Research on language and gender interaction is well into its third decade and yet there have been surprisingly few contributions from the Chinese language to the explosion of cross-linguistic literature on the topic. This paper brings together both scattered observations and detailed published works on Chinese to provide a preliminary report on gender differences in the Chinese language.

1. Introduction

In the general linguistic literature, hundreds of popular and academic treatises have been published on language and gender since the early 1970’s in the United States, prompted by the women’s movement. For the Chinese language and its dialects, during that period and into the 1980’s, scant attention was paid to gender-differentiated speech aside from language variation research, in which sex is an important independent variable (e.g. Shen 1987). Studies devoted specifically to issues involving language and gender were rare. Notable exceptions include Light (1982), probably the very first to approach the subject and primarily on Cantonese; Shih (1984), the first general overview (in Chinese); and Farris (1988), the second overview (in English). These early studies paved the way for subsequent exploration into gender-related differences in Chinese. This paper’s aim is to give a short report on some earlier and recent findings, including the author’s, of sex-based differences at different levels of linguistic structure in the Chinese language. Section 2 reports on gender differences observed with respect to the phonetics and phonology of the language. Section 3 deals with the lexical level, both with respect to differences in vocabulary choice between men and women, and gender-differentiated vocabulary items about men and women. Section 4 concentrates on syntax and pragmatics. Section 5 concludes with a preview of new research in gender differences in conversational interaction in Chinese. This report focuses on standard (Mandarin) Chinese, with side references to Cantonese.

* This paper is a much expanded version of my NACCL-9 talk in May 1997. My thanks to Cat Farris, Shou-hsin Teng, and Sam Wang, among others, for helping me obtain some sources.
2. Phonetics and Phonology

There have been numerous observations of speech differences between men and women. The most fundamental difference is the average pitch of voice of females versus males that is largely, but not entirely, due to differences in the vocal anatomy. Much of the differences in pitch of voice between the sexes is socially learned. While there is a great deal of overlap between males and females in their pitch range, speakers use only a small part of that range.¹ Cross-cultural studies, for example, show that pitch and voice quality vary from culture to culture. Majewski (1972) reports the average speaking pitch of 103 Polish men to be 137.6 Hz, whereas that of a comparable (though much smaller) group of American men was 118.9 Hz. Loveday’s (1981) study compares the average pitch of voice used by Japanese and (British) English men and women. There is a dramatic difference in the average pitch of Japanese men and women, with women’s voices reaching as high as 400 Hz. Nonetheless, the latter’s high pitch has been dropping significantly in recent years (Kristof 1995).

Comparable studies are not available for pitch differences between Chinese men and women. The average pitch of Chinese female voices has probably dropped somewhat during the past few decades. At the same time, there may be pitch differences associated with different socio-cultural contexts for women, with formal situations, such as public speaking, dictating a slightly higher overall pitch and clearer enunciation. Different pitch ranges may also be operative for female bilingual speakers, with a higher, overall pitch and larger pitch range for speaking Chinese versus a non-tone language such as English. Future research is needed for a systematic investigation into these proposals.

While information is lacking on what is the average pitch of Chinese males and females, for speakers of (standard) Mandarin Chinese, Professor Chin-chuan Cheng’s (1995) software, Speech Analysis for Windows, can very accurately identify the sex of the speaker. The sex-identification capability of the program is based on analyzing F0’s along the time dimension in a given stretch of recorded speech and obtaining an average fundamental frequency (F0, perceived as pitch) for that sequence. From his test with numerous Mandarin speakers during the development of his software program, he arrives at the ultimate selection of 150 Hz as the F0 that distinguishes male and female Mandarin speakers. A speaker’s utterance of Mandarin that yields an average above 150 Hz would be identified by the software as the speech of a female speaker, and anything at or below 150 Hz would be identified as that of a male speaker.²

¹ Studies on gender differences that are socially learned and not attributable to anatomical differences between the sexes are reported in Smith (1979:123ff), Graddol and Swann (1989:18ff), and Coates (1993:146ff), among others.
² Professor C.C. Cheng’s pitch of voice ranges from 90 to 170 Hz in speaking Mandarin. His average is usually around 130 Hz (e-mail of 8/25/97), which would be unambiguously identified as ‘Male.’ Where his software have made errors in judgment, so have humans.
Aside from average pitch differences, there are other pronunciation differences between Chinese men and women. Lehman et al. (1975:35), for instance, reported on the American Linguistics Delegation that visited the People’s Republic of China in late 1974, and noted that while very few speakers had mastered the standard pronunciation of Putonghua, those who did fell into three groups: (1) some university professors, (2) some female high school teachers of Chinese, trained in Beijing, and (3) female guides as at museums and exhibition halls. Thus, on the whole, women were generally more sensitive to the prestige standard pronunciation than men, exhibiting patterns that are found in the U.S. and other countries (James 1996). In contrast, those who paid least attention to the standard pronunciation were younger men who were leading members of Revolutionary Committees in charge of educational institutions. It appears that men with position and authority may be in less need of elevating their status by learning correct, standard pronunciation. The power and prestige of China’s national leaders have never been diminished because of strongly accented Putonghua. There may well be covert prestige for men of status not to spend hours trying to master standard Chinese pronunciation.

A particular style of speaking and pose from the Cultural Revolution period was also noted by the Delegation (Lehman et al. 1975:35):

(1) The precision of articulation of many of these female speakers was quite striking, and was associated with a very erect posture, compressed lips, and a bright, serious and earnest expression. It is worth noting that almost all announcers in China are women, who use a similar clipped and forcefully articulated style over the radio, and at stage performances; this style is imitated by little girls who announce school plays and dances.

In Chan (1996), noted in connection with sound symbolism are two other cases of feminine speech style in Beijing Mandarin. One is Hu’s (1991a) observation that school girls in Beijing possesses what he dubs a ‘feminine accent’ (女國音); that is, these girls produce the palatal series [t̚, ʈ̚’, ɕ] as dental sibilants [ts, ts’, s], or as more fronted palatals. Hu (p.51) explains that “fronted palatals and dentals sound more ‘fragile’ and ‘piercing’ to Chinese ears, and so more ‘feminine’, while alveolars tend to be more ‘blunt’ and ‘masculine.’” Hu (p.53) further remarks, “the requirement for girls and young women to display good manners by avoiding laughing and talking with their mouths wide open.” Thus, socially, girls need to be lady-like, and this is accomplished by producing a more feminine form of articulation. The more fronted articulation produces a sound with higher acoustic frequency, thereby adding to an already higher average pitch of voice for females in general.3

3 A somewhat similar gender difference may also be present in the production of affricates in Cantonese. Hashimoto (1972:120, fn.8) mentions D.C. Lau of the University of London, who has observed that male speakers tend to palatalize [ts] and [t’s] more than female speakers.
The second study is Shen’s (1987) sociolinguistic investigation of syllable onset, /w/. The labial approximant, [w], is one of the phonetic realizations of /w/, another is the labiodental approximant, [v]. Shen’s large-scale variation study reveals that [v] is used significantly more frequently by female speakers than by male speakers. This variant, [v], which is in Beijing speech and not in Putonghua, is produced with spread lips, and the teeth and lower lip closer together. The sound thus produced has higher acoustic frequency than the plain labial approximant, [w], which is produced with lip-rounding and lip protrusion. The [v] variant, which generally occurs in syllables wei, wen, weng, and optionally in wan (Hu 1991b), is undoubtedly perceived as more feminine and may have contributed to its emulation elsewhere in the country, including southern China in Guangzhou. While the labiodental variant is often used by female news broadcasters in China, male news broadcasters sometimes use it, also.

Interestingly, in Taiwan as well, one frequently hears news broadcasters using [v] in their speech, and this is typically (though not exclusively) produced by females. Such production is not accidental, as one trainee for television news broadcasting in Taiwan recalls. In her news broadcasting class at TTV in 1989, trainees were separated by sex, with female trainees taught by female instructors (and presumably male trainees taught by male instructors). In her all-female class, the trainees were asked to repeat and imitate their instructor, who used [v] in such words as yi wan 一萬 ‘ten thousand’ and xinwen 新聞 ‘news’. Those who pronounced such words using the plain labial approximant, [w], were corrected by her. The instructor had consciously used the [v] variant in those phonological contexts where she wanted the trainees to do likewise. In Taiwan and mainland China, news broadcasters are often females. Shih (1984:224) attributes the greater use of female announcers to their more standard pronunciation and clearer enunciation. In the United States and other English-speaking countries, in contrast, national news broadcasters are typically male, the reason undoubtedly being that for covering world news, male figures exude solemnity and authority. In fact, radio and television announcers tend to have a pitch of voice that is lower than the general population in order for them to sound authoritative (Ohala 1994:327). For Chinese female news broadcasters, they compensate by speaking with steadier pitch (less pitch fluctuations) and in a lower and deeper voice in announcing the news (Shih 1984:225).

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4 News broadcasters as well as ordinary women are imitating the sound. In the Cantonese television weekly series, *Maahnfa Tung* (Kaleidoscope) produced in Guangzhou (Chan forthcoming), in one of the episodes, one young adult female speaker’s greeting on the telephone was “Wai, wai” (in high rising tone), said with [v] onset, which is not part of Cantonese phonology. In fact, the greeting, wai, in Guangzhou and Hong Kong Cantonese also has a high front vowel variant, wei, that generally only young females use (Jian (1994/1996:137).

5 Thanks go to Lin Huey (e-mail of 8/25/97), who further remarked that in 1992, when she was in a training program for Chinese-English interpreters, “one of our instructors also made this obvious distinction. She was working for the largest radio broadcasting company in Taiwan [at the time].”
Gender differences in pronunciation may also be studied in association with a particular communication style, such as *sajiao* (撒嬌), analyzed by Farris (1995) in present-day Taiwan’s setting. The *sajiao* style, which she describes as “the adorable petulance of a spoiled child or young woman who seeks material or immaterial benefit from an unwilling listener,” is analyzed as being marked for the feminine gender. Farris (p.16) reports on a friend’s observation of a very nasal style in young unmarried women’s use of *sajiao* with their boyfriends. Farris argues that the *sajiao* style indicates women’s indirect and informal power in Chinese society; at the same time, it serves as a means to create and maintain that form of power. For her general description of feminine speech at the phonological level, Farris (p.16-17) translates Shih (1984:224), excerpted in (2) below. Shih, who considers gender differences to be most salient at the phonological level, provides a description that is based on introspection, observations, as well as data collected from dormitories of male and female students in Taipei:

(2) The standard man’s voice … is inclined toward the low and heavy, thick and strong, while the standard woman’s voice is inclined toward the young and immature, warm and respectful, sometimes having bashful overtones or even a petulant air (*sajiao*).6… Moreover, the more a woman’s voice emphasizes natural and artificial feminine qualities, giving an impression of tenderness and warmth, the more it lacks authority. Whereas, a man’s voice, which is low and deep, steady and calm, gives the impression of authority.

On the question of *sajiao* specifically, Zhang (1995) prefers the definition in the *Modern Chinese Dictionary* (Beijing: Commercial Press, 1979), namely, “to deliberately act like a spoiled child in front of someone because of the awareness of the other person’s affection”. Zhang observes that in both mainland China and Taiwan, *sajiao* is a communication style that is typically used by children to their parents (to refuse things demanded of them or to get permission to do things prohibited by them), and by adults to their lovers or spouses (as a kind of romantic play). Of particular importance here is that Zhang identifies two additional features of *sajiao* speech, namely, the prolongation of the vowels and “softening” of the consonants. Vowel lengthening is self-explanatory. For consonant softening, she describes three manners of articulation that would produce this. One, aspirated consonants may be articulated with less (i.e., weaker) aspiration so that the aspirated-unaspirated distinction becomes blurred. Two, the contact between two articulators may be softer (less abrupt, perhaps?). Three, the contact between articulators may be shorter in duration. Zhang also notes that this consonant softening effect is most apparent with the dental

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6 Shih (p.224) also mentions in an aside that the *sajiao* style is used in particular with the father or sweetheart. (The *sajiao* style is frequently acted out in television series produced in Taiwan.)
sibilants, [ts], [ts’] and [s] (i.e. the aim is to reduce the stridency of these sibilants to make them sound less harsh – mc).

Often accompanying saijiao is the sentence-final particle, ma 嘛, a particle that is used to “soften” the tone of an utterance and is generally regarded as more typical of women’s speech. (It should not be confused with the grammatical particle, ma 嗎, used in yes-no interrogative sentences.) In the saijiao style, the entire sentence is uttered slowly and when ma is added, the syllable is nasalized and noticeably lengthened. As Shen (1995) observes, such manner of pronunciation may be scorned as unmanly when it is produced in public by males, and given the derisive label of niangniangqiang 娘腔腔 ‘womanish, womanish accent.’ The scorn is shown in (3) from Shen (with glosses added here). (3b) was originally produced by Shen’s room-mate, who had also dismissed the male caller as someone untrustworthy, based solely on hearing him over the telephone.

(3) a. Bié kū le! Dà nánrén zěnme kēyī zhème niángniángqiāng?
   don’t cry PRT! big male-person how can this-way womanish-accent
   ‘Stop crying! How can you, a big male, be so womanish?!’

   b. Gāngcái diànhuàlǐ nàge rénde niángniángqiāng zhēn ràng rén shòu bù liáo.
   just-now phone-in that-CL person-PRT womanish make person endure not PRT
   ‘That person just on the phone’s womanish speech is really unbearable!’

Niangniangqiang speech, as noted by Shen, is marked with high pitch and thinness of voice quality. It is a style that one normally associates with female speech and is not stereotypically male speech, which has lower pitch and deeper resonances. Adding of the “softener” ma particle with vowel lengthening and nasalization only further mocks such speech as womanish. Men do occasionally produce sentences with this ma particle, as it is by no means gender-exclusive. However, a man using it too frequently would certainly raise eye-brows, as in a case reported to the author of native speakers’ amusement when a young man who had learned Chinese from his girlfriend loaded his sentences with ma!

It is worth noting that native speakers from the PRC have remarked on Taiwanese men sounding more effeminate than those on the mainland. For example, one female student who had never met anyone from Taiwan and only heard them over the telephone when they called long-distance to her father, identified some features that made these speakers sound effeminate to her: the Taiwanese men were very polite, spoke slowly and enunciated very distinctly, and delivered sentences with rising intonation where PRC males would not have.7 Thus, the more prototypical male speech should be relatively quicker in tempo than women’s speech rate; their voices should be deep and low-pitched; their intonation should be flatter, steadier, and falling rather than rising. These characteristics combined together contribute to

7 This observation was made by a graduate student during my trip to China in summer 1996.
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the perception of speech that is manly, spoken with authority, confidence, and decisiveness. It is not a wonder that grown men speaking in public with heavy nasalization, high pitch, slow speech rate and thin voice quality, as in saijiao or whining, would be scorned as being niangniangqiang, and deemed untrustworthy.8 Stereotypical Chinese male speech is succinct, direct, confident, and definite, in contradistinction to stereotypical women’s speech (Shih 1984:221).

The above only scratches the surface of what we still need to learn about gender differences in speech production, as well as gender differences in attitudes toward prestige forms and particular manner of speaking by males versus females.9 Farris (1991:201) aptly states that cultural stereotypes play a crucial role in developing and maintaining gender differences, and that speech stereotypes in particular serve to characterize the way that native speakers perceive how men and women normally speak. These stereotypes reinforce what is expected of speakers and the roles they play in society. Much is yet unclear as to the degree to which speech stereotypes reflect actual language use, and to what extent the two diverge. Nor do we have a clear idea of what cultural differences may exist with respect to how well stereotypes accurately reflect gender differences in language use. There may, for instance, be stronger pressure in the Chinese environment for individuals to conform to social expectations, such that stereotypical behavior as cultural norms may dictate language behavior to a greater extent in Chinese society than in western, English-speaking society. Issues such as these do not find any quick, ready answer, and will be equally relevant in the following sections, even though they will not actually be raised.

3. Lexicon

In studying the lexicon, it is useful to distinguish gender differences in vocabulary usage on the one hand, and gender-differentiated vocabulary about men and women on the other, even though the distinction may often be blurred. Two traditional disciplinary areas where gender differences in vocabulary are studied are anthropology and historical linguistics. The former often deals with naming, kinship terms, and terms of address and reference, and the latter studies lexical change over time, addressing some of the social, cultural, and political forces that have led to semantic shifts and major changes in vocabulary choice. Much have been written on gender differences in language use and vocabulary about the two sexes from both anthropological and historical linguistic perspectives, although not necessarily with gender differences as the focus.

8 For English, noteworthy is the case of Margaret Thatcher, former British Prime Minister, who needed to improve her public image by taking training lessons both to lower her average pitch and to reduce her pitch range, in addition to keeping a steady pitch (Romaine 1994:105).
9 Cf. Lung (1997) on pre-1997 research results, based on a 1994 study, that suggest women in Hong Kong leading in acceptance and positive attitudes toward Putonghua, the non-local, prestigious language norm. Interestingly, Bourgerie’s (1990) variation study of Cantonese finds women in Hong Kong tending toward innovative, non-prestige forms in the local dialect.
For vocabulary differences between men and women, Chinese does not differ much from other languages in finding it socially more acceptable for men to use profanity and taboo words than it is for women to do so. This is due at least in part to society’s expectation for women to be polite and to refrain from strong outburst of their emotions. Furthermore, Shih (1984:219) notes that use of profanity and taboo words would lower a woman’s social status. The same would hold true for slang, although perhaps to a lesser extent. One would not be surprised to find in Beijing, for example, more slang expressions invented and used by young men than by young women. Chinese society expects women to be polite when they speak, as noted by (Hong 1997:205), and when they do, they should not speak loudly, and their expressions should be refined and elegant. Men, in contrast, are not bound by such social prescriptions. Nonetheless, whether females are politer than males cannot be answered without also taking into consideration such factors as the particular situation and the relative social rank of the interlocutors, as Hong (1997) shows in her study, with requests made under different social and interpersonal contexts.10

China has traditionally drawn a sharp division between males and females and their roles in society. Gender-differentiated speech is but one manifestation; one area in which this can be seen is in the complex network of kinship terms of address. The Chinese system of kinship terms of reference and address takes such variables as sex, generation, and lineage into consideration, so that one differentiates one’s mother from one’s father, or an older sister from a younger one, and so forth. Usually, the sex of the speaker does not enter into terms of address in modern Chinese (but see Feng 1937 for some cases in Chinese history). However, Chao (1956/76:339) has noted the possibility of women using mm, the weak form of women 我們 ‘we, us’, more frequently than men. Of greater interest to Chao is the practice of teknonymy, in which a person addresses another as if s/he were a generation lower, as in a woman addressing her parents-in-law as gonggong 公公 and popo 婆婆. However, he notes the declining practice of teknonymy by married women and its replacement by the adoption of the husband’s terms of address for other relations as well as for his parents.11

Chao (1956/72:314) also mentions a special use of the third person singular, ta 他, that had in earlier times been used by women to refer to their husband (and less frequently the other way around): “a woman would hem and haw, and by the way ta ‘he’ was mentioned with studied casualness, quite out of context or connection, a hearer would understand at once that it was her husband she was referring to.” How a woman refers to her husband—or calls him—has changed over the years in response to different social, geographical, political, and ideological settings. The same holds true for a man’s terms of address for his wife, as well as others.

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10 See also Pan (1995), in which official rank outweighs age and gender in the use of politeness strategies in verbal interaction. Cantonese data for the study are collected in Foshan, Guangdong.

11 The practice of teknonymy is also cited in Shih (1984:219), together with other observations.
The first-person use of renjia 人家 that is almost exclusively used by females and within certain restricted interactional contexts also merits attention. In the context of Taiwan, at least, renjia is discussed by Farris (1995:15, 156 fn.5) in connection with saijiao communication style. It is noted by Shih (1984:219) as a form that females use to refer to themselves, as they seldom use the pronoun, wo 我 ‘I, me.’ F.Y. Chao (1995), who identifies renjia as “the most prominent gender-related pronoun in modern Chinese,” offers a different analysis from Farris, who treats renjia as being used by young girls who are too shy to use the unmarked first person pronoun. Chao proposes, instead, that renjia is not only used by young girls but also by female adults, in that the word renjia carries with it the social marker of femininity, and is thus not determined or limited by age or social status. She argues that women then choose renjia as the first-person pronoun when they want to increase their femininity to be more attractive, or to convince or suggest others to yield. Hence, if a man uses renjia to refer to himself, he would be called niangniangqiang ‘womanish’; and if a boy uses it to refer to himself, he would be corrected. The only occasion in which a man would use renjia to refer to himself is if he were deliberating imitating women’s speech.

In her study, Chao (1995) presents an insightful analysis of females’ selection of renjia (as opposed to the regular pronoun, wo), as due to society’s expectation that women be indirect. In the process of making such a choice, it also expresses to some degree an uncertainty on the part of the speaker as to what she is talking about, in contrast to stereotypical male speech, which is direct, succinct, and to the point.

Chao further identifies three social functions of renjia as a gender-marked pronoun. One is intimacy, for indicating the close relationship between speakers, as in conversations between mother and daughter, between best friends, or between spouses. The second is subordination, which typically, though not always, involves the speaker as the relatively powerless participant in the conversation. The third social function is self-identity, since renjia is used only by females and the referent is also female only.

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

12 For Cantonese, Chan’s (forthcoming) study of the naturally-produced corpus of je and jek sentence-final particles reveals that females use je and jek (and especially jek) more frequently than males do. A full-scale study will likely show that females use SFPs more often than males.
indicate greater politeness and nonassertiveness.” The difference between (4a) and (4b) below, from Light (p.29), is a contrast between the use of o in (4a) to conclude polite formulaic phrases, and ó with rising pitch in (4b), which Light regards as almost *de rigeur* for a woman to use in polite society.13

(4) a. Wáng Xiāngshēng, bié kèqì, o! b. Wáng Xiāngshēng, bié kèqì, ó!
   Wang Mr. neg-imp. polite part. ‘Don’t be polite, Mr. Wang.’
   ‘Don’t be polite, Mr. Wang.’

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

Besides its use as a hedge in discourse, *ba* has also been described as a SFP that is used to soften the tone of speech, making it less blunt, or less definite, in interrogatives and imperatives.14 The use of SFPs to soften an otherwise bare statement, question, or request can readily be seen as a politeness strategy that women might employ more than men, in response to prescribed social norms for women in Chinese culture.

Shih (1984:221) mentions that women uses a great deal of SFPs and interjections. She (p.219, 221) identifies such sentence-final particles as *ma* 嘛, *ya* 呀, *ne* 呢, *la* 啦, and *ye* 耶 as ones that are more frequently used by women. With respect to interjections, these include *aiyo* 哎喲 and *aiya* 哎呀.

Shih (1984:219) also discusses other gender-marked expressions, such as *sigui* 死鬼 (literally ‘dead ghost’), *taoyan* 討厭 ‘(how) annoying’, and *wode ma ya* 我的媽呀 Heavens!’ (literally, ‘my mother’).15 She emphasizes that such expressions as these (including

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13 Light (1982:29) also gives Cantonese counterparts with ho corresponding to o in Mandarin (4a) and rising tone on hó corresponding to ó in Mandarin in (4b).

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

15 Concerning the word, *sigui* 死鬼, Debbie Yuching Knicely informs the author that women in Taiwan generally use it only as a scolding term for referring to their husbands, such as in complaining to friends about their husband having gotten drunk again the night before. She further notes that it tends to be used more by women in the older generation, especially those from mainland China. She treats *Wode ma ya!* 我的媽呀 as an expression used by both sexes, and considers *Wode tian a!* 我的天啊! ‘Oh heavens!’ (literally, ‘my sky/heaven’) the one that females often use and not men.
interjections and sentence-final particles mentioned above), are not gender-exclusive. However, she cautions that a man who uses such gender-marked expressions too frequently would be laughed at as being niangniangqiang. Public ridicule of this kind is surely the most effective deterrent, providing social pressure to ensure the maintenance of a sharp distinction between the sexes in the use gender-differentiated speech forms.

A number of authors (e.g., Shih 1984, Farris 1988, Tan 1990) have commented on deprecatory terms used to describe or refer to women in traditional China’s patriarchal society through the centuries. Thus, it is noteworthy that in post-1949 mainland China, in the spirit of egalitarianism, the Chinese government abolished such discriminatory expressions as nüzi wucai bianshi de 女子無才便是德 ‘a woman is virtuous when she is incapable’ (Tai 1975:237).

Although terms and expressions that reflect strong sexist bias are slowly disappearing in modern Chinese settings, more deeply entrenched in the language are compounds that still reflect the historical placement of males’ worth above that of females. This can be gleaned from the male-female sequence of constituents in such compounds as fumu 父母 ‘father and mother, parents.’ Prosodically, with respect to the historical four-tone categories of Ping, Shang, Qu, and Ru (平上去入), Qu precedes Shang in fumu, and not the preferred prosodic sequence of Shang before Qu that one regularly finds in established coordinate compounds (cf. Ting 1969, Lien 1989). In other words, the semantic constraint of ‘male-before-female’ takes precedence over a competing, prosodic one in the compound, fumu. These cases argue strongest for a sexist bias in the sequence of the components. Still, age or generation might also be an underlying semantic factor in the sequence. This is more clearly shown in xiongdi 兄弟 ‘older and younger brother, brothers’ and in munü 母女 ‘mother and daughter,’ where the constituents within the compounds differ in age and/or generation but not in gender.

In other compounds involving gender, where the constituents share the same tone category, as in fuqi 夫妻 ‘husband and wife’ and zinü 子女 ‘sons and daughters, (one’s) children,’ semantics – which places males before females – plays a key role in determining the order, without need to compete with prosodic constraints. It is significant that one does not find many cases of a reversed order, yinyang 陰陽 ‘yin and yang’, at least when one considers semantics only. In cases where prosody and semantics converge, as in nannü

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16 In coordinate compounds with both constituents in Ping tone, the syllable with a voiceless (qing 清) initial typically precedes that with a voiced (zhuo 濁) initial (Ting 1969). The sequence of the constituents in yinyang 陰陽 ‘yin and yang’, a historically well-established compound, obeys this phonological constraint of ‘qing-before-zhuo,’ and not the semantic one of ‘male-before-female.’ In adding ‘qing-before-zhuo’ as a further phonological constraint on ordering of constituents within well-established coordinate compounds, a reconsideration of zinü 子女 ‘sons and daughters’ is needed. While both syllables are in Shang tone, the two constituents differ in that zi 子 has a qing initial and nü 女 a zhuo one, so that phonologically, the sequence is ‘qing-before-zhuo.’ If we take historical phonology into consideration, it would be more appropriate to treat zinü as a convergence of
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男女 ‘male and female,’ ernü ‘sons and daughters, (one’s) children,’ and fufu ‘husband and wife,’ where Ping (or ‘Even’) precedes non-Ping (or ‘Oblique’ Ze) tone, semanatics is not the sole basis for determining the sequence. Examples such as these are weakest as evidence for male dominance being reflected in the language.

This section closes with a few comments on gender-marked language with respect to terms of address and personal names. This topic has been well studied (cf. Tai 1976; Sung 1981; Hong-Fincher 1987, 1992; Farris 1988; Lin 1988, etc.). Examples that have been discussed include multiple terms of social identity and address for females (xiaojie ‘Miss,’ taitai ‘Mrs.,’ furen ‘Madam,’ nüshi ‘Ms.’) that reflect social and marital status, as well age (e.g., one could consider a young school girl a xiaojie but not nüshi) versus one term only for males (xiansheng ‘Mr.’). The implications of such asymmetry is noted within a theory of marking by Shih (1984), and pursued in greater detail by Farris (1988), in her study of gender differences reflected in the script and lexicon. Included are cases of overt gender-marking with nü ‘female’ preceding terms for occupations that have traditionally been male-dominated and thus are covertly marked <+masculine> (e.g. (nü) yisheng ‘(woman) doctor’).

On gender-marking, Lin’s (1988) book on choosing a name for one’s newborn baby may be of linguistic interest for studying which Chinese characters she identifies as names for boys, and which as names for girls. In her corpus of over 900 Chinese characters, she marks those characters that are appropriate for males with ‘M’ and those for females with ‘F.’ Characters that she views as gender-neutral and may be used for either sex are left unmarked. Examples of characters that are marked exclusively for use in males’ names include: hao ‘great, vast,’ long ‘dragon,’ and yao ‘shine.’ Examples of characters for female-exclusive name are: bi ‘green jade,’ he ‘lotus,’ and ting ‘graceful.’ And lastly, gender-neutral characters for names include: hua ‘splendid,’ jing ‘refined, wen ‘refined,’ and zhi ‘ideal.’ With mainland China taking a more egalitarian approach during the latter half of this century, the traditionally-marked feminine names are less frequently used, so that a person’s sex often cannot be decided from simply studying the name. This contrasts with Chinese communities that still embrace a more traditional outlook, where the ideals of femininity and masculinity are intimately linked to name selection.

4. Syntax and Pragmatics

semantic and phonological constraints. In doing so, its value as an example of sexism reflected in the language is greatly diminished.
17 The so-called ‘radicals’ in the Chinese writing system and the characters containing them have been of interest in studying the selection of personal names, and the study of words describing the two sexes. Cf. Sung 1981, Shih 1984, Farris 1988, and Tan 1990.
Among the literature on language and gender, very little has been written on gender-related variations in syntactic structures. McConnell-Ginet (1988:84) identifies the reason syntactic variation has been studied less than phonological variation as being due in part to the difficulty in defining the unit that ‘varies.’ This is because different syntactic constructions often differ also in function, unlike phonetic variants of a single phonological unit (such as the different phonetic realizations of /w/ in Beijing Mandarin).

In section 3, we discussed differences between men and women usage (or non-usage) of renjia and various SFPs. Other gender-related differences can be observed in the language. In Ye’s (1995) study of complimenting in Chinese, for example, some gender-differentiated patterns emerge with respect to both types of compliments based on topic and sex of the participants (including taking into account same-sex versus mixed-sex situations), and types of responses to those compliments. Concerning grammatical structures specifically, we focus on the cases presented in Ye (p.246) where the compliments involve an activity (e.g. painting), and where the responses are explicit and contain a positive semantic carrier. The result shows that males used nouns more often than females. An example is shou 手 ‘(good) hand’, as in: Mei xiangdao, ni hai you zhe shou 没想到, 你還有這手. ‘I didn’t expect you to have such a talent.’ Females, on the other hand, preferred adverbs, as in the use of bucuo 不錯 ‘quite well,’ in: Huade zhen bucuo. 畫得真不錯. ‘You paint really (quite) well.’

Gender distribution is given by Ye (p.246) in percentage figures only: males’ preference of nouns is 24.1% to females’ 10.8%, and females’ preference of adverbs is 32.0% to males’ 19.8%. Without raw figures or statistics, the observed distribution can only be treated as a possible tendency, to be explored in the future with naturally-occurring data. Nonetheless, Ye’s (p.264) analysis of the use of nouns is interesting. S/he suggests that this reflects a process of categorization wherein the complimenter places the complimentee into an evaluative category (e.g. shifu 師傅 ‘master,’ huajia 畫家 ‘artist’). For Ye, this also demonstrates that the speakers are deeply influenced by the Confucian tradition of ming bu zheng, yan bu shun 名不正, 言不順 ‘nothing is perfectly justifiable without being placed into the right categories’ (literal translation given in a footnote: ‘If the name is not correct, the speech cannot be right.’). If indeed it is not as appropriate for females to be so definite in categorizing people based on their activity or performance, one would predict that the evaluative response of using nouns would tend to be avoided by females, and the preference would be for a more formulaic, adverbial response such as hen hao 很好, or bucuo 不錯 ‘quite well.’

In his pragmatic study of interrogatives in Chinese using modern Taiwan drama as his database, McGinnis (1990) includes sex as one of his independent variables to determine if there are any gender differences in production of types of interrogatives. The results are negative with one exception, namely, males use the A-not-A questions containing the copula

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18 Ye’s (1995) investigation is based on a discourse completion task with written responses from native Chinese speakers in the PRC.
significantly more than females do (p.118). However, as McGinnis does not offer an explanation, more research is needed to determine if the pattern is reflected in natural discourse, and if so, what socio-cultural factors are operating.

Christensen (1994) does not study gender issues per se, but his data show possible gender-related differences. He uses Wallace Chafe’s so-called “pear” film to obtain a corpus of oral and written narratives from ten subjects. Six of the subjects were female (BCEGHJ) and four were male (ADFI).19 While the subject pool is small for a cross-gender study, some preliminary observations can be made. Note first that all subjects watched the same film, which is seven minutes in duration, contains sound but no dialogue, and depicts a series of simple events that can be easily understood in any cultural context. Thus, all subjects were exposed to the same stimulus, to which they gave their own renditions based on recall. Of interest here is how the subjects retold the film, and whether any gender differences can be gleaned from the data. I have chosen to study reduplication, based on the hypothesis that females will use more reduplication than males. The premise is that such forms sound more polite and more tentative, and also sound more expressive in narrating the events in the film. Noteworthy here is Zhan’s (1992:24ff) proposal that reduplication is a positive politeness strategy for intensifying interest to the hearer, as in telling a story, making the description more vivid.

In this study, false starts are excluded. They can easily be discerned from listening to the audiotaped recordings. Counted are reduplication of verbs, adjectives/stative verbs, adverbs, nouns, and classifiers/measures. Expressly for this exercise, treated with reduplicated verbs are cases of repetitions of verbs used for narrative continuation; that is, for moving the action along. An example is the opening line of Subject B’s narrative (p.184), which contains the verb, cai 取 ‘to pick.’ Cai was first used as the main verb, and then repeated three times to emphasize the repetition and continuation of that action in the scene: OK. Yi ge nanren zai cai lizi / cai, cai, cai / OK. 一個男人在採梨子 / 採, 採, 採/ ‘OK. A man was picking pears. He picked and picked and picked.’ The results from the oral narratives show that all the females produced some reduplicated forms, while one of the four males did not produce any. A total of 21 reduplicated forms were produced, of which 18 (86%) were uttered by the six female subjects, and only 3 (14%) by the four male subjects. The females produced more than their share: they averaged 3 reduplicated forms per female, in contrast to .75 per male. Even in the written narratives, where one would expect the more formal style to yield few or no reduplicated forms, females once again out-produced males, this time with a ratio of 7 to 1. The 7 reduplicated forms are in 4 of the six females’ written narratives. While the pool of male and female subjects is very small, the results are revealing in confirming, tentatively at

19 My thanks to Matt Christensen for permitting me to use his audiotaped recordings of the oral narratives for my small study here. Transcripts of the oral and written narratives are given in Christensen’s (1994) Appendices A and B. Subjects are identified by letters only. Sex identification is made possible here from listening to the recorded oral narratives.
least, the hypothesis that females use more reduplicated forms in narratives than males. If similar results obtain in a quantitative study using a larger corpus, this pilot study then provides preliminary evidence of gender-stereotyped speech reflected in language use, and moreover, of gender differences at the syntactic level.

5. Conclusion
The research presented thus far in this paper on gender differences in Mandarin Chinese falls within the boundaries of traditional areas in linguistics, with heed also paid to pragmatic and discourse approaches. The types of data for these studies include vocabulary lists; observational data; introspection by native speakers; interviews; quantitative studies; oral and written narratives; drama scripts with varying degrees of improvisation; surveys and questionnaires in the form of discourse completion tasks; and conversational data that range from slightly scripted to completely unscripted. For an understanding of language use, in-depth studies based on audio- and/or videotaped recordings of natural, spontaneous speech are crucial. These have been extremely limited thus far. Farris’ (1991) ethnographic study of child discourse is one, as is Kuo’s (1997) study of women talk. Natural, impromptu speech from radio talk, and phone-in, shows is yet another source, and one tapped by Shen (1997).

Based on a corpus of radio talk/phone-in shows recorded off the World Wide Web, Shen’s thesis is part of the new direction of linguistic research on conversational interaction. Such research recognizes the importance of socio-cultural contexts in the construction of gender. Shen conducts a systematic, quantitative study of gender differences and analyzes such discourse variables as amount of speech, turn-taking and floors, interruptions (dominant vs. supportive), and functions of utterances (assertive vs. supportive). Statistically significant differences are found in the distribution of amount of talk by gender based on topic. Men talked a greater amount of time than women overall, though not on all shows: they spoke significantly more on politics and economy. For women it was family and education. However, women participated to a very limited degree on love and marriage. Shen suggests the possibility that Chinese women may not be expected to, or be allowed to, talk about highly sensitive topics with people who are not closely related to them. Or perhaps women are simply not used to talking about sexuality in a “public” mixed-sex setting. These patterns are some of the results in Shen’s quantitative study on conversational interaction. This study is probably the first of its kind for Chinese.

Language plays a key role in the construction and socialization of gender roles. This is an area where Chinese can contribute, both cross-linguistically to the growing body of literature on the subject, and across disciplines to broader issues on gender.
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