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Sentence-Final Particles in Cantonese: A Gender-Linked Survey and Study

Marjorie K.M. Chan
The Ohio State University

0. ABSTRACT

The Cantonese variety of the Chinese language provides an interesting case to study sentence-final particles. It is a tone language with three contrastive level tones in addition to rising and falling tones, and no stress accent system. Hence, every syllable has a tone. With syllables restricted in this way by pitch height and pitch contour, the language often resorts to sentence-final particles to perform functions that intonation does in a non-tone language such as English, which has a full-fledged system of stress. Among the sentence-final particles in Cantonese, there are some that are gender-linked and these are the focus of the present study. In general, there has been very little research to date on language and gender with respect to Chinese, whether one is referring to Mandarin, Cantonese, or some other variety of Chinese (Chan 1996, 1998a,b, 1999a). This study summarizes some research findings on sentence-final particles in Cantonese and presents some new ones to contribute to the growing body of cross-linguistic research on language and gender.

1. INTRODUCTION

In modern colloquial Cantonese, as spoken in Guangzhou (Canton City) and Hong Kong, casual conversations among close friends and relatives are abound in sentence-final particles. While some have primarily grammatical function, such as turning a declarative sentence into an interrogative one, most have affective use, reflecting the attitude or emotion of the speaker. There has been very little research to date on language and gender with respect to the Chinese language, whether one is referring to Mandarin, Cantonese, or some other variety of Chinese (Chan 1996; 1998a,c; 1999a). This paper focuses on the gender-linked use of some sentence-final particles in Cantonese, a dialect of Chinese that is spoken in Guangdong Province in southern China, as well as in Hong Kong and Macao, and numerous overseas communities all over the world, including Singapore, Malaysia, Viet Nam, Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines, New Zealand, United Kingdom, United States, and Canada. Cantonese (or ‘Yue’) is spoken by some 66 million speakers in the world today, based on estimates given in the Summer Institute of Linguistics’ *Ethnologue: Languages of the World* (Grimes 1996), which also ranks it as sixteenth in its list of top 100 languages by population. Standard Cantonese, the prestige subvariety, is spoken in Guangzhou (Canton City) and Hong Kong.¹ It will be shown that general

distribution patterns may obscure some interesting behavior by males with respect to particle usage in different sociocultural contexts. The research findings emphasize the need to recognize the complexity of both sociocultural settings and the ramifications of multiple roles that individuals play in their interaction and communication with others.

The Cantonese variety of Chinese is particularly interesting to investigate because it is a tone language with three contrastive level tones in addition to rising and falling tones, and no stress accent system. Hence, every syllable has a tone, including sentence-final particles. This, it should be noted, is not true of Mandarin Chinese, where sentence-final particles are toneless, and thus are in the so-called 'neutral tone.' The tonal system in Cantonese, with its contour tones and tonal register, further curtails the use of intonation to overall raised pitch (Wu 1989:174ff, cited in Matthews and Yip 1994:409) and simple rising intonation for most types of interrogative sentences. As a result, sentence-final particles in Cantonese often function similarly to intonation in a language such as English, which has a full-fledged system of stress and no lexical tones. Cantonese also relies more heavily on sentence-final particles than Mandarin does. The latter has only four lexical tones, and thus fewer tones to constrain pitch height and pitch contour and it has a partially-developed stress system. As unstressed syllables are toneless, they can more readily accommodate pitch changes demanded by intonation patterns. In contrast to Mandarin, Cantonese has more sentence-final particles, uses them more frequently in speech, and produces them with a greater range of pitch and duration differences. Chan (1998b:103) notes, for example, that open syllables in Cantonese average 300 milliseconds, while sentence-final particles can have duration of up to one full second! When two or three sentence-final particles are concatenated at the end of an utterance, they can easily exceed one second. This dramatic syllable-lengthening is not observed in Mandarin. Thus, the striking differences between these two varieties of Chinese offer much potential for further research with respect to the study of pragmatic meanings of sentence-final particles in general, and their gender-differentiated usage in current sociocultural settings in particular, as part of on-going, cross-linguistic research on language and gender.

Sentence-final particles are ubiquitous in colloquial spoken Cantonese. There are some thirty basic forms (Kwok 1984, Ouyang 1993), which may occur individually or in clusters of two or three at the end of an utterance. Mandarin, in contrast, has only between seven and at most about seventeen common sentence-final particles (cf. Matthews and Yip 1994:338, Chao 1968:795ff). Sentence-final particles serve to add further nuance to what the speaker is saying beyond the actual content words themselves. Consider, for example, the following two pairs of interrogative sentences in Cantonese (extracted from sample Chinese sentences given in Deng 1991:132). Transcription here is in Yale romanization minus tone diacritics. (PRT = particle.) For tones on sentence-final particles, tone numbers 1 through 5 are used, with 5 for highest pitch and 1 for lowest pitch.

- (1) a. *Neih sik keuih ma.33?*
 you know him/her PRT
 ‘Do you know him/her?’
 b. *Neih sik keuih me.55?*
 you know him/her PRT
 ‘Do you know him/her?’
- (2) a. *Neih geisih faan laih a.33?*
 you when return come PRT
 ‘When are you coming back?’
 b. *Neih geisih faan laih jek.5?*
 you when return come PRT
 ‘When are you coming back?’

In the first pair, sentence (1a) is a fairly neutral, information-seeking question. It is formed by adding the yes-no question particle, *ma.33* (mid-level tone), at the end of the declarative sentence. In changing the particle to *me.55* (high-level tone), sentence (1b) conveys the speaker’s startled reaction or surprise. The context in which it is uttered is not neutral; the speaker is seeking some kind of confirmation. It might, for instance, be asked by a young woman with a hint of jealousy to her boyfriend upon seeing an attractive stranger wave to them. In English, the two sentences are translated identically. One way to convey the difference might be the differential use of intonation. Alternatively, using the above scenario, (1b) could be made into an echo question in English: “You know her?”, and perhaps further adding an interjection: “Oh, you know her?” Sentence-final particles such as *me.55* that have illocutionary force are not used in formal situations; they are absent in public speeches and news broadcasts. Affective use of sentence-final particles is generally limited to informal settings. Moreover, some particles, such as *me.55*, are found primarily in casual or intimate conversations among close friends and relatives.

The second pair of sentences are interrogatives. Sentence (2a) contains the particle, *a.33* (with phonetic variants, *ya.33* and *wa.33*). It is optionally added to declaratives, interrogatives, as well as imperatives, functioning to soften the tone of voice, thereby conveying greater politeness. This particle is common to Cantonese and Mandarin in both pronunciation and pragmatic function. While sentence (2a) is also grammatical without the particle, its omission makes the sentence sound more abrupt and potentially more severe. A father might say it sternly to his son as the young man bolts out the door. Sentence (2b), with *jek.5* (high tone) poses a question and at the same time conveys the speaker’s impatience. Obviously, the two particles, *a.33* and *jek.5*, are not interchangeable. Use of *jek.5* here may also be mixed with some feelings of displeasure, as the addressee heads out the door. Sentence (2b) would normally be used only between people who know each other well, such as between spouses. And, given traditional gender roles in Chinese culture and society, such a sentence would stereotypically be viewed as a sentence uttered by the wife rather than the husband. The pair of sentences in (2) are translated identically into English, since neither particle has any lexical meaning of its own.

The remainder of the paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 presents published studies on sentence-final particles *je.55*, *jek.5*, *ho.35*, and *wo.33*. Section 3 is a study of the particles *la.33*, *la.55*, *a.33*, and *a.55* based on data from two episodes of a television series and a comparison with the corresponding written scripts, which contain fewer sentence-final

particles than were uttered in the final television production. The paper ends with a few concluding remarks.

2. THE CANTONESE SENTENCE-FINAL PARTICLES *JE.55*, *JEK.5*, *HO.35*, AND *WO.33*

Among the thirty or so Cantonese sentence-final particles, *je.55* and *jek.5* (hereafter simply *je* and *jek*) have been studied in detail for gender-linked differences by Chan (1996), based on a survey of twentieth century textbooks, dictionaries, and linguistic studies, together with a corpus of twelve videotaped episodes of a very popular, half-hour weekly television series, *Maanfa Tung* ‘Kaleidoscope.’ Chan (1998a) is a follow-up study of *je* and *jek* using the same corpus. The Kaleidoscope television series was filmed in the mid-1980s by the Guangdong Television Company on location in Guangzhou (Canton City), China, in an actual residential area that is referred to in the episodes as *Maanfa Hong* ‘Maanfa Lane’. That television series is known for being the first mainland Chinese television production that used everyday, colloquial Cantonese. The spirit underlying behind the series was that it be “as close to real life as possible.”² As a result, the language used is very natural and filled with sentence-final particles.

Chan (1996) suggests that the particles *je* and *jek* did not emerge at the same time. Most likely, the original particle was *je*, with a delimitative function and a core meaning of ‘only, merely.’ That function is especially obvious in sentences containing some quantification. The affective use of this particle by children is noted in Wang (1957:92), who states that young children like to use *je*. It conveys a sense of bragging on the part of the child. Qiao (1966) may have been the first to identify a gender-linked usage of *je*, noting that it often occurs as a modal particle in interrogatives in female speech that conveys a sense of being affectedly sweet. Decline in usage of this affective sense, and its gradual replacement by *jek* is reported by Light (1982),³ who makes it clear, however, that he does not identify *jek* as gender-exclusive. Rather, it is viewed by his informants as a form that is used between lovers, among family members, or among very close working companions.

While native Cantonese speakers associate *jek* with female usage, Chan (1996) observes that both males and females in the Kaleidoscope corpus use *je* and *jek*. Although in absolute terms, males use more *je/jek* particles than females in the corpus, males use them proportionately less frequently than females, when one takes into consideration that males produce a higher proportion of the overall corpus (roughly sixty percent). As shown in Table 1 (from Chan 1996), the study yields a total of 206 *je* and *jek* sentence-final particles: females produce 30 *je*’s and 66 *jek*’s, while males produce 55 *je*’s and 55 *jek*’s. Females use *jek* twice as often as they do *je*, and the results are statistically significant. Males, on the other hand, produce an equal proportion of both particles. The distribution pattern thus supports native speakers’ intuition and perception that *jek* is more associated with female speech, at least in today’s spoken Cantonese.

	FEMALES *	MALES	TOTAL
JE Sentences	30	55	85
JEK Sentences	66	55	121
Total:	96	110	206

Table 1. Distribution of *je* and *jek* sentences across gender. (* p < .01 level)

There may also be generational differences in the use of *jek*. Gao (1980:196-197), who does not mention *je* at all, discusses two uses of *jek*: the first is to attract the hearers' attention. The second usage of *jek* he identifies as occurring commonly between relatives and very close friends. He further suggests that *jek* is used by the younger generation, in speaking to someone in the older generation, as in children to their parents, and siblings to their older brothers and sisters. That usage carries with it some degree of coyness, or associations of a spoiled child. Gao does not mention gender. Perhaps for girls, the coyness and affected sweetness of this usage in childhood continue into early adulthood, and is used with those who have some perceived dominance over them, in a society that remains patriarchal despite socialist reforms. Boys, on the other hand, may have been socialized to outgrow that style of speaking, at least in the public arena. The Kaleidoscope corpus hints at the possibility of some generation-linked differences in the use of *je* and *jek*. Further research is needed to determine if the differences represent an instance of language change or stable variation across the generations.

Even though in the series there are no intimate scenes between spouses, there is an interesting difference between how males speak to their wives and how they speak to their friends or neighbors. As shown in Table 2, the wives use *jek* proportionately more frequently than *je*, in fact, almost three times more frequently than *je* to their husbands: 37 *jek*'s to 13 *je*'s. To their wives, the husbands also use *jek* more frequently than *je*: 18 *jek*'s to 10 *je*'s, which is in sharp contrast to the equal proportion of *je* and *jek* in the overall male corpus. The results suggest that males speak quite differently in private with spouses than they do in public settings. A study of the husbands and their communication with neighbors confirms this. As Table 3 shows, the same individuals use 25 *jek*'s to 27 *je*'s in conversing with their neighbors. The remaining occurrences of *je* and *jek* are uttered by other males in the episodes who are either bachelors or not yet of marriageable age.

	WIVES TO HUSBANDS		HUSBANDS TO WIVES	
	JE	JEK	JE	JEK
	13	37	10	18
Total:	50		28	

Table 2. Distribution of *je/jek* in wife-husband conversations. (* p < .01 level)

	WIVES TO FRIENDS		HUSBANDS TO FRIENDS	
	JE	JEK	JE	JEK
	1	6	27	25
Total:	7		52	

Table 3. Distribution of *je/jek* in wives-husbands' conversations with friends.

What is rarely found in the corpus is the use of *jek* for affected sweetness or coyness. Perhaps this is in part due to the absence of truly intimate conversations between young lovers or scenes of stereotypical, spoiled daughters and doting fathers. It may also be part of the egalitarian rhetoric and ideology of post-1949 mainland China that have discouraged the more strongly feminine-marked speech and demeanor. Instead, *jek* is often used to convey a complex mixture of many different emotions that range from tactfulness and intimate seeking and sharing of information to those of impatience, exasperation, and dismay.

In a follow-up study of the utterances produced by males and females in the Kaleidoscope corpus, (Chan 1998c) reveals that the two genders do not produce proportionately the same amount of declarative sentences and interrogative sentences using *je* and *jek*.⁴ This is shown in Table 4.

	FEMALES		MALES	
	*			
	Declarative S's	Interrogative S's	Declarative S's	Interrogative S's
JE	27	3	43	12
JEK	5	61	13	42
	32 (33%)	64 (67%)	56 (51%)	54 (49%)
Total:	96		110	
Table 4. Distribution of declarative S's vs. interrogative S's across gender. (* p < .01 level)				

For females, two-thirds (67%) of their *je/jek* productions are in interrogative sentences and one-third (33%) in declarative sentences. Almost all interrogative sentences (61 out of 64) contain *jek*. Males, in contrast, produce half (49%) of their *je/jek* utterances as interrogatives, and the other half (51%) as declaratives. Unlike females, males also show more willingness to utter *jek* in declaratives (13 out of 56) and *je* in interrogatives (12 out of 54). Despite a pattern of distribution that is not as sharply delineated in male use of *je* and *jek* as in the females' use of these two particles, the distribution is nonetheless statistically significant ($p < .01$).

	JE	JEK
1. Declaratives	(F: 27, M: 43)	(F: 5, M: 13)
Gender-neutral:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . delimiting ('just, only') . downplaying . explaining, clarifying . being tactful, agreeable 	(none)
Female-linked:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . coaxing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . downplaying with exasperation . being tactful, complimentary . intimate relating of news
Male-linked:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . refuting . turn in course of events . boasting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . being impatient, exasperated . <i>jek</i> as a stronger variant of <i>je</i> for downplaying
2. Interrogatives	(F: 3, M: 12)	(F: 61, M: 42)
Gender-neutral:	(none)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . general info-seeking** . rhetorical Q's w. sarcasm, exasperation
Female-linked:	(none*)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . dismay . intimate info-seeking w. both genders . soft-spoken info-seeking
Male-linked:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . WH-Q's for info-seeking . rhetorical Q's, incl. w. impatient tone of voice . <i>je</i> embedded in tag Q's 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . protest and other forms of complaint

* There are only two cases of rhetorical Q's and one case of *je* embedded in a tag Q.

** There are three cases of intimate info-seeking by males, but posed to females only.

Table 5. Distribution of gender-neutral and gender-linked uses of *je/jek* across gender and sentence types.

Some pragmatic functions are neutral whereas others are linked to males or to females in the use of *je* and *jek*. This is summarized in Table 5 (from Chan 1998c). Both genders use *je* in declarative sentences for delimiting an amount or downplaying it or an event. They also use it for conveying tact and agreeableness. For gender-linked usages, females use *je* in declaratives for coaxing, while males use *je* in declaratives where they are refuting something or boasting.

For *jek* in declaratives, there were no clearly neutral usages. Females use *jek* for downplaying, with an added note of exasperation at times. They may also use *jek* for saying something tactfully or in a complimentary fashion. Males, on the hand, use *jek* sometimes as a stronger variant of *je* for downplaying something, a usage that is absent in females' production of *jek*. Males also use *jek* in declaratives to express impatience or exasperation.

For interrogatives, *je* is used almost entirely by males in the corpus, for reasons that require further research. This has not been noted in previous literature; it is used in information-seeking WH questions, including with impatience, and in tag questions. On the other hand, both genders use *jek* in interrogatives, and both use it in general information-seeking questions as well as in rhetorical questions that contain some element of sarcasm or exasperation. Besides these gender-neutral uses of *jek* in interrogatives, there are also uses that are gender-linked. Females use *jek* in more soft-spoken or more intimate information-seeking questions, and in some rare instances, to express dismay, the most marked female use of *jek* in the corpus. For males, in lieu of using *jek* in interrogatives to show dismay, the marked usage seems to be that of expressing protest (e.g., a husband's protest, "So many (pieces of stereo equipment), how can I carry all that by myself?!"). It would normally only be used with someone very familiar or close to the speaker. This male-linked usage of *jek* has not been noted in the literature. Thus, one finds male-linked uses of *je* and *jek* in addition to neutral uses and those that are female-linked. Moreover, despite the perception that it is females who are associated with the use of *jek*, males also use it, albeit to a much lesser extent, and for different purposes, namely, as a stronger variant of *je* and to lodge their protest and unwillingness to perform some task. For precisely these reasons, neither *je* nor *jek* would fit easily into a framework that would associate the two particles with politeness. It may be plausible to analyze *jek* as occurring in contexts of subordination of the speaker, but that usage is not restricted to females.

In addition to *je* and *jek*, another Cantonese particle that has been linked to gender-differentiated usage is *ho.35* (with phonetic variants of smooth or glottal stop onset), presented in Light (1982:26), who analyzes *ho.35* as a confirmatory particle that is heard more frequently from women in all stations of life. However, he notes that it is also heard frequently among men in a lower social or professional position than their hearer. In addition, Light indicates that *ho.35* "is also heard in situations where the speaker is of superior status and wants to 'draw out' his inferior-status listeners by creating an atmosphere suggestive of free exchange," and is hence a conscious effort on the part of the speaker to elicit comments from subordinates.

Light (1982:30) also discusses the sentence-final particle, *wo.33*, used for reporting, in which the speaker takes no personal responsibility for the accuracy of the statement. Here, Light finds that *wo.33* is used with noticeable frequency by domestic servants, secretaries, and clerks in Hong Kong; but these positions are primarily occupied by women, and hence, "the most that one can say is that women's use of *wo* exceeds that of men in rough proportion to the greater number of women in social roles which call for utterances using *wo*." Light does identify the pronunciation of this particle with lengthened duration and rising-falling intonation as gender-linked. That adds a "baby-talk suggestion to the reporting" and is thus generally perceived as the province of women.

3. *LA.33, LA.55, A.33, AND A.55* IN TWO KALEIDOSCOPE EPISODES

A systematic study of the Kaleidoscope corpus has not yet been conducted for particles other than *je* and *jek*. Nevertheless, a preliminary study is made of two of the episodes to determine what additional gender-linked sentence-final particles might be found in that corpus. Episodes 3 and 8 are chosen because, for both episodes, there exists not only a romanized transcription of the actual television production (in Fung 1996a), but there is also a corresponding Cantonese script, prepared by the Guangdong Television Company and typed in Chinese (i.e., monosyllabic, monomorphemic Chinese characters). Of significance is the fact that the wording in the romanized and character versions of the episodes is not identical, and the differences are particularly notable with respect to those innocuous-looking sentence-final particles. In addition to the romanized and character scripts, the Kaleidoscope project also produced video- and audiotapes of these two episodes as part of the Kaleidoscope multimedia course materials (see endnote 2).

The study of the sentence-final particles in the two television episodes yielded some interesting differences in the production by males and females. A comparison was made between the Cantonese (character) script and the romanized transcript with respect to what sentence-final particles surface in Episodes 3 and 8. These two episodes contain a total of 6,088 Chinese characters (each corresponding to a syllable) in the Cantonese script, and 6,742 syllables in the romanized transcript. There are, hence, more syllables uttered in the television production than appear in the script, and some of the increase is in sentence-final particles.

Noteworthy for the comparison of sentence-final particles is the fact that females in these two episodes speak only somewhat less than males do: females produce 47% of the total corpus in the two Cantonese scripts, a proportion fairly matched by the 46% in the romanized transcriptions for the actual shows. For this study, four sentence-final particles are discussed: *la.33*, *la.55*, *a.33*, and *a.55*. They are selected because they occur frequently in the two episodes, and they form a near minimal set, differing from each other only with respect to presence or absence of a lateral onset, and high versus mid-level tone.⁵

We turn first to the two particles, *la.33* and *la.55*, which differ only in tone. They are paired together because in the Cantonese scripts, only one Chinese character is used for transcribing the two particles, with the performers selecting a mid or high level tone in the television production. Fung (1996b:97) identifies two functions for *la.33*: the particle may indicate certainty and change of situation (i.e., an aspectual marker of change of state), or it may be used to tell the listener to do something, and not simply to suggest it. She describes *la.55* as “a sentence-final particle implying a casual suggestion or request.”

Table 6 shows that in the two character scripts, females were scripted with 70 of *la* particle, while males were scripted with 72 of them, yielding a total of 142 particles. On the other hand, the romanized transcripts, based on transcribing the actual television production, yield a higher total of occurrences, namely, 173, of which females produced

85 and males 88. Difference in total notwithstanding, the two sets of scripts show *la* equally proportioned between the two genders.

SCRIPTS	FEMALES	MALES	TOTAL
Character scripts	70	72	142
Romanized scripts	85	88	173
Total:	155	160	315

Table 6. Distribution of *la* (*la.33/la.55*) in the scripts across gender.

From Table 6, a further breakdown is given in Table 7 to show which gender produces which of the two particles, *la.33* and *la.55*. As a separation of the two particles cannot be made from the Cantonese script (since only one Chinese character is used), we focus on the romanized scripts for these two episodes. For females, of the 85 tokens, about three-quarters (74%) are particle *la.33* and only one-quarter (26%) particle *la.55*. Males show a much less skewed distribution pattern. Although they produce roughly the same number of tokens, only three-fifths (59%) are *la.33* and two-fifths (36 %) *la.55*. Interestingly, the results for females are contrary to stereotypical expectations that females might produce more of the high-tone particles.

ROMANIZED SCRIPTS	FEMALES	MALES	TOTAL
	*		
LA.33	63 (74%)	52 (59%)	115
LA.55	22 (26%)	36 (41%)	58
Total:	85	88	173

Table 7. Distribution of *la.33* and *la.55* in the romanized scripts across gender.
(* p < .01 level)

In the literature, Kwok (1984:80-81) pairs *a.55* with *la.55*. She notes that in imperative sentences, there are many cases where these two particles are interchangeable. In cases involving the first person (singular or plural), *a.55* “seems to be more consultative and more lively in tone, inviting the addressee to agree to the action proposed ... [while *la.55*] does not seem to be so concerned with the addressee’s reactions or feelings.” Again, one may observe here a potential gender-linked difference that may reflect stereotypical behavior expected of the two genders. The two Kaleidoscope episodes show a tendency of gender-linked differences in the production of *a.55*: females utter 13 of the 20 tokens and males only 7. With respect to sentence-final particles *a.55* and *la.55*, the corpus also suggests the possibility of gender-differentiated usage: *a.55* is uttered more frequently by females, and *la.55* more so by males. A larger corpus with more tokens of these two particles is needed for a more detailed investigation.

Finally, the most common sentence-final particle in Cantonese, namely, *a.33*, will be discussed and summarized in Table 8. Particle *a.33*, illustrated in sentence (2a), serves to soften the utterance, making it less abrupt and less assertive. In imperative sentences, *a.33* lends a more intimate, gentler tone to a command, as in the case of a parent telling a child to play nicely. If females are stereotypically expected to be more polite and more soft-spoken, then these expectations are met in the two episodes: females produce this particle proportionately more frequently than males: of the total production of 126 *a.33*'s, 60% are uttered by females, and only 40% are uttered by males. Interestingly, the Cantonese scripts, on the other hand, distributed *a.33* almost equally between the two genders. Hence, what appears to be a fairly neutral sentence-final particle based on the Cantonese script reveals gender differentiation in what is actually said. This sentence-final particle is ubiquitous and so frequently used by both genders in colloquial speech that no obvious gender-linked differences had been noted in the literature.

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

Table 8. Distribution of A.33 in the scripts across gender. (* p < .05 level)

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this paper, several Cantonese sentence-final particles have been presented, based on what limited research there is to date. Many issues need to be addressed in the future; these include questions of the extent to which gender-linked uses of the particles in the television series reflect stereotypical uses. Cross-linguistic studies may also trigger questions on the degree to which cultural differences might play a role in the amount of gap between stereotypical uses of linguistic forms that might be found in television series and real-life uses of such forms by the two genders. Chinese society has traditionally been patriarchal, with strongly prescribed gender roles and norms for behavior. The society expects conformity, and with such expectations, the gap between real-life behavior and stereotypical behavior that reflects social norms may turn out to be narrower than that found in cultures and societies where creativity and individualism are encouraged.

Notes

¹ Differences between the Canton City variety of modern standard Cantonese and that of the Hong Kong variety are noted in Chan's (1999b) review of Bauer and Benedict (1997), an in-depth linguistic study of the dialect. For a short historical study of the Cantonese (or 'Yue') dialect of Chinese see Yue-Hashimoto (1991).

² Thanks go to Professor Xiaobin Jian (email correspondence of 5 and 8 September 1998). He was the first Project Director of the Ohio State University Cantonese Project (1993-1996) and was able to provide the author with additional background information on the television series. In addition, it was his brother-in-law who was its producer! The OSU Cantonese Project and its principal investigator, Professor Galal Walker, developed a set of multimedia Cantonese teaching and learning materials that accompanied twelve of the episodes from the Kaleidoscope television series. The author takes this opportunity to thank her colleague, Galal, for enabling her to use the Kaleidoscope materials for her research. She also thanks Roxana Fung for discussions and help on the project. (See Fung (2000) for a semantic and pragmatic study of a subset of sentence-final particles in the twelve episodes of the Kaleidoscope series.) And lastly, thanks go to the audience in my NACCL-11 panel, and especially to Benjamin T'sou for his enthusiastic comments, where this paper was originally presented. Some of the findings in this paper were also presented as part of my invited, conference-closing lecture at NACCL-11 on "Gender, society, and the Chinese language."

³ Hence, not surprisingly, studies such as Cheung (1972), Gao (1980), and Matthews and Yip (1994) only refer to *jek* and not to *je* as having affective use. *Je* is not even mentioned in Gao (1980), while Cheung (1972) and Matthews and Yip (1994) treat it as primarily a particle with a delimitative, downplaying function of 'just, only.' Cheung (1972) allows *je/jek* as variants in that context, and includes examples of *jek* conveying some sense of pride or boastfulness.

⁴ There were no imperative sentences containing *je* or *jek* in the corpus.

⁵ Neither *ho.35* nor *wo.33* is transcribed in the two Cantonese scripts although they do surface in the actual television production of the episodes and in the romanized transcripts. However, there are only two tokens of *ho.35*, with both uttered by females. The two episodes show no obvious gender-differentiated usage of *wo.33*, of which 10 tokens are produced by females and 12 by males. These preliminary results support Light's suggestion that *wo.33* is not gender-linked. There are no instances of *wo* uttered with rising, or rising-falling, pitch in the two episodes.

Reference:

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