

# Gendered Usage of Sentence-Final Particles in Mandarin Chinese

James C. Wamsley  
Indiana University

## Abstract

Linguists often reference the contextual features of an individual's speech to investigate the ways in which they represent their identity. Previous research on the links between language and gender has found that differences in the speech of men and women primarily manifest themselves in terms of pragmatics as opposed to phonological features or the lexicon. Sentence-final particles are non-obligatory particles which are appended to the end of sentences to convey extra pragmatic information. Research on sentence-final particles in Japanese (Uyeno 1971) and Cantonese (Chan 1999) has found correlations between the gender identity of the speaker and their usage of sentence-final particles. This study uses data from four men and four women to examine the ways that sentence-final particles are utilized by native speakers of Mandarin Chinese. The results of this study show that overall, men and women use sentence-final particles at a comparable rate. However, the two groups differ in that men more frequently use *ma*, a particle which signals insistence that the addressee be committed to the state of affairs, while women more frequently use *ba*, a particle which signals that the speaker seeks to solicit agreement from the addressee. The results of this study provide further information on real-world usage of sentence-final particles and contribute to future research related to the links between language and gender.

**Keywords:** Mandarin Chinese; Language and gender; Sentence-final particles

## 1. Introduction

Just as language allows individuals to express their thoughts, it also allows them to express their identity. Language usage can be influenced by factors such as age, socioeconomic class, education level, etc. Previous sociolinguistics studies have shown that these factors can influence speech features such as vowel quality or word choice. Through socialization, speakers acquire speech features relevant to their individual identity and are able to utilize these features to express their identity. Therefore, linguists often

reference the contextual features of an individual's speech to investigate the ways in which they represent their identity.

One aspect of identity currently studied by linguists is gender, which has been shown to have an influence on the speech of men and women, even when gender is a salient characteristic of the conversation. Previous studies such as those done by Deborah Cameron (1997) and Penelope Eckert (2000) have looked at language as it is used by men and women, finding that in general, it is not phonological or lexical features which distinguish members of a gender group, but rather the pragmatic ways in which they use language.

Sentence-final particles in Mandarin Chinese provide a concrete example of the relation between gender identity and language. However, little research exists on sentence-final particles as they are used by men and women. Strict pragmatic definitions of sentence-final particles are difficult to delineate as their meaning is most strongly defined by the contexts in which they are used (Lu 2005). Most research on sentence-final particles has been on their pragmatic usage and the contextual meanings associated with the particles. At the same time, many studies on the linguistic influence of gender in Mandarin Chinese have been on sociophonetic phenomena (Kim et al 2016, Li 2017).

This study investigates the pragmatic applications of sentence-final particles in Mandarin Chinese and the influence of the speaker's gender identity on their usage in order to expand upon research into the role of linguistic communicative style in gender performativity by examining a corpus of data gathered from native speakers of Mandarin Chinese.

The following sections will lay out the steps taken to investigate this topic. This paper continues with an introduction to sentence-final particles in Mandarin Chinese with a review of previous sociolinguistic studies done on sentence-final particles. Section 3 is an introduction to the study itself which outlines research questions, hypotheses, and an explanation of the methodology used. Section 4 examines the results of the study. This is followed by a discussion of the study and its results, and a conclusion.

## **2. Background**

### **2.1 Speech Act Theory**

Since sentence-final particles are linked to the pragmatic intent of speakers, observations based on the usage of these particles will be linked with concepts found in speech act theory. In the course of communication, interlocutors will utter statements to one another. As outlined by Austin (1962), the utterances themselves are categorized as locutionary acts. Illocutionary acts, on the other hand, represent the intentions of the speaker in uttering a sentence. One category of illocutionary acts is the indirect speech act, meaning that the sentence meaning does not absolutely correlate with the speaker's meaning or intentions, which are themselves interpreted based on shared background knowledge. Often, indirect speech acts are employed for the sake of politeness (Searle 1969). As framed by Brown and Levinson (1987), politeness can be divided into positive and negative schemes. Positive politeness entails redressive actions which are directed toward one's positive face and negative politeness is directed toward negative face. Brown and Levinson's concepts of positive and negative face are representations of one's social reputation as perceived by others in a given interaction, with positive face being one's

desire for their wants to be other's wants and negative face being one's desire to be unimpeded. Politeness strategies in discourse include hedges, which are metalinguistic comments on what is being stated, and discourse markers, which are part of the procedural meaning of a statement but not its truth conditions (Fraser 1996).

In Mandarin Chinese and other languages, sentence-final particles contribute to the illocutionary force of the utterances to which they are appended. Lu (2005) defines the specific effects of individual sentence-final particles as their "general characterization." In defining the illocutionary effects of a given sentence-final particle, one is able to interpret the overt intentions of the speaker. However, the general characterizations of sentence-final particles in Mandarin Chinese are not absolute, and their usage is influenced by other factors, as will be shown in the following section.

## 2.2 Sentence-Final Particles in Mandarin Chinese

Sentence-final particles are monosyllabic particles that are not grammatically obligatory and are usually appended to the end of a statement or question to express additional pragmatic information. They appear in languages such as Chinese, Japanese, and Korean. According to Simpson (2014), these discourse particles relate to speaker attitude, force of assertion, and evidentiality and appear most frequently in colloquial speech (Simpson 2014). Table 1 below gives examples of sentence-final particles which are common in Mandarin Chinese.

Table 1. Common Sentence-Final Particles in Mandarin Chinese<sup>1</sup>

Particle	Meaning	Example
<i>a</i>	expression that there is an apparent difference in attitude between speakers	<i>Ta you zhuyi a.</i> “(Of course,) he had a method.” (Lu 2005, p.58)
<i>ma</i>	the addressee should be committed to the state of affairs	<i>Ni shang na'er qu le ma.</i> “Where (the heck) have you been?” (Lu 2005, p.149)
<i>ba</i>	speaker seeks to solicit agreement	<i>Meiling hai zai jiaoshou ba?</i> “Meiling is still teaching, (right)?” (Lu 2005, p. 48)
<i>le</i>	marks currently relevant state	<i>Ta chuqu mai dongxi le.</i> “He’s gone out to buy something (so he’s not here anymore).” (Simpson 2014, p. 157)
<i>ne</i>	speaker and addressee are both committed to a state of affairs and the context has contradicted this	<i>Wo hai dei xi wan ne.</i> “But I still have to do the dishes” (Lu 2005, p. 105)

As can be seen in Table 1, monosyllabic particles are added to the end of utterances and connote additional pragmatic information such as a speaker’s attitude towards their interlocutor or towards what is being said as well as illocutionary force. Sentence-final particles are regional as well. Because this study is about Mandarin Chinese, it focuses on the particles that are most common in Standard Mandarin: *a*, *ma*, *ba*, *le*, and *ne*.

### 2.3 Previous Studies on Sentence-Final Particles and Gender

Most studies on Mandarin sentence-final particles examine how they are used and what information they convey, rather than who uses them. Lin (2005) and Lu (2005) sought to define sentence-final particles based on their usage in context, with Lin focusing on how

<sup>1</sup> Example sentences and definitions are drawn from the works cited in the table. Lu (2005) provides a “general characterization” of the sentence final particles *a*, *ma*, *ba*, and *ne* based on usage examples and the Gricean Cooperative Principle.

sentence-final particles are utilized in relation to face and politeness and Lu interpreting the pragmatic usage of the particles *ma*, *ba*, *a*, *ne*, *de*, and *me*<sup>2</sup> in natural conversational contexts.

Lu (2005) uses data which come from conversations between the author and an interlocutor, writing samples found in *China Central Daily*, and stage performances in order to create a “general characterization” for each of the sentence-final particles. This general characterization is based on the contextual usage of the sentence-final particles in the data in combination with the Cooperative Principle (Grice 1975) as an expression of speakers’ attitude. Lu’s use of mostly natural data informs the current study.

Lin (2005) associates sentence-final particles with negative politeness and claims that the particles *ba* and *a* are hedges. In this study, the author found that female salespersons used sentence-final particles four times more than male salespersons (Lin 2005).

One notable study on sentence-final particles found that men’s and women’s usage of the sentence-final particles *je* and *jek* in Cantonese was influenced by the gender identity of the speaker (Chan 1999). In Cantonese, the particle *je* is related to downplaying, coaxing, and boasting, while *jek* is seen as a stronger downplaying element, and correlated with exasperation, and impatience (Chan 1999). A corpus comprised of transcripts of 12 episodes of *Maanfa Tung*, a Cantonese-language television program, revealed that while men exhibited a greater overall usage of sentence-final particles, women speakers of

---

<sup>2</sup> ‘*ma*’ here refers to the sentence-final question marker, which Lu considers a sentence-final particle. The particle *de* is less frequently discussed and *me* is the romanization used by Lu to refer to what is otherwise referred to as *ma* in this paper.

Cantonese used the sentence-final particle *jek* twice as often as *je* in order to sound more soft-spoken<sup>3</sup> (Chan 1999).

A study by Dabney (2014) focused on native Mandarin speakers' sociological perceptions of speakers based on their usage of sentence-final particles. The author utilized a reading and rating questionnaire to gauge listeners' perception of speakers. In particular, the author found that the relatively frequent usage of the sentence-final particles *ei* and *ou* by Taiwanese men marks them as more "feminine" than Mainland men (Dabney 2014). It should be noted that Mainland China is relatively more conservative with regard to traditional gender roles attitudes (Wan-Ying 2016).

McGloin (1990) provides an overview of the research involving sentence-final particles in Japanese, which function similarly to the way they do in Mandarin in that they pragmatically mark the speaker's various sentiments and are minimally distinct from identical utterances which do not contain the sentence-final particle (McGloin 1990). Japanese sentence-final particles are also similar to Mandarin in that their usage is at times influenced by the gender identity of the speaker. The particles *zo* and *ze* are more strongly associated with forcefulness and masculinity, while the particles *wa* and *no* are viewed as more feminine. In a study of university students, Uyeno (1971) observed that participants mitigated their usage of sentence-final particles because of the associations these particles have with masculinity and femininity.

A study by Mulac et al (2013) analyzed the stylistic differences between men and women and their awareness of the stereotypicality of men's and women's speech, finding

---

<sup>3</sup> *Maanfa Tung* is a half-hour children's television program filmed in the 1980's which is known for being the first mainland Chinese television series to use everyday colloquial Cantonese. In total, female characters produced 30 *je*'s and 66 *jek*'s while males produced 55 *je*'s and 55 *jek*'s.

that there are style differences and that men and women are aware of the stereotypes associated with the opposite gender.

### **3. The Current Study**

#### 3.1 Aims of this Study

This study seeks to examine the correlations between the usage of sentence-final particles in Mandarin Chinese and the gender identity of the speaker. There are two main research questions. The first is to what extent gender plays a role in determining a speaker's usage of sentence-final particles. The second is about what differences are observed with regard to gender and the usage of specific sentence-final particles. This question is broken into two parts, namely: individuals of which gender use sentence-final particles more often and how women and men differ in their pragmatic employment of the same sentence-final particles. The investigation of frequency of usage looks at overall and relative token counts for sentence-final particles for each individual and for each gender grouping. By looking at the frequency and usage of these particles by men and women, one can construct a better picture of how these particles might reflect the role of identity in speech. These questions will be answered by observing the naturalistic speech of speakers of Standard Mandarin who use sentence-final particles in their speech. By analyzing natural data, the broader influence of gender on the usage of these particles becomes clearer.

#### 3.2 Hypotheses

Because sentence-final particles express pragmatic information about speaker attitude and are marked at the level of consciousness, gender is likely to influence the

overall usage of particles and the types which are employed in a given situation. Because sentence-final particles are generally regarded as part of informal speech (Simpson 2014) and are associated with femininity (Lin 2005, Dabney 2014), there is likely to be a greater overall presence of sentence-final particles in women's speech. Lin's observations of male and female salespeople revealed that the latter used four times as many particles (Lin 2005).

For individual sentence-final particles, Hu states that women use *ba* more (Dabney 2014, citing Hu 1981). Because of the results of these previous studies, it is hypothesized that women will be more likely to use the *ba* particle. In addition, because *ma* is considered a more forceful particle, expressing the belief of factuality and insistence on the part of the speaker (Dabney 2014), it will likely be used more often by men. Although previous research has not made this claim, it is generally accepted that gender role attitudes in Mainland China are more conservative (Wan-Ying 2016). This suggests more widespread acceptance of the usage of the *ma* particle by men. Such is the case of McGloin (1990), who found that Japanese particles associated with masculinity were also associated with forcefulness.

### 3.3 Methodology

To investigate this issue, the researcher gathered data on the usage of sentence-final particles by four men and four women who were guests on *The Jin Xing Show*, a popular talk show which airs in Mainland China. Jin Xing's show is like many talk shows in that it consists of a one-on-one casual chat between the host, Jin Xing, and her celebrity guest in front of a studio audience. Topics of discussion range from acting in movies and television,

gossip about other celebrities, and family matters. Jin Xing is known for pushing her guests into talking about their personal lives and creating a casual, highly informal atmosphere.

In the course of these interviews, guests who were native speakers of Mandarin Chinese made use of sentence-final particles. In total, 4 men and 4 women invited as guests on *The Jin Xing Show* in 2016 were chosen for this study. This investigation has two components, a quantitative analysis supplemented by a qualitative analysis. For the quantitative data, word counts and sentence-final particle counts were gathered for each guest to measure the prevalence of sentence-final particles in their speech and to determine which particles are used by which speakers.

For the qualitative analysis, the usage of five of the most common sentence-final particles discussed in other literature *a, ma, ba, le, and ne* is discussed in context as they are used by the guests. By looking at the real-world application of sentence-final particles, a comparison can be made with the findings of previous studies.

Variables which were taken into consideration include the guests' areas of origin and gender identity. Although it is not part of the analysis, guests' ages range from 36 to 50. They are all from Mandarin Chinese-speaking areas of China. Speakers from other provinces or from regions dominated by other varieties such as Cantonese were excluded. The primary variable of interest in this study is gender. The men and women who are observed in the study identify as men and women. It should also be noted that the host, Jin Xing, is a transgender woman. All interviews lasted 25 minutes.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Quantitative Results

Observations include counts for the number of words spoken in the interview and the number and type of sentence-final particles used. Word counts and sentence-final particle (SFP) counts are given in Table 2 below.

*Table 2. Speaker Word Counts and Particle Usage*

<b>Speaker</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Origin</b>	<b>Words</b>	<b># SFPs</b>	<b>% SFPs</b>
Xu Qing	48	W	Beijing	1,945	27	1.38%
Qin Hai Lu	39	W	Liaoning	2,319	58	2.5%
Xu Fan	50	W	Hubei	1,704	42	2.46%
Ma Su	36	W	Heilongjiang	1,902	36	1.89%
<i>Totals for Women</i>				<i>7,870</i>	<i>163</i>	<i>2.07%</i>
Liu Yijun	47	M	Shanxi	1,823	46	2.52%
Tong Da Wei	38	M	Liaoning	2,333	46	1.97%
Chen Kun	41	M	Chongqing	2,656	52	1.95%
Xia Yu	41	M	Shandong	2,518	47	1.86%
<i>Totals for Men</i>				<i>9,330</i>	<i>191</i>	<i>2.04%</i>

With regard to the word counts by individual speakers, men tended to have the highest word counts. The total number of words spoken was 17,200, with 9,330 words spoken by the four men and 7,870 words spoken by the four women. In total, 354 sentence-final particles were uttered in the interviews. Men used 191 sentence-final particles, an average of 2.04% of words uttered, and women used 163 sentence-final particles, an average of 2.07%. The overall average rate of sentence-final particles was 2.05% of uttered words

Sentence-final particle usage by individuals yielded a range of variation between 1.38% and 2.52%. Table 3 below contains information on the average usage of each particle by gender where percentages represent total percentages for men, women, or both respectively.

Table 3. Use of Particles by Gender

SFP	Usage by Women (%)	Usage by Men (%)	Total (%)
<i>a</i>	68 (41.71)	68 (36.17)	136 (38.41)
<i>ma</i>	13 (7.97)	34 (18.08)	47 (13.27)
<i>ba</i>	49 (30.06)	21 (11.17)	70 (19.77)
<i>le</i>	19 (11.65)	23 (12.23)	42 (11.86)
<i>ne</i>	14 (8.58)	42 (22.34)	56 (15.81)

Women used the sentence-final particles *a* and *ba* more frequently than men. The *a* particle was the most commonly employed sentence-final particle and this is unsurprising since it is quite frequent in everyday speech. Usage of *ba* aligns with Hu's (1981) findings that women use the *ba* particle more often. Thirty percent of women's sentence-final particles were *ba*, as opposed to 10.99% usage by men, placing it among the most frequently-used particles by women and the least used particle by men.

In men's speech, *ma*, *le*, and *ne* were more frequent than in women's speech. Because the *ma* particle is seen as more forceful, it was more likely to be found in men's speech, with 18.08% of the particles used by men being *ma*. Only 7.97% of the particles used by women were *ma*. This means that although *ma* is used by women, it isn't used as often as it is by men, and is in fact the least used particle by women overall. As for the particles *le* and *ne*, other than the prevalent usage of *ne* by Chen Kun, the distribution of usage between men and women is near the average for both. For both men and women, *a* was the most frequently used sentence-final particle. For men, the second most frequent particle was *ne*; for women, it was *ba*.

Table 4 provides information on the individual usage of sentence-final particles for each guest.

Table 4. Use of Sentence-Final Particles by Guest

Speaker	Age	Gender	<i>a</i>	<i>ma</i>	<i>ba</i>	<i>le</i>	<i>ne</i>	Other	Total
Xu Qing	48	W	10	3	5	9	1	0	27
Qin Hai Lu	39	W	33	4	13	2	6	0	58
Xu Fan	50	W	15	4	16	3	2	2	42
Ma Su	36	W	10	1	15	5	5	0	36
Liu Yijun	47	M	24	11	5	4	2	0	46
Tong Da Wei	38	M	26	0	4	5	9	2	46
Chen Kun	41	M	7	14	4	4	22	1	52
Xia Yu	41	M	11	9	8	10	9	0	47

Qin Hai Lu's usage of *a* is notable for how frequently it was used. High frequency of the *a* particle can be said to reflect her personality. This will be discussed further in the next section. Chen Kun's usage of *ne* is also notable. Chen Kun seemed to be using this particle more as a discourse marker than as a pragmatic expression of desire for further information. While others used the *ma* particle moderately, Ma Su and Tong Da Wei used it once and zero times, respectively.

#### 4.2 Qualitative Results

There are five examples which illuminate usage of these particles by individual speakers. The first is Qin Hai Lu's usage of the particle *a*, which often denotes an apparent difference in attitudes between speaker and addressee. Qin Hai Lu has a reputation of a diva, which she proudly exclaims through the course of her interview. Qin Hai Lu talks about the difficulty of being a student in the respected Central Academy of Drama in excerpt (1):

(1) ...*yinwei dajiahua dou chuqu jianzu a, jian daoyan a, zhao juben a, zhao jihui a*

...because everybody goes out to meet with groups **a**, meet with the director **a**, look for scripts **a**, look for any opportunities **a**

The usage of *a* here marks Qin Hai Lu's belief that the audience is not aware of and would likely underestimate the hard work that goes into being a student at the prestigious academy. Her reliance on the particle is to be expected, given her reputation as an outgoing, outspoken celebrity. She notably does not use *ma* here because this would be seen as too forceful and if repeated in the same manner as *a*, it would probably be seen as rude.

Another example of individual sentence-final particle usage is the use of *ma*, which expresses the speaker's belief that the addressee should be committed to the state of affairs, by Chen Kun. In excerpt (2), Chen Kun says directly to Jin Xing that he is not comfortable with her line of questioning, expressing his sincerity by including the *ma* particle:

(2) *Ni bu yao shuochu wo xinli haipa de shi ma.*

Please do not say those things which I fear from the bottom of my heart **ma!**

Chen Kun's playful usage of *ma* marks his sincerity without seeming overly serious. Chen Kun is being playful, requesting that Jin Xing no longer discuss the public's loss of interest in him in the future. While this is a serious problem for celebrities such as Chen Kun, he cannot ask her outright to stop talking about what she wants to discuss as this would be a violation of the host's rights. In this case, Chen Kun uses the *ma* particle to display playful anger with her and to add forcefulness to his request, which he knows Jin Xing is not obligated to heed.

One more significant observation is the use of *ba* as a politeness marker by Ma Su. Here, *ba* is inferred to be a politeness marker since Jin Xing does not have the ability to "agree" with Ma Su's response to her question. In this way, it is similar to tag questions in English such as "right" and "you know?" in that they fulfill the illocutionary purpose of confirming that the speaker and hearer agree. In excerpt (3), Jin Xing asks Ma Su when she

filmed a particular movie and, in her response, Ma Su uses the *ba* particle which is often used to solicit agreement from the interlocutor:

(3) *Jin Xing: Shenme shihou yan?*  
*Ma Su: Yinggai shi 2016 nian 6 fen ba.*

Jin Xing: And when did you film it?  
Ma Su: Maybe it was in June 2016 **ba**.

Ma Su does the same thing in excerpt (4):

(4) *Jin Xing: Na shi ershi ji?*  
*Ma Su: Wo dangshi shi daxue yinianji, yinggai shi 21 sui ba.*

Jin Xing: You were 20 then?  
Ma Su: At that time, I was a freshman in college, I might have been 21 **ba**.

In both of these cases, Ma Su is not making a suggestion to Jin Xing. Rather, she is answering a direct question for which she may or may not have a clear answer.

The particle *le* is utilized mostly to express a change in affairs. An example of such usage is seen in the speech of Liu Yijun in excerpt (5):

(5) *Liu Yijun: Hu Ge laoshuo “laoshi, laoshi, laoshi”, suoyi tamen jiu genzhe han “laoshi”*  
*le*

Liu Yijun: Hu Ge always would say “teacher, teacher, teacher”, so they started calling me “teacher” **le**

Liu Yijun uses *le* here to show that as a result of the character Hu Ge always addressing him as “teacher” on the television program he was on, it caught on among his fans and they started to use “teacher” as a special nickname for him.

One further observation that has been made in the course of analyzing these interviews is that, in fact, sentence-final particles do not occur exclusively in sentence-final

position. At times, *ne*, which usually denotes that the speaker and hearer are both committed to a state of affairs which is contradicted by the current context, is used after the topic and followed by a comment in sentences with topic-comment structure. It has been shown previously that in some instances, *ne* can follow a noun phrase (Lu 2005). Excerpt (6) contains an example of this particle used sentence-medially by Chen Kun.

(6) *Chen Kun: shenme ne, wo dou buzhidao shou shenme.*

Chen Kun: And what **ne**, I don't even know what.

Forty-two percent of Chen Kun's particles were *ne*. When the particle *ne* is used in this example, the purpose is requesting further information on a topic which is stated and immediately followed by *ne*, and then followed by further information, seemingly addressing or anticipating the interlocutor's request. This usage of *ne* by Chen Kun is addressed further in the Discussion section. This usage shows that it is worth exploring sentence-final particles as discourse markers and the gendered usage of these items in future research.

## 5. Discussion

In general, men and women used sentence-final particles in their speech at about a comparable rate, which contradicts findings by Lin (2005) that female salespersons use sentence-final particles four times more often than male salespersons. This could be an effect of the contexts, i.e., engaging in sales pitches and engaging in conversation on a talk show. Despite the similarity in the overall usage, hierarchical frequency differences for specific particles can be observed between gender groups, which matches the findings of Uyeno (1971) in Japanese and Chan (1999) in Cantonese. With regard to individual

sentence-final particles, *a*, *le*, and *ne*, usage was about the same between gender groups. These particles seem not to be influenced by the gender identity of the speaker, with exception to Chen Kun's usage of *ne*, which is discussed below. The particles *ba* and *ma* seemed to be influenced by gender, with *ba* used more frequently by women and *ma* used more frequently by men. This is similar to Chan's finding that *jek* was used twice as often by women. It was also observed that these particles are respectively the least used by the opposite gender. This supports the hypothesis that the particles most strongly associated with politeness and forcefulness would be marked for usage based on gender, as observed in Chan 1999 and McGloin 1990.

It is worth taking a moment to address Chen Kun's usage of *ne*. The closest approximation to this usage as described in literature is in Lu 2005, where *ne* is used following an interrogative statement to denote that the speaker and addressee both expect the question to be answered. In this case, Chen Kun is using *ne* not at the end of an interrogative statement but does seem to be signaling to his addressee that the topic preceding *ne* will be addressed. Nowhere else in the previous literature on this particle discusses this usage of *ne*. I suspect that Chen Kun is using *ne* in an innovative way, based on the more conventional usage of *ne*. Future research could investigate this usage in particular as well as the phenomenon of using sentence-final particles in an alternative syntactic position.

## **6. Conclusion**

Overall, this study on sentence-final particles in Mandarin Chinese provides support for their gendered usage. Not only does it find that men and women use sentence-

final particles at a comparable rate, it also provides some evidence that some sentence-final particles are more influenced by gender than others. This marking is reflective of wider social expectations about the language tools men and women use to express what they mean.

This study constructed a corpus of natural language data from native Mandarin Chinese speakers in order to observe correlations between the usage of sentence-final particles and the gender of the speaker. Such a study contributes to the work that has been done on the links between gender and pragmatic use of language. It also provides a basis for future studies that look at the links between language and gender in Chinese. Some of the limitations of this study include the inability to control for age and origin of the celebrity guests as well as the potential effects of the gender identity of the talk show host, Jin Xing. Jin Xing uses many sentence-final particles in her own speech and the effect of her own gender identity (that of a transgender woman) was not taken into account. A future study could look at Jin Xing's own sentence-final particle usage based on the gender of her interlocutor as well as mutual accommodation between Jin Xing and her guest. However, it is difficult to determine the exact aims of speakers when using sentence-final particles, because pragmatic goals need to be inferred, and this greatly complicates the coding of particle usage. A more thorough future investigation might be able to unveil some of the less clear phenomena in the data.

Future research will more thoroughly track the usage of *ba* and *ma* by men and women and will explore other varieties of Chinese as well. This investigation has expanded knowledge of not only the real-world usage of sentence-final particles but also the effects of gender on language in Mandarin Chinese.

## References

- Austin, J. (1962). *How to Do Things with Words*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Chan, M. (1999). Sentence-Final Particles in Cantonese: A Gender-linked study and survey. *Eleventh North American Conference on Chinese Linguistics (NACCL 11)* (18-20 June 1999, Harvard University). Compiled by Baozhang He and Wenzhe Hu. Cambridge: East Asian Language Programs, Harvard University. 87-101.
- Dabney, N. (2014). *The influence of discourse particles on listeners' perception of speakers in Mandarin*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University; Ann Arbor: ProQuest, UMI Dissertations Publishing, 2014.
- Fraser, B. (1996). Pragmatic markers. *Pragmatics* 6. 167–90.
- Grice, P. (1975). Logic and conversation. In Peter Cole and Jerry L. Morgan (eds), *Syntax and Semantics Volume 3: Speech Acts*. New York: Academic Press. 41-58.
- Hu, M. (1981).北京話的語氣助詞和嘆詞 (Modal particles and interjections in the Beijing dialect). *中國語文 [Chinese Language]*. 5/6. 347-350. 416-423.
- Lin, H. (2005). *Contextualizing linguistic politeness in Chinese - a socio-pragmatic approach with examples from persuasive sales talk in Taiwan Mandarin*. Retrieved from <https://etd.ohiolink.edu/>.
- Lu, W. (2005). Sentence-Final Particles as Attitude Markers in Mandarin Chinese. *Dissertation Abstracts International, Section A: The Humanities And Social Sciences*, 66. (12). 4371.
- McGloin, N. (1990). Sex difference and sentence-final particles. *Aspects of Japanese Women's Language*. Tōkyō : Kurosio, 1990. 23-41.
- Mulac, A., H. Giles, & J. Bradac. (2013). The gender-linked language effect: An empirical test of a general process. *Language Sciences* 38. 22-31.
- Searle, J. (1969). *Speech Acts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Simpson, A. (2014). *Sentence-Final Particles, The handbook of Chinese linguistics*. First Edition. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Wan-Ying, Y. (2016). Differences in Gender-Role Attitudes between China and Taiwan. *Asian Women / Asian Women*. 73.

[SMG 上海电视台官方频道 SMG Shanghai TV Official Channel]. 2016 Season. *The Jin Xing Show* Retrieved from [https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL4h4SEPdxAGyR\\_4gYNv4pfbtC\\_NKrxBW8](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL4h4SEPdxAGyR_4gYNv4pfbtC_NKrxBW8)