

Chapter Three

Methodology

This section will first detail how the spoken database of the present study is formulated and also list the research questions of the current study.

3.1 Spoken Database

The spoken data of the current study consists of 10 recordings of naturally occurring face-to-face two-party Mandarin Chinese conversations, each of which lasts for 30 minutes and which in total run to three hundred minutes. The whole spoken database is constituted by 88,102 words.

What follows is a list of the data with a brief description of the speakers and the topic covered in the conversations:

1. College study: A face-to-face dialogue between a mother in her early 50s who is a banker and her teen-aged son, a senior high school third-grader. They mainly talk about Joint College Entrance Exam and which school and department the son is more willing to attend and what occupation he is planning to devote to.
2. Business: A face-to-face dialogue between a young man and his girlfriend who are both in their early 30s. They are both computer engineers working in different computer companies and the topic in their conversation centers around their job affairs, colleagues and their clients.
3. Movie: A face-to-face dialogue between a male college senior student in his early 20s and his teen-aged girlfriend who is a sophomore student. Their dialogue is mainly about a movie this boy just saw and their opinion on this movie.
4. Course: A face-to-face dialogue between a male college student and his classmate

girlfriend who are both sophomore students aged 19. They talk about the classes they are currently attending, the teachers offering these classes, what they have learned from these classes and the evaluation of these classes and teachers.

5. Hot-Spring Hotel: A face-to-face dialogue between two female graduate students at their mid-20s who went to a hot-spring hotel together. They evaluate the quality of the hotel they stayed overnight and other hot-spring hotels they have ever been to.
6. Graduate School Life: A face-to-face dialogue between two female graduate students at their mid-20s. This conversation involves many events taking place in their graduate school life including doing transcriptions, taking classes, the people they know and what they might become in the future.
7. Junior High School: A face-to-face dialogue between a brother who is a senior high school first-grader aged 15 and his sister who is a 12 year-old six-grader in elementary school. They talk about which junior high school the girl should attend after she graduates from the elementary school.
8. Activities after School: A face-to-face dialogue between a husband and a wife who are both senior high school teachers in their early 30s. In this conversation, they try to figure out an appropriate activity for their 6-year-old son to do after he comes back from school.
9. Controlling TV: A face-to-face dialogue between a husband who is a salesman and a wife who works as a dietician in school. They are both in their mid-40s. In this conversation, they attempt to take advantage of one latest technological tool to control the time of their children's watching TV.
10. Glasses and Dogs: A face-to-face dialogue between a husband and a wife who are both in their early 50s. The husband works as an engineer and the wife is an accountant. In this conversation, the wife complained about the new glasses she

recently bought and also they talked about the dog they have kept for a very long time.

The backgrounds of these interlocutors vary to some extent. The ages of these conversationists range from early-tens to fifties, the occupations of them also differ a lot, and the topics in these conversations involve various issues.

3.2 Research Rationale and Research Questions

Although many past studies have endeavored to investigate the meanings of *shuo*, they have not thoroughly examined three aspects regarding the functions of *shuo*. First of all, no previous study except Huang (2003) has discussed in detail the optionality of *shuo* as a complementizer. Most of the studies maintain that the presence or the absence of complementizer *shuo* renders no difference in terms of grammaticality whereas Huang (2003) argues that the presence of *shuo* indicates that the reference of the complement clause belongs to the world of speech and that the absence of *shuo* means that the complement clause refers to the world of reality. However, since the previous studies have shown that *shuo* also performs expressive or conversational functions, it is hypothesized in the current study that the optionality of *shuo* is also conditioned by conversational factors.

Second, the current study aims to focus on the adverbial function of *shuo*. Most of the previous studies do not discuss the cases where *shuo* follows adverbial conjunctions such as *ruguo* “if” or adverbial connectives such as *jiushi shuo* “that is to say,” *piru shuo* “for example” and *biru shuo* “for instance.” Therefore, how *shuo* co-exists with different types of adverbial connectives should be further discussed. Furthermore, since *shuo* can also be optional as it co-occurs with these adverbial connectives (Hwang 1998), how do the cases where *shuo* is present with these

adverbial markers differ from those where *shuo* is absent also deserves further discussion.

What's more is that no prior study has attempted to compare how the complementizer *shuo* is related to the adverbial connective *shuo*. This study will also attempt to examine how these two types of *shuo* are related.

Based on the previous discussion and review, the present study aims to probe into the following research questions:

1. When *shuo* is used as a complementizer, what types of matrix predicates does *shuo* co-occur with? Furthermore, what discourse functions does *shuo* perform when it functions as a complementizer?
2. When *shuo* is used as a discourse marker in a connective frame, what types of connectives does *shuo* co-occur with? Furthermore, what discourse functions does *shuo* perform as a discourse marker in a connective frame?
3. How are the functions of *shuo* as a complementizer related to those of *shuo* as a discourse marker in a connective frame? Furthermore, how are these discourse functions related to the grammaticalization path of *shuo*?