the factor of topic of conversation, and examine whether or not there are certain areas of speech in which males or females feel more justified in making dominance-associated interruptions or supportive interruptions.

3.4 Utterances with Assertive vs. Supportive Functions

In the Western literature, men’s speech style has traditionally been characterized as assertive, and women’s as supportive. Do men’s and women’s speech show significant features of assertiveness and supportiveness respectively in the Chinese context? A possible way to examine gender differences in conversational assertiveness and supportiveness is to detect the functional intents of verbal contributions and to compare the gendered distribution of assertive and supportive functions in conversational interaction. So far no empirical study has ever been done to address this issue.

In the current study, each conversational contribution (including floor-holding turn, non-floor-holding turn, and non-turn utterance) is first noted with function(s). The taxonomy of functions is based on Edelsky’s (1981) study of five committee meetings. After identifying the individual functions, I further categorize them into two groups: assertive functions and supportive functions. (There is one function that does not fit into either group: the function of using ritual politeness or greeting formulae.) Table 3 outlines the two groups of functions:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ASSERTIVE FUNCTIONS</th>
<th>SUPPORTIVE FUNCTIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>informing or explaining</td>
<td>complying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>initiating a topic</td>
<td>acknowledging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>soliciting response</td>
<td>repeating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>giving a positive or negative opinion</td>
<td>interpreting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>criticizing / praising</td>
<td>summarizing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reporting or story-telling</td>
<td>analyzing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>arguing / validating</td>
<td>chiming in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>announcing or warning</td>
<td>hitching on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>joking or teasing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Functions of Utterances

The length of time spent by each conversation participant in utterances with assertive functions and in utterances with supportive functions will be measured individually to study the proportion contributed by males and females to these two functions. The average percentage in the total utterances will be calculated by each gender and then analyzed statistically to see if the difference in functions is significant between the two genders.

As I have discussed in the previous sections, I attempt to use a context-sensitive approach in the current study, since different situational variables have a possible effect on
the features of conversational interaction. Hence, in this study of research on assertive versus supportive functions, the overall gendered distribution across all situations will be presented first, followed by specific distributions based on topic of conversation as well as the ratio of men to women.

NOTE TO CHAPTER 3

1. I recognize that individual differences exist in terms of speech tempo. Personality may also play a crucial role. However, given the size of the corpus, individual differences are reduced to a minor factor in the analysis of the data. It is, nonetheless, worth noting that in the Chinese culture there is a stereotype that a “ladylike” female is not expected to speak very fast, especially in a public, mixed-sex setting. Although there are studies on speech politeness, so far to my knowledge no research has been done to examine gender differences in speech rate in the Chinese context.
CHAPTER 4
DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

4.0 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I have outlined the four units of analysis that will be used in my corpus-based study of radio talk shows: amount of speech, turns and floors, interruptions, and utterances with assertive vs. supportive functions. In this chapter I will present the statistical results of the collected data, and discuss the results within the outlined analytical framework.

4.1 Amount of Speech

4.1.1 Overall Distribution of Amount of Speech by Gender

Altogether there were around 10.5 hours of talking time collected for this study.
The overall distribution of amount of talk between the genders is displayed in Table 4. (Units are in minutes. Percentages are given within parentheses in Table 4 and all subsequent tables in this chapter.)

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MALE</td>
<td>375.4 (59.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEMALE</td>
<td>256.1 (40.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>631.5 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Distribution of amount of talk by gender (p<0.01)
As shown in Table 4, the overall time spent in talk is not distributed evenly between the genders. Men’s total percentage of talking time across all situations was 59.4% and women’s total percentage was less than half (40.6%), which means men do the greater share of the talking measured by the length of time. Statistical analysis shows that the gender difference here is highly significant (p < 0.01). This result indicates that Chinese men talk more than Chinese women, at least in some circumstances.²

One interpretation could be found in the relationship of quantity of speech to influence, or power. It is possible that Chinese men talk more as a way of exploiting their greater power and exerting influence and dominance over Chinese women. The fact cannot be ignored that men have greater status and power than do women in a broad Chinese social context.

The normal power relationship in the Chinese society has had a long history with men in the dominant position and women the subservient. In mainland China, although after the founding of the People’s Republic of China women’s emancipation movement is claimed to have made progress and women are said to “hold up half of the sky”, there is no denying that this remains a male-dominated world. Women are denied access to real power. There is a “glass ceiling” for women in most business and administrative structures. Women’s economic security still rests in large part on finding an appropriate mate, especially in the countryside. Taiwan boasts of a higher level of education and living standard than the mainland China, but it has a similar, if not more serious, situation with regard to male supremacy in the society and the economic dependence of women on
men. Farris (1995) observed in her fieldwork in Taiwan that Chinese women often utilize a soft, indirect and informal power play such as *sajiao* to gain a balanced position in their dealing with men. By means of *sajiao* and so on, women’s subordination is reinforced and maintained.

In traditional Chinese society, women, like children, were expected to be seen but not to be heard. Women and their language were devalued to such an extent that they were required to be silent. Chinese women were brought up with a set of proper norms embedded in mind, including the proper way to speak or to behave. In this century women have gained greater participation in most social affairs, and hence their voices have become more powerful and are heard more often. Language, in a certain sense, can be rightly seen as a way of exerting power and control. Hence, the finding in this study that Chinese men out-talk Chinese women in social interaction may be explained in terms of the remaining power difference and status hierarchy between the genders in Chinese society.

Another approach to explaining gender differences in amount of speech is to focus on the different conversational styles among men and women. Many researchers (Tannen 1993, Coates 1996, etc.) have suggested that men and women are socialized to have different goals in interactions and to use different verbal strategies in order to attain these goals. Men learn that it is important for them to participate actively in interacting with others as a way of gaining attention and asserting status, while women learn to use talk to establish and maintain harmonious relationships with others. Consequently, the male speech style emphasizes competition, assertiveness and dominance; the female speech
style, in contrast, emphasizes cooperation, support, and equality in conversational interactions. Men will talk more when they feel the need to establish or maintain their status in the group, but women will be careful not to take up a disproportionate amount of talking time because they do not use talk to assert status and because they fear that they will be judged negatively if they talk too much.

Little work has been done specifically in the Chinese linguistic-cultural system to reveal how gender is socialized through language use. Also little has been written to examine the potential gender differences in conversational goals or the different speech strategies used by men and women in the Chinese context. One exception is Farris’ research on the gender of child discourse. Farris examined interactions of same-sex peer groups of boys and girls in a Taiwanese preschool. Drawing on local constructions of gender in this urban Taiwanese setting, Farris (1991:200) observed, “young boys develop interests in strenuous, competitive play and focus on aggressive or mechanical aspects of things in their natural universe, whereas young girls are concerned with nourishing social ties with their peers, or in developing roles modeled on female authority figures such as teachers and mothers”. Based on this observation, it could be concluded that in the Chinese cultural system, males and females also learn, through socialization, to approach conversational interaction with different goals and to develop different verbal strategies and styles in interacting with others. Of course more work needs to be done to shed light on the situation in mixed-sex socialization. It is yet too early to claim with confidence that Chinese men talk more than Chinese women due to their aggressive speech style.
So far I have tried to explain the gender difference in amount of talk found in my data, using both the “dominance” approach and the “difference” approach. However, even a combination of power explanation and style explanation is not sufficient to help understand all the results. In the following discussions, I will take into consideration the exact context and social structure of interaction.

4.1.2 Distribution of Amount of Talk by Gender and Topic

It has been suggested that specific factors in particular situations can affect expectations and beliefs about men’s and women’s behaviors, while these expectations and beliefs, associated with differences in status between men and women, play a crucial role in how much they talk in different contexts (James & Drakish, 1993). As I mentioned in the previous chapter, there is a variety of different activities in which amount of speech has been examined. Some are formal task activities, in which a specific instrumental goal is to be accomplished, such as reaching a joint decision or problem-solving. Others are informal, non-task-oriented activities in which the subjects are asked to “talk about anything” or “just get to know each other”. According to James and Drakish (1993) in their review of over sixty studies on amount of talk, a great proportion of studies that involve formal task activities found males to talk more than females, but a much smaller percentage of studies in informal non-task-oriented settings found the same result. Thus, overall, men appear to be more likely to talk more than women in formal task-oriented contexts. The reason is that in the case of formal tasks, intellectual competence is perceived as important, and men, who are expected to be more competent than women
according to their higher status, would tend to act as authorities to a greater extent than women. They would therefore give more statements, information and opinions than do women. In addition, this type of task-oriented contributions (information, opinions, suggestions, etc.) usually take up more talking time than other contributions (acknowledging, giving indications of interest, etc.).

The current study examines interaction in radio talk shows. The context involved is not formally task-oriented, since there is no requirement that the subjects successfully solve a problem or arrive at a certain decision. On the other hand, it is not too informal either (not “talk about anything” or “just get to know each other”). In each episode of the talk show, there is at least one host/hostess and one topic to be discussed with invited or phoned-in guests (see Table 2). The contents of the discussion are spontaneous, but the topic is not; the host/hostess normally has the topic ready before the program begins. As soon as the talk show is on air, the topic is announced, and everybody is supposed to talk about it only. It can be a heavy political one such as the Tiananmen Square Incident, or a light discussion on how to grow roses. The interaction that takes place in this kind of context may be called formally structured but not formally task-oriented interaction.

An examination of the interaction between topic and the gender of participant can provide a clearer picture of gender-specific distribution of talking time in the specific contexts, as illustrated in Table 5.

Of the eight topics listed here, there are five (T1 Politics, T2 Economy, T4 Health, T6 Nature, T7 Love & Marriage) in which men do a greater share of talking than women. Statistical analysis shows that the gender difference is highly significant in T1 and T2.
And in T4, T6 and T7, the difference between genders is also statistically significant but the difference is not as salient. This means men out-talk women by an observable margin in all of the five situations, particularly in the discussion of two topics: T1 Politics and T2 Economy. Men and women are found to take up nearly the same amount of time on the T3 Society (males 49.5%, females 50.5%, difference not statistically significant). But in the discussion of T5 Family and Education, women show a much greater rate of participation than men (males 26.5%, females 73.5%) and according to the statistical test, the difference is very significant. T8 Songs does not yield a statistically significant difference in amount of talk between the two genders.

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

** statistically highly significant (p< 0.01); * statistically significant; the sex with figures in bold type did the greater amount of talk

Table 5: Distribution of amount of talk by gender and topic

The result indicates that although men talk more than women in many cases, they do not necessarily do so in every situation. The topic of conversation has an effect on the verbal output of each gender. This is not surprising if we consider the gender bias in topic competency. Men and women differ in areas in which they are expected to be competent
and knowledgeable. In a topic in which males are supposed to know more than females (e.g. cars), males are expected and are well motivated to make more contributions. But in a topic in which females are supplied with more relevant information (e.g. child-rearing), females are expected and are allowed to talk more than males. As Edelsky (1981) pointed out, sometimes how talkative you are really depends on how talkative you are allowed to be in a specific situation.

The data suggests that T1 Politics and T2 Economy are two of the most male-oriented topics in Chinese society. Men are found to talk significantly more than women on these two topics. T3 Society and T8 Songs appear to be more or less neutral topics in which men and women occupy a similar amount of talking time. The topic in which women have contributed significantly more than men is T5 Family and Education. Education is not necessarily a female-oriented topic, but family surely is. Under this category, one episode is centered around the issue of how to educate children. The conversants discuss the pros and cons of various teaching methods, and compare the Chinese and Western traditions of child education. Since mothers usually take more responsibility for child care, it is reasonable to expect women to talk more (and to be allowed by men to talk more) on this topic. Another episode is a discussion of Chinese schools in Vancouver. Since Chinese schools usually involve elementary school education rather than adult education, it is traditionally associated more with women than with men (female teachers, etc.).

It is interesting to note the relatively low frequency of female participation (34.2%) in the discussion of T7 Love and Marriage. This is of course a topic of great interest to
both men and women, and according to a study done by Hirschman in 1973 (cited in James & Drakish 1993:300), this topic encouraged more talk by women because of its high level of socio-emotional content. It is widely accepted in the literature of language and gender that women appear to be more competent in socio-emotional talk than in instrumental talk, probably due to the positive supportive role expected of them in verbal interaction. However, a similar result is not found in the discussion of “love and marriage” in the Chinese situation. One explanation could be that Chinese women are not expected to or allowed to talk about such a highly sensitive topic with someone who is not closely related to them; or they are simply not used to talking about sexuality in a “public” mixed-sex setting. Whether or not they talk more than men in “private” same-sex situations is to be explored later by interested scholars.

4.1.3 Distribution of Amount of Talk by Ratio of Men to Women

In Kramer’s (1974) “Women’s Speech: Separate but Unequal?”, one of the most widely quoted earlier works on language and gender, several experiments have been suggested by the author for further exploration. One of the experiments that Kramer suggests is to see if the ratio of men to women in the situation makes a difference in the relative verbosity of each sex. This is a valuable proposition, because the behavior observed in an empirical study is always dependent on the requirements of the situation and the relative performance expectations that participants hold in a given situation.

The current study tries to take into account a wide range of social structural factors -- the underlying pattern of social relationships and the underlying structure of self-
other expectations -- in explaining gender-specific behaviors regarding amount of speech.

For my purpose here, the distribution of amount of speech is examined with respect to the ratio of men to women. The result is illustrated in Table 6 (only speech in mixed-sex interaction is of interest in the study of this variable):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RATIO OF MEN TO WOMEN</th>
<th>MALE SPEECH</th>
<th>FEMALE SPEECH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3:1</td>
<td>16.0 (96.8%)</td>
<td>0.5 (3.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:1 **</td>
<td><strong>111.7 (82.9%)</strong></td>
<td>23.0 (17.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:1 (*)</td>
<td>208.9 (54.4%)</td>
<td>175.1 (45.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:2</td>
<td>38.8 (40.3%)</td>
<td>57.5 (59.7%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** statistically highly significant (p< 0.01), the sex with figures in bold type did the greater amount of talk (*) shows a tendency (p> 0.05 but = 0.05)

Table 6: Distribution of amount of speech by ratio of men to women

When there is an equal number of men and women in the interaction (the 1:1 situation), the percentage of distribution of talking time by gender (males 54.4%, females 45.6%) exhibits a similar pattern as the overall gendered distribution shown in Table 3 (males 59.4%, females 40.6%), with men taking up a relatively greater share of available talking time. However, statistical analysis shows that although a gender difference can be claimed here in the 1:1 situation, the difference is not as salient as in the overall distribution. Therefore, we may conclude that there is not too much gender difference in amount of talk on a 1 to 1 basis (or 2 to 2, for that matter). Greater differences show up when there is an uneven ratio of male participant(s) to female participant(s).

When the ratio of men to women is 2:1, men produce more speech than do women, and statistical analysis shows that the difference is highly significant (p < 0.01). It
seems that in the presence of another male partner, men tend to grow more active in participating in conversations. In contrast, women do not talk significantly more than men when there are more women in the conversation. Table 6 indicates that women still talk relatively less than men when the ratio of women to men is 2:1. The ratio of amount of speech by women to that by men is just 59.7%:40.3%, lower than 2:1, which means that the average verbal output of each woman is less than that of a man.

To see more clearly the gender difference in a three-person session, it is helpful to conceptualize the distribution patterns in terms of what would be the expected percentage of amount of talk if everyone gets their fair share of talking time, in contrast to the actual time they spoke.\(^3\) Then, the picture that emerges is the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>In Percentage (% per person)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actual:</td>
<td>59.7 (29.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected:</td>
<td>66.7 (33.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actual:</td>
<td>82.9 (41.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected:</td>
<td>66.7 (33.3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Whether the ratio is 2:1 of male to female, or 2:1 of female to male, females spoke less than their fair share of amount of time. In other words, if time had been equally proportioned out to each individual speaker, females would have been expected to speak more they actually did, especially in the 2 males to 1 female situation. In contrast, males got more than their fair share. Note that males each got to talk around 40% (see the
underlined figures) regardless of whether there are 2:1 males to females or 2:1 females to males.

When the ratio of men to women rises to 3:1, the difference in amount of talk becomes even sharper in the percentages of distribution between genders (96.8% vs. 3.2%; note that an equal amount of time should have been 75% vs. 25%). But probably due to the small amount of time involved in this kind of conversational situation, there is insufficient data for a statistically significant difference. Still, a tendency has been shown that men are likely to become increasingly active in conversational interaction as the number of male partner increase, if they are aware of the presence of a female listener. If there had been more 3 men 1 woman situations in the corpus, it would be highly probable that a statistically significant difference would have been observed.

One feasible explanation is that in a group interaction, the performance expectations of the participants are often associated with their gender and their status characteristics. Since men have a higher status than women in society, the expectations associated with high-status people are normally attached to men. Men are expected to show higher intellectual competence in a formally structured interaction such as a talk show. They are allowed to act, and they tend to act as authorities or experts in the topics of discussion, and to talk more than their less informed partner(s) of the opposite sex. Another factor that may be at play in cross-sex interaction is sexuality and opposite attraction. Pearson (1985) suggests that male speakers in a group interaction would tend to compete for the female partner's attention. It would be hard to test if men really compete for greater amount of speech time as a way of impressing women, and if they do
so specifically in a Chinese cultural system. But the computational results here show that men do make more statements, give more information, and offer more expressions of opinions when more men are involved in cross-sex interactions. Women are pushed into an essentially listening role in this type of interaction.

4.2 Turns and Floors

4.2. Overall Distribution of Turns and Floors by Gender

After the study on amount of talk, it is helpful to obtain a more detailed picture of turn-taking and floor-holding. As in the results of amount of talk, results from turn-taking and floor-holding are analyzed in terms of overall distribution by gender, distribution by the interaction of gender and topic, and distribution by the ratio of men to women. Table 6 illustrates the overall distribution of time spent in turns and floors by the two genders:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>MALE</th>
<th>FEMALE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Floor-holding turns **</td>
<td>352.9 (60.5%)</td>
<td>230.3 (39.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-floor-holding turns</td>
<td>15.2 (57.3%)</td>
<td>11.3 (42.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-turn utterances (*)</td>
<td>7.3 (33.5%)</td>
<td>14.5 (66.5%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**statistically highly significant (p < 0.05), the sex with figures in bold type did the greater amount of talk (*) shows a tendency (p > 0.05 but = 0.05)

Table 7: Distribution of turns and floors by gender

Table 7 shows that males take longer floor-holding turns than do women. And the difference is highly significant in statistical analysis. This result indicates that men hold the floor for longer periods of time. In a dyad, this means that it is usually the male participant who does most of the talking and holds the other participant’s attention. This is consistent
with the result in the last section that males talk more than females. What holds true for dyads also hold for group interactions with two or more male participants. The females, in comparison, do not hold the floor as long as males. They either willingly turn the floor to male partners, or have their floors grabbed from them, as is frequently the case. This suggests that women are more likely than men to play the listening role in a conversational interaction. It is harder for them to take and hold the floor, get their voice heard, or gain attention from male interactants.

Table 7 also shows that men take relatively longer non-floor-holding turns than do women. The difference, however, is not statistically significant.

Females, in contrast, are more likely than men to make non-turn-utterances, although the gender difference is not statistically significant, as in the case of floor-holding utterances. A non-turn-utterance is usually a back channel response, something that just indicates one is following the ongoing talk, or one has interest in the topic. It is usually not uttered loudly and emphatically, so that it would not be heard as asserting one's view. Therefore, a non-turn-utterance is much less conspicuous than an utterance in a non-floor-holding turn. The result shows that females use non-turn-utterances quite often (66.5%), while males only make this kind of utterance around half as often (33.5%) as females do.

4.2.2 Distribution of Turns and Floors by Gender and Topic

The gender difference in men's and women's behavior in turn-taking and floor-holding is further examined in relation to conversational topics. Since no statistically significant difference is found between genders with respect to their behaviors in non-
floor-holding turns, only the floor-holding turns and non-turn utterances are examined accordingly. Table 8 shows the result of the examination.

Again, the result shows that the participants’ performance could be affected by the perceived nature of the situation and the constraints of the contexts. The turn-taking and floor-holding behaviors of men and women vary with the topics, but a pattern can be observed that is basically consonant with the overall gendered distribution of turns and floors shown in Table 7.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FLOOR-HOLDING</th>
<th>NON-TURN</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>MALE</strong></td>
<td><strong>FEMALE</strong></td>
<td><strong>MALE</strong></td>
<td><strong>FEMALE</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T1 Politics **</td>
<td>69.8 (87.3%)</td>
<td>10.2 (12.7%)</td>
<td>1.3 (72.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T2 Economy **</td>
<td>47.5 (80.5%)</td>
<td>11.5 (19.5%)</td>
<td>1.0 (62.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T3 Society</td>
<td>33.6 (50.5%)</td>
<td>32.9 (49.5%)</td>
<td>0.7 (22.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T4 Health **</td>
<td>82.4 (60.9%)</td>
<td>52.8 (39.1%)</td>
<td>1.8 (33.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T5 Family &amp; Education **</td>
<td>19.2 (27.4%)</td>
<td>51.0 (72.6%)</td>
<td>0.4 (13.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T6 Nature *</td>
<td>32.1 (63.9%)</td>
<td>18.1 (36.1%)</td>
<td>0.6 (30.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T7 Love &amp; Marriage **</td>
<td>43.8 (66.8%)</td>
<td>21.8 (33.2%)</td>
<td>0.9 (39.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T8 Songs</td>
<td>24.5 (43.4%)</td>
<td>32.0 (56.6%)</td>
<td>0.6 (28.6%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** statistically highly significant (p < 0.01); * statistically significant (p < 0.05); the sex with figures in bold type did the greater amount of talk
(*) shows a tendency (p > 0.05 but ≈ 0.05)

Table 8: Distribution of turns and floors by gender and topic
Table 8 shows that with respect to the situations involving five of the topics -- T1 Politics, T2 Economy, T4 Health, T5 Love & Marriage and T6 Nature -- men take longer floor-holding turns. The gender differences are found to be statistically significant in all five situations (highly significant in T1, T2, T4 and T5). Note that the same five topics have initiated more amount of speech from men than from women (see Table 5).

The topic that has produced a very different pattern of distribution is T5 Family and Education. In this situation, women take much longer floor-holding turns than men do. Statistical analysis shows that the gender difference here is highly significant. Again, this result is consistent with the distribution of amount of talk by gender and topic. T5 Family and Education is the only topic in which women talked significantly more than men (see Table 4). This shows that women are more active in the discussion of this topic, and they are given more time to show their knowledge and opinions about the topic.

No significant difference is found between the two gender groups regarding their floor-holding behaviors when the topic of discussion is T3 Society or T8 Songs.

Women seem to make more non-turn utterances according to the raw figures and frequencies in Table 8. The computational results show an overall pattern of female dominance in non-turn utterances (in six of the total eight topics). But non-turn utterances usually occupy a very small proportion of speech time, so when they are further broken down into different topics, there is insufficient data for studying statistical significance in gender differences.
4.2.3 Distribution of Turns and Floors by Ratio of Men to Women

Table 9 shows men’s and women’s behavior in turn-taking and floor-holding with respect of the ratio of men to women who participated in mixed-sex interaction. The result suggests that in almost all cases men take significantly longer floor-holding turns, which means men usually hold the floor for a longer period of time. Only in the 1 male to 2 females situation did females take a little bit longer, but the difference there was not significant. The highest rate of floor-holding time is found in the 3 males to 1 female situation, in which the three males together held the floor for most of the available talking time (96.8%) and gave the female almost no time to hold the floor at all (3.2%). The second highest rate is found in the 2 males to 1 female situation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FLOOR-HOLDING TURNS</th>
<th>NON-TURN UTTERANCES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>MALE</strong></td>
<td><strong>FEMALE</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:1 *</td>
<td>15.1 (96.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:1 **</td>
<td>104.9 (83.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:1 *</td>
<td>196.4 (55.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:2 (*)</td>
<td>36.5 (41.3%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**statistically highly significant (p<0.01); * statistically significant (p<0.05); the sex with figures in bold type did the greater amount of talk; (*) shows a tendency (p>0.05 but = 0.05)

Table 9: Distribution of turns and floors by ratio of men to women
The result with non-turn utterances is more variant across different situations. No gender difference is observed in non-turn utterances when the ratio of men to women is 3 to 1. A slight difference seems to emerge in the 2 to 1 situation, but since the figures are too small, it does not have any statistical significance. The same applies to the 1 to 2 situation. The only significant difference is found when there is an equal number of male and female speakers. In this situation, females are found to produce more non-turn utterances. Since non-turn utterances are usually supportive in nature, this result may suggest that females are less competitive and more supportive in their speech style.

4.3 Interruption

4.3.1 Overall Distribution of Interruption by Gender

Do men interrupt women more than women interrupt men? In this study, I’ll first look at the overall distribution of interruption by the gender of the interrupter:

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MALE</td>
<td>135 (75.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEMALE</td>
<td>44 (24.6%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10: Distribution of interrupters by gender (p<0.01)

The result clearly shows that interruptions are not symmetrically distributed between the genders. Table 10 demonstrates a dramatic asymmetric pattern: there are 135 interruptions by male speakers and only 44 interruptions by female speakers. The difference is determined to be highly significant by statistical analysis (p<0.01). However, as I noted in the previous chapter, it is also important to examine interruptions in terms of
the gender of the interruptee, for it is possible that males speaking with females orient themselves to the role of listener differently than they do with one another. Table 11 shows the distribution of interruptions by the gender of interruptee:

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MALE</td>
<td>123 (68.7%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEMALE</td>
<td>56 (31.3%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11: Distribution of interruptees by gender (p<0.01)

The result is also asymmetrical between the gender groups. Nonetheless, contrary to the stereotype that women get interrupted more often than men do, Table 11 shows that males actually get interrupted significantly more often (p<0.01), or in other words, interruptions are more likely to happen when the one who is interrupted is a man. Combining the results of Table 10 and Table 11, we may conclude that a large percent of interruptions are directed by males against other males. But it is still not clear if men interrupt women more often than women interrupt men. Therefore, it is necessary to look at the pattern of interruptions relevant to the interaction between the gender of the interrupter and the interruptee, as revealed in the following table:

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M-m</td>
<td>88 (49.2%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M-f</td>
<td>47 (26.2%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F-m</td>
<td>35 (19.6%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F-f</td>
<td>9 (5.0%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

M, F = interrupter; m, f = interruptee

Table 12: Distribution of interruptions by gender of participant
The result shows that each gender group of interrupters treated the other group differently from their own group. It is confirmed that males interrupted other males most frequently, accounting for nearly half of all the interruptions in the data (49.2%). Males interrupted females more often than females interrupted males. In contrast with males’ interruption behavior, females appeared to interrupt less frequently when the interruptee was of the same sex. The difference between male-male interruption and female-female interruption is statistically significant (p < 0.05).

4.3.2 Two Types of Interruption

As I discussed in the previous chapter, interruptions do not always go together with dominance. In many cases, it is not meant to be a violation of other speakers’ rights to complete a turn or disregard for what other speakers have to say. Instead, it is a way of indicating active listenership and high involvement in the on-going talk. There are two types of interruption with totally different functions: one type of interruption is dominance-related and the other type is cooperative in nature. In the following section, I will make a distinction between the two types and examine the interruption behaviors of males and females respectively.

Table 13 shows the distribution of the two types of interruption by the gender of the interrupter. No percentages are given to enable comparisons both across the rows and across the columns.

The result indicates that men make dominant interruptions significantly more often than women do (81 vs. 20, p < 0.01). Men also make more supportive interruptions than
women (54 vs. 24, p < 0.05), but the difference between genders with regard to this type of interruption behavior, though statistically significant, is not as salient as the gender difference in dominant interruptions. This may suggest that males tend to be more dominance-oriented, which is consistent with the results above on amount of talk and turns and floors. Table 12 also shows a difference in the distribution pattern of interruption behavior within the gender. While males make significantly more dominant interruptions than supportive interruptions (81 vs. 54, p < 0.05), females make roughly an equal proportion of the two kinds of interruptions (20 vs. 24, p > 0.05), which provides one more evidence that males are relatively more dominance-oriented.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>MALE</th>
<th>FEMALE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DOMINANT INTERRUPTION</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUPPORTIVE INTERRUPTION</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 13: Distribution of interruption types by gender of interrupter

The distribution patterns of the two types of interruption are also observed in terms of the gender of the interruptee, as demonstrated in Table 14:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>MALE</th>
<th>FEMALE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DOMINANT INTERRUPTION</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUPPORTIVE INTERRUPTION</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 14: Distribution of interruption types by gender of interruptee
The result indicates that the men were not only more likely than women to interrupt, they were also more likely than women to be interrupted by a dominant interruption (72 vs. 29), as shown in Table 14. Again, the difference here is proved to be highly significant by statistical standard (p < 0.01). In addition, when men were interrupted, the interruption behavior was more likely to be dominance-associated than cooperative in nature (72 vs. 51, p < 0.05), whereas females were interrupted by a roughly equal proportion of the two kinds of interruptions (29 vs. 27, p > 0.05). It may be concluded that men would have to be more competitive when dealing with others in conversational interaction.

Table 15 presents a further breakdown of the gendered distribution of each type of interruption:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>M-m</th>
<th>M-f</th>
<th>F-M</th>
<th>F-f</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dominant Interruption</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive Interruption</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

M, F = interrupter; m, f = interruptee

Table 15: Distribution of interruption types by gender of participant

The largest number of interruptions is found in male-male interaction, and among these interruptions, 56 of them are dominance-related while 32 of them are supportive interruptions. This difference is statistically significant (p < 0.05). In contrast, there is little difference in type of interruptions among other groups of interaction (male-female, female-male, female-female). Moreover, males did not interrupt female speakers as frequently as they interrupted other male speakers. Not many interruptions are found in
the female-female situation, which may suggest that women are in general more cooperative and less competitive than males when they interact with other speakers of the same sex.

4.3.3 Distribution of Interruptions by Gender and Topic

The results from interruption behaviors are also analyzed in terms of conversational topics in which the two types of interruption occur, as shown below in Table 16 (Part I). The result has not revealed a conspicuous pattern of distribution across different situations. Due to the small number of observations involved in interruptions by females (F-m or F-f), it is hard to give a full account of gender difference in interruption use in relation to conversational topics.

It can be seen from Table 16 (Part I) that there are different numbers of episodes under the different topics. If we further examine the distribution of interruptions on a per-episode basis, we find that T2 Economy yields the highest average number of M-m dominant interruptions (5.0 per episode). The next ones in descending order with respect to M-m dominant interruptions are: T1 Politics (3.7 per episode), T4 nature (3.0 per episode), etc. Table 16 (Part II) presents a whole picture of interruption distribution by gender and topic on a per-episode basis.

On the whole, there seems to be a rough tendency exhibited in the male-initiated interruptions (M-m or M-f): the more male-oriented the topic is, the more likely it is for dominance-related interruptions to occur. But this does not necessarily apply to the other type of interruption. No statistical analysis is possible here due to limited data.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># OF EPISODES</th>
<th>DOMINANT INTERRUPTION</th>
<th>SUPPORTIVE INTERRUPTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M-m</td>
<td>M-f</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T1 Politics</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T2 Economy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T3 Society</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T4 Health</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T5 Family &amp; Education</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T6 Nature</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T7 Love &amp; Marriage</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T8 Songs</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 16 (Part I): Distribution of interruption types by gender and topic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># of episodes</th>
<th>Dominant Interruption per episode</th>
<th>Supportive Interruption per episode</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M-m</td>
<td>M-f</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T1 Politics</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T2 Economy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T3 Society</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T4 Health</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T5 Family &amp; Education</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T6 Nature</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T7 Love &amp; Marriage</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T8 Songs</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 16 (Part II): Distribution of interruption types by gender and topic (per episode)
4.4 Assertiveness and Supportiveness

4.4.1 Distribution of Assertive/Supportive Functions by Gender

As mentioned in the previous chapter, one way to observe gender differences in conversational assertiveness and supportiveness is to compare the gender-specific distribution of time spent in utterances with assertive and supportive functions. The functional intent of each verbal contribution can be detected. For example, if the intent of an utterance is to give information, make a statement or show a positive or negative opinion, it is deemed to be an utterance with assertive functions; if the intent of an utterance is simply to indicate listenership or encourage others to go on talking, it is an utterance with supportive functions.

The gendered distribution of time spent in utterances with assertive and supportive functions is presented as followed:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assertive Functions</td>
<td>347.7 (70.1%)</td>
<td>148.3 (29.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive Functions</td>
<td>27.7 (20.4%)</td>
<td>107.8 (79.6%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 17: Distribution of utterance functions by gender

Table 17 shows that males made significantly more utterances with assertive functions than females did (347.7 min vs. 148.3 min, p < 0.01), whereas females made significantly more utterances with supportive functions than males did (107.8 min vs 27.7 min, p < 0.01). On the other hand, when we examine the distribution of utterance functions within
genders, we can see that males produced significantly longer utterances with assertive functions than utterances with supportive functions (347.7 min vs. 27.7 min, p < 0.01); females also show a tendency of making longer utterances with assertive functions, but the difference between these and supportive utterances is not statistically significant (148.3 min vs. 107.8 min, p > 0.05 but = 0.05). This is not surprising if we consider the results in the previous sections: males held the floor for longer period of time and took longer turns than females; males made more dominance-related interruptions than supportive interruptions. Since utterances with assertive functions are associated with dominance, power and control, it is reasonable to expect men to produce longer utterances with assertive functions.

4.4.2 Distribution of Assertive/Supportive Functions by Gender and Topic

Table 18 demonstrates the distribution of utterances with assertive and supportive functions by gender and topic. The results are consistent with findings made above. Males are found to produce much more utterances with assertive functions in the discussion of five of the topics. These are the same five topics in which they have already been found to talk more than females, namely, T1 Politics, T2 Economy, T4 Health, T6 Nature and T7 Love and Marriage. At the same time, males took longer turns and held the floor for longer periods of time. Statistical analysis shows that the gender differences found in all the five situations are highly significant. T3 Society is also shown to have initiated more assertive functions from men than from women, but the difference is not statistically significant. In the remaining two topics -- T5 Family and Education and T8
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ASSERTIVE FUNCTIONS</th>
<th>MALE</th>
<th>FEMALE</th>
<th>SUPPORTIVE FUNCTIONS</th>
<th>MALE</th>
<th>FEMALE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T1 Politics **</td>
<td>70.8</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>T1 Politics</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(97.0%)</td>
<td>(3.0%)</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>(27.8%)</td>
<td>(72.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T2 Economy**</td>
<td>47.2</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>T2</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>8.7 (72.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(92.0%)</td>
<td>(8.0%)</td>
<td>Economy(*)</td>
<td>(27.5%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T3 Society</td>
<td>33.4</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>T3 Society *</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(59.0%)</td>
<td>(41.0%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(14.7%)</td>
<td>(84.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T4 Health **</td>
<td>82.3</td>
<td>32.7</td>
<td>T4 Health *</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>26.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(71.6%)</td>
<td>(28.4%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(17.2%)</td>
<td>(82.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T5 Family</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>32.3</td>
<td>T5 Family</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>24.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&amp;Education *</td>
<td>(35.3%)</td>
<td>(64.7%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(10.3%)</td>
<td>(89.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T6 Nature **</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>T6 Nature</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>9.4 (64.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(72.7%)</td>
<td>(27.3%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(35.2%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T7 Love&amp; Marriage **</td>
<td>43.6</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>T7 Love&amp; Marriage *</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(76.5%)</td>
<td>(23.5%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(21.7%)</td>
<td>(78.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T8 Songs</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>T8 Songs (*)</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>6.1 (72.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(44.7%)</td>
<td>(55.3%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(27.4%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**statistically highly significant (p< 0.01); * statistically significant, the sex with figures in bold type did the greater amount of talk

(*) shows a tendency (p> 0.05 but ≈ 0.05)

Table 18: Distribution of utterance functions by gender and topic
Songs -- females are shown to make more utterances with assertive functions than males. However, the gender difference is significant only in T5, a female-oriented topic, and not in T8, which is a relatively neutral topic.

Females are found to produce significantly more utterances with supportive functions than males do in most of the topics. Only in one topic, namely T6 Nature, is the gender difference in this respect not statistically significant. It is notable that with T1 Politics, T2 Economics, T7 Love and Marriage, even though the analysis given earlier shows that men talked significantly more than women in these situations, women are found here to produce more utterances with supportive functions. One interpretation could be that women participate very little in the discussion of these three topics, and when they talk, their remarks tend to be supportive rather than assertive in nature. In contrast, men talk a lot in these situations, but only a very small amount of their speech has supportive functions. Again, this may suggest that men show more dominance and assertiveness in their speech style when they are involved in more male-oriented topics.

4.4.3 Distribution of Assertive/Supportive Functions by Ratio of Men to Women

Conversational assertiveness and supportiveness can be further examined in terms of the ratio of men to women who participate in mixed-sex interactions. The results are presented in Table 19:
Table 19: Distribution of utterance functions by ratio of men to women

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>MALE</th>
<th>FEMALE</th>
<th>MALE</th>
<th>FEMALE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>assertive functions</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:1 **</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(97.1%)</td>
<td>(2.9%)</td>
<td>(87.0%)</td>
<td>(13.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:1 **</td>
<td>107.3</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(84.8%)</td>
<td>(15.2%)</td>
<td>(53.7%)</td>
<td>(46.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:1 **</td>
<td>197.4</td>
<td>91.6</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>77.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(68.3%)</td>
<td>(31.7%)</td>
<td>(18.4%)</td>
<td>(81.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:2</td>
<td>27.2</td>
<td>37.0</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>26.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(42.4%)</td>
<td>(57.6%)</td>
<td>(17.4%)</td>
<td>(82.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>supportive functions</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:1 **</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**statistically highly significant (p< 0.01), the sex with figures in bold type did the greater amount of talk.

Table 19 shows clearly that, overall, men made more utterances with assertive functions than women, while women made more utterances with supportive functions. It seems that the higher the ratio of men to women in the interaction, the bigger difference it makes in assertiveness behavior between the two gender groups. As to supportiveness behavior, it can not be observed as clearly what effect the ratio of men to women has made on its performance. But it is to be noted that women produced significantly more utterances with supportive functions than men did in the 1:1 situation. Women also produced significantly more supportive utterances than men did in the 1 male to 2 females situation. It is possible that when women find more partners of their own sex present, they tend to be more relaxed and more close to their speech style in all-female interaction. However, so far no work has been done in the Chinese context on women’s speech style in all-female situations. A challenging task for further research is to find out if all-female
interaction in the Chinese context show significant features of conversational supportiveness.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 4

1. Statistical tests are performed to check if the differences found between genders are significant. The statistical formula used here as well as in all the other tables in this chapter is z=(p'−pi)/sqrt((pi*(1-pi))/n). (z: statistic value from which the alpha level of significance is determined; p': percentage of the category calculated; pi: chance level, or equal distribution of probability across all categories; n: total number of tokens. If z >1.64, or if z < -1.64, p <0.05. If z > 2.58, or if z < -2.58, p <0.01. A p-value that is less than 0.05 is regarded as significant, and a p-value less than 0.01 is highly significant.) Many thanks to Dr. Shunde Jin for his help in the statistical tests.

2. In Chan’s (forthcoming) “Gender-marked speech in Cantonese: The case of sentence final-particles je and jek”, a rough 40-60 percent distribution in amount of talk is also found. Her corpus is a set of twelve episodes from a television series in Cantonese. Her finding concerning amount of talk is based on two sets of informal calculations: one on number of utterances, and one on syllable count.

3. Full credit is given to my advisor for this point.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

5.0 Overall Distribution Patterns

In this study, I have tried to analyze the data in the framework of four discourse variables: amount of speech, turn-taking and floors, interruptions (dominant vs. supportive), and functions of utterances (assertive vs. supportive). In summary, the analysis of data has produced the following distribution patterns. Concerning amount of speech, males do a greater share of talking measured by the length of time. Regarding turn-taking and floors, this study finds that (1) males take longer floor-holding turns than do females; (2) females are more likely than males to make non-turn-utterances; and (3) there is not much gender difference in non-floor-holding turns. On interruptions, the results are as follows: (1) males interrupt more than females; (2) males also get interrupted more than females; (3) males interrupt other males most frequently; (4) males interrupt females more often than the reverse; and (5) males’ interruptions tend to be more dominance-related. With respect to functions of utterances, the fourth and last discourse variable analyzed in the present study, males make more utterances with assertive functions, whereas females make more utterances with supportive functions.

On the whole, males are found to be more dominance-oriented than females in this study: they talk more than females, take longer turns, hold the floor for longer periods of
time, interrupt more and their interruptions are more likely dominant than supportive. Males’ utterances are featured by assertiveness. We may thus conclude that there is ample evidence for gender differences on the discourse level in the Chinese language. Overall, Chinese men’s speech shows more dominance, power and control, while Chinese women’s speech is more associated with cooperation, support and subsistence.

However, a note should be added here concerning this conclusion. The current study only examines verbal interactions in radio talk shows. The context in which the interaction take place is formally structured, although the interactions themselves are not formally task-oriented. It may be that this type of context affects expectations and beliefs about men’s and women’s verbal behavior and may have produced more stereotypical gender behavior. For instance, as I mentioned in Chapter 4, men may be expected to be more intellectually competent than women in a situation such as a talk show, and they may tend to act as authorities and give more statements, information and opinions than women. More studies need to be done in different contexts to examine gender behavior on the discourse level. Such studies can include informal interactions between husbands and wives, casual conversations among same- or cross-sex friends, and so forth.

As noted in Chapter 3, around 60 studies have been conducted to explore gender differences in amount of talk, but virtually all of these studies have used English-speaking Americans as their subjects. However, since no similar studies have been done on Chinese, it is still helpful to compare the finding in the current study with those carried out in the Western field. As reported by James and Drakish (1993:284), out of 56 studies dealing with adult mixed-sex interaction, males were found to talk more than females.
overall in 24, or 42.9%, of the studies. A further 10 studies (17.9%) found males to talk more than females in some circumstances, with there being no difference in other circumstances. In 16 studies (28.6%) no difference was found between the sexes overall, and only 2 studies (3.6%) found females to talk more overall. The remainder of these studies found that sometimes males and sometimes females talked more, depending on the situation. In summary, a majority of the studies have found males to talk more than females, either overall or under at least some circumstances, which is similar to the finding in my study regarding amount of talk.

5.1 Socio-cultural Factors

In addition to the perceived nature of the situation in which verbal interactions take place, there are other social factors that affect the language behavior of men and women. Their performance might vary according to the underlying pattern of social relationships, the content of the interaction, the structure of self-other expectations, and/or other constraints on the contexts. This study mainly focuses on two factors that could have important effect on gender-differentiated performance -- the topic of conversation, and the ratio of men to female who participate in the interactions.

With regard to topic and gender, this study made the following findings. Males talk a greater amount of time than females on politics and economy. Females talk more than males on family and education, but they participate to a very limited degree on love and marriage. Males take longer floor-holding turns than females in most of the situations (politics, economy, health, love and marriage, nature); only in the discussions of family
and education do females hold the floor for a longer period of time than males. As to non-turn utterances, there is not sufficient data to study gender differences by topic; on a per-episode basis. The topic, “economy”, produces the highest number of male-male dominant interruptions. This study also notes that in male-initiated interruptions, there is a rough tendency that the more male-oriented the topic is, the more likely it is for dominance-related interruptions to occur. Not much gender difference is found in supportive interruptions. Males produce more utterances with assertive functions than females do on the topics of politics, economy, health, love and marriage, and nature; only on the topic of family and education do females make more assertive utterances than males do. In contrast, females tend to produce more utterances with supportive functions than do males on almost all topics.

On the whole, males consistently demonstrate conversational assertiveness in the discussions of politics, economy, health, love and marriage, and nature. They are found to talk more on these topics, take longer turns, hold floors for longer periods of time, make more dominant interruptions, and produce more utterances with assertive functions. This suggests that these topics are relatively male-oriented in Chinese society. Women show more features of conversational supportiveness in most of the situations. The topic of family and education is the only situation that initiates more assertiveness from the female speakers.

With regard to ratio of men to women, gender difference is salient when there are more males than females participating in the interactions. When the ratio of men to women is 2:1, men talk much more than women, while the converse is not true. A
tendency is shown that in the presence of women, men are likely to become increasingly more talkative as the number of male participants increases. Men take longer floor-holding turns in almost all situations; the highest rate of male floor-holding is found in the 3:1 male to female situation. Women produce more non-turn utterances, especially when the ratio of men to women is even. Men make more utterances with assertive functions overall; it appears that the higher the ratio of men to women, the sharper is the gender difference regarding assertive behaviors. Women produce more supportive utterances in ratios of 1:1 and 1:2 male to female situations.

The results above indicate that men tend to be more competitive when there are more male participants present in cross-sex interactions. Women are pushed to an essentially listening role when men seem to be competing for the talking time or the floor. Women are consistently less competitive and more supportive than men, regardless of the male to female ratio.

5.2 Theoretical Implications

This corpus-based study of radio talk shows is one of the first attempts in the Chinese field to give a systematic, quantitative study of gender differences in conversational interaction. Since very little has been done on Chinese to address similar questions, it is difficult to compare the findings here with similar studies conducted by others. It is expected that future work in this field will re-examine the findings in this study and offer confirmations, further refinement, or challenges to the results obtained here based on a set of radio talk shows. It is hoped that this initial study will contribute to
the understanding of language and gender issues in the Chinese context, as well as to more
general, universal characteristics of language and gender.

The current study reveals that Chinese men and women seem to have different sets
of norms for conversational interaction, and that socio-cultural factors play an important
role in the gender differentiation in language. The work is representative of the new
direction of linguistic research that recognizes the importance of socio-cultural contexts.
Nonetheless, the variety of contexts that might be helpful in understanding the encoding of
gender in language, as well as the construction of gender through language, is virtually
endless. In this study I have tried to explore to a certain extent some contextualized
situations, but there are many more that will need to await further research. Given the
limited size of the project and the nature of data collection (radio talk shows recorded off
the web), I have not been able to address such issues as race (ethnic Chinese in a North-
American setting), socioeconomic status, age, occupation, education, talk show host-guest
dynamics, and so forth. I view the current study as laying the groundwork for the kind of
directions and questions to be answered, and as part of the on-going research and inquiries
into new areas of exploration in the interaction of language and gender.

All in all, language should not be treated as a closed system or studied without
reference to “external” environmental factors. Future studies in language and gender are
expected to extend into such areas as the social causes and consequences of gender
differences in language, the acquisition of differentiated interaction patterns by boys and
girls, and the development of differential communicative competence. The field will
undoubtedly benefit from the growing interest in the sociolinguistic analysis of gender

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differences in speech and the contribution from informed and detailed studies of a single language such as Chinese.
APPENDIX

Transcription Conventions:

1. A slash (/) indicates the end of a tone group or chunk of talk, e.g.:

   她明天来 /

2. A hyphen indicates an incomplete word or utterance, e.g.:

   我～我～我马上就走 /

3. Pauses are indicated by a full stop (short pause -- less than 1 second) or a dash (long pause), e.g.:

   他就坐在，那儿 /
   那 **** 还没好呢 /

4. Square brackets indicate the start of overlap between utterances, and an equals sign at the end of one speaker’s utterance and at the start of the next utterance indicates the absence of a discernible gap, e.g.:

   A: 他上学去了没有 /
   B: [肯定没有] =
   C: = 那太好了 /

5. Angled brackets give additional information, e.g.:

   A: 你真有一手啊 <LAUGHS>
   B: <LAUGHS>

6. The symbol % encloses words or phrases that are spoken very quietly, e.g.:

   %天 哪 %

(Based on Coates 1996)
REFERENCES


