

The Comparison of the Cantonese Sentence Final Particles

bo (㗎) and *wo* (㗐): From the 1940s to the 1970s

Wai-Mun Leung

Department of Chinese, The Hong Kong Institute of Education

10 Lo Ping Road, Taipo, Hong Kong

Tel: 852-2948-7223 E-mail: waimun@ied.edu.hk

Abstract

In the past decades, researchers of Cantonese treated the frequently used sentence-final particles (hereafter SFPs) *wo3* (㗐, mid level tone) and *bo3* (㗎, mid level tone) as variant forms, the former being the result of sound change from the latter (Kwok 1984, Luke 1990, Li 1995, Fang 2003). However, Leung (2010) argues that *wo3* in the late 20th century performs the functions of realization, reminder, hearsay and contrast while the main function of *bo3* is only to show contrast, thus they are not entirely interchangeable. To explore the development of the two particles from the historical prospective, this paper attempts to examine them in Hong Kong Cantonese diachronically based on the spoken data of old Cantonese movies of 1940s and 1970s.

Keywords: Cantonese, Sentence-final Particles, Historical prospective, Spoken data of movies

1. Introduction

As a sentence-final particle indicating mood and tone-of-voice, *wo3* (mid level tone) is used very frequently in modern Cantonese. Most of the previous scholars (Kwok 1984, Deng 1991, Li 1995, Fang 2003) considered *wo3* as the variant or phonetically weakened result of the SFP *bo3* (mid level tone) and the focus of discussion in their work is often on *bo3*. Obviously there was not much explanation of *wo3* in the previous work until Luke's observations (1990), let alone distinguishing them. However, according to the Hong Kong University Cantonese Corpus *bo3* is a SFP used in a low frequency in the late 20th century; it only appears 16 times. When the single use of it is considered, it only appears 5 times (Leung 2010). They therefore seem not to be free variations of the same particle.

In order to trace the development of the use of the SFPs *bo3* and *wo3* in the past several decades, this paper attempts to examine the two SFPs in Cantonese diachronically with the spoken data of old Cantonese movies produced in 1940s and 1970s for further observations. The Cantonese discussed in this paper is the variety spoken in Hong Kong and the Jyutping Romanization scheme (Linguistic Society of Hong Kong 1993) is adopted for the notations of Cantonese sounds.

2. Data Collection

As the bases of language analysis in the following sessions, we have chosen Cantonese movies for the collection of language examples in the 1940s and 1970s. The characteristic of the samples is that language in the movies is natural colloquial. According to the level of naturalness, oral communications can be categorised according to whether there is any restriction to the topic of conversation, whether there is any text preparation, whether the speech involves reading from scripts, see in the following table:

Insert Table 1 Here

Movie belongs to level 4, the category of "Topic-restricted / text preparation needed / not reading from scripts". Cantonese movies produced in Hong Kong, containing a record of the colloquial speech, are an important source of information since SFPs are a feature of colloquial speech but appear less often, and may not be fully represented, in written materials. The Cantonese movies produced in Hong Kong in different periods of time can reflect, to a large extent, of the characteristics of the contemporary Cantonese speech. Cantonese movies have become popular since the 1940s and copies of many of them are easily accessible nowadays. With the movies, we have another reference in addition to the written records which may not record exactly the use of SFPs in all situations. However, it is still needed to be aware that the dialogues in movies, though not purely reading of scripts, are nevertheless not natural; they are "topic-restricted" and "text preparation needed".

To build a collection of SFP instances for the given time periods, the occurrences of the SFPs *wo3* and *bo3* in each selected movie were recorded in the following way: the movie was played and then paused whenever an SFP was heard, the related sentences were copied word for word, and the entire context where it appeared was also noted down, and the movie was then played until another SFP was heard, and the above steps were repeated. The time at which each SFP appeared in the movie was also marked down for future reference. The movie was then played till the end. This procedure of extracting the SFPs applies to the movies of the 1940s and 1970s.

2.1 Cantonese Movies of the 1940s

One of the spoken corpora used in this paper was movies in the 1940s. The earliest Cantonese sound movie preserved in the Hong Kong Film Archive (hereafter HKFA) was “Twin Sisters of the South”, which was shown in 1939. Seven movies have been chosen from the 1940s as the subjects of research, the details are as follows (source from the HKFA):

Insert Table 2 Here

2.2 Cantonese Movies of the 1970s

Similarly seven films have been chosen as the subjects of this research, the details are as follows (source from the HKFA):

Insert Table 3 Here

2.3 Abbreviations

Examples are given below to illustrate the features of the particles. For each example, the source and year of the data are given after the example number, and the abbreviations of the source and year will be used when quoting the example. The abbreviations are given in the following table:

Insert Table 4 Here

3. The Use of *bo3* and *wo3* in the 1940s

The language examples of this period of time mainly come from the seven Cantonese movies that were produced in the 1940s (section 2.1). This section focuses on the functions of the two particles *wo3* and *bo3* in this period. We begin with the particle *wo3*.

3.1 The Use of *wo3*

The SFP *wo3* appears 99 times in the language examples obtained from the movies. The analyses of the examples obtained from the movies enable us to conclude that *wo3* had the following three functions: (1) Realization, (2) Reminder and (3) Hearsay. Moreover, it could also appear at the end of imperative sentences.

3.1.1 Realization

The first function of *wo3* is showing “realization”, that is, if *wo3* is omitted, then the tone-of-voice of the utterance will not be perceived as “realization”. In the first example below, the background is a party of a high-class family. Some thieves pretend to be visitors and stay in the party. One of the thieves turned around and saw that a gentleman sitting at the next table is wearing a precious diamond ring; the thief is taken by surprise and immediately reports this to his leader who is sitting next to him. The *wo3* at the end of the thief’s utterance points out what others do not know or sense, that is introducing a new message. If the particle *wo3* were removed from the utterance, then the utterance would become a simple declarative sentence. The SFP *wo3* serves to express the tone-of-voice of an unexpected discovery which is known as mirative (a pragmatic extension of evidentiality).

Example 1 (New 1947)

你	睇	吓	隔	離	檯	個	幾	粒	鑽	石	，	正	嘢
nei5	tai2	haa5	gaak3	lei4	toi4	go2	gei2	nap1	zyun3	sek6		zeng3	je5
2SG	see	ASP	neighbour	table	DEM	several	CL	diamonds				precious	
嚟	囉	！											
lai4	wo3												
SFP	SFP												

“You see the diamonds in the next table? Precious stuff!”

In the second example below, the background to the dialogue is that a girl thinks that her boyfriend has stopped loving her and has started romance with another girl. The girl feels lost and helpless, and runs up a mountain. Her friends start to look for her, and Speaker A asks Speaker B where she has gone. Speaker B replies that he

does not know. The particle *bo3* in Speaker B's reply is to show an element of contrast, which comes from the presupposition inherent in A's question. A believes that B might know where the girl has gone to but apparently B has no knowledge about this matter. Speaker C looks around and sees that the girl is located not far away. The SFP *wo3* at the end of his turn indicates "realization" and draws other people's attention to what he found.

Example 2 (Twin 1939)

- A: 佢 搞 咗 上 邊 度?
 keoi5 kaam4 zo2 soeng5 bin1 dou6
 3SG climb ASP up where?
 "Where is she hiding?"
- B: 我 唔 知 囉!
 ngo5 m4 zi1 bo3
 1SG NEG know SFP
 "I don't know."
- C: 喺 嗰 度 㗎!
 hai2 go2 dou6 wo3
 COP DEM SFP
 "She's there!"

3.1.2 Reminder

The second function of *wo3* in the 1940s is "reminder". The context of the example below is that Guangzhou has been occupied by the Japanese enemy and so refugees have to move to Hong Kong. At the very beginning Speaker A promises that he will find a job for Speaker B if B helps take the luggage. When they arrive at the train station, A uses an excuse to try and get out of paying B for his work. This irritates B who then quarrels with A:

Example 3 (Roar 1941)

- A: 你 搵 笨, 我 唔 俾 面 你 㗎!
 nei5 wan2 ban6 ngo5 m4 bei2 min2 nei5 wo3
 2SG find clumsy 1SG NEG give face 2SG SFP
 "I am telling you that I will not give face to you if you deceive me."
- B: 唔 俾 面 又 點 啊?
 m4 bei2 min2 jau6 dim2 aa3
 NEG give face ADV how SFP
 "What can you do if I don't give face to you?"

A reminds B that if B is to deceive A, A will not treat B nicely. In fact, A gestures to hit B, and so B instantly goes to the station staff for help. In Example 4, the context is that a daughter has found her father with whom she lost contact as a result of the war. She wants to go to his house and see him immediately, but the speaker reminds her that her step-mother is very rude and was not nice to her when they met before and will definitely be very rude if they meet again. The speaker thus suggests that the girl ask her father to come and see her. Here, *wo3*, besides functioning as a reminder, also shows a contrast, telling the hearer that the situation may not be the same as what the hearer has expected.

Example 4 (Twin 1939)

- 不過 你 屋企 有 個 後 母 好 惡 㗎, 不如
 bat1 gwo3 nei5 uk1 kei5 jau5 go3 hau6 mou5 hou2 ok3 wo3 bat1 jyu4
 but 2SG house have CL step mother INT vicious SFP ADV
 叫 你 爸爸 嚟 見 你 㗎 咪 好?
 gin3 nei5 baa4 baa1 lai4 gin3 nei5 gam2 mai6 hou2
 ask 2SG father come see 2SG DM NEG good
 "But remember that your step-mother is very rude, you'd better ask your father to come and see you."

3.1.3 Hearsay

In this period of time, the third function of *wo3* was "hearsay". In Example 5, the hearer wants to continue her work in the office, but the speaker informs her that the baby-sitter said that her baby was very sick and asked her

to go home at once. Here, besides reporting other's speech, an advice is also given against what the hearer originally intended to do.

Example 5 (Scatterbrain 1951)

佢	話	你	屋	企	個	B	B	仔	病	得	好	
keoi5	waa6	nei5	uk1	kei5	go2	go3	bi4	bi1	zai2	beng6	dak1	hou2
3SG	say	2SG	house	DEM	CL		baby		sick	COM	INT	
緊	要	過，	叫	你	即	刻	返	去	過！			
gan2	jiu3	wo3	giu3	nei5	zik1	hak1	faan1	heoi3	wo3			
serious	SFP	ask	2SG	at once	back	go	SFP					

“He said that your baby is seriously sick, and asked you to come home at once.”

In Example 6, a girl is sick in bed and a man asks her to go out for a walk and get some fresh air. But the girl's mother tells her that the doctor has advised her to take a rest, and asks her not to go out lest she would get a cold. The mother's utterance not only reports other's speech but is also advising against something, that is using other's words to suggest against the hearer's decision.

Example 6 (Twin 1939)

醫	生	吩	咐	話	要	休	息	吓	過，	唔	好	搵
ji1	sang1	fan1	fu3	waa6	jiu3	jau1	sik1	haa5	wo3	m4	hou2	wan2
Doctor		tell	say	AUX	rest	ASP	SFP	NEG	good	find		
風	吹	啊！										
fung1	ceoi1	aa3										
wind	blow	SFP										

“Your doctor told you that you should take a rest; don't be chilled by the wind.”

3.1.4 Novel Usages

The fourth situation where *wo3* was used was at the end of imperative sentences. However, in this situation, the tone-of-voice of the utterance was brought out by the imperative sentence itself and not by the particle *wo3*. In the example below, a waiter in a hotel tells the customer that he is newly employed and asks for the customer's forgiveness if he makes mistakes. Even if *wo3* did not appear at the end of the sentence “please don't blame me”, this sentence would still be an imperative one. The use of *wo3* at the end of this type of sentence was a new usage, and similarly the tone-of-voice was expressed by the sentence itself and not by the particle *wo3*.

Example 7 (New 1947)

你	原	諒	我	初	嚟	梗	係	唔	知	手	尾
nei5	jyun4	loeng6	ngo5	co1	lai4	gang2	hai6	m4	zi1	sau2	mei5
2SG		forgive	1SG	first	come	ADV	COP	NEG	know	details	
啦	嘛，	如	果	我	攞	錯	咗，	你	就	唔	好
laa1	maa3	jyu4	gwo2	ngo5	lo2	co3	zo2	nei5	zau6	m4	hou2
SFP	SFP	if	1SG	get	wrong	ASP	2SG	ADV	NEG	good	
怪	我	過！									
gwaai3	ngo5	wo3									
blame	1SG	SFP									

“Please forgive me that I don't know how to tidy up. After all, I am green and new here. If I fetch the wrong item, please don't blame me.”

3.1.5 Short Summary

To sum up, in the 1940s, the three main features of the particle *wo3* were: (1) Realization, (2) Reminder, (3) Hearsay. Besides, *wo3* could also appear at the end of imperative sentences. When we compare the usage of *wo3* in the late 20th century, it is seen that *wo3* had undergone changes in a period of several decades, and its areas of use had obviously been extended. It is important to point out that the function of showing “contrast”, which is commonly found in modern Cantonese, was apparently not one of *wo3*'s characteristics in the 1940s.

3.2 The Use of *bo3*

The particle *bo3* is one of the basic SFPs in Cantonese language. In the language materials obtained from the movies of the 1940s, *bo3* appeared 215 times, a frequency of occurrence higher than that of *wo3*. The main function of *bo3* in this period of time was “emphatic” (O'Melia 1954, Cowles 1965). We can conclude from the

language materials obtained from the movies that this particle possessed the following two functions: (1) Emphasis and (2) Contrast.

3.2.1 Emphasis

The first feature of *bo3*, emphasis, as observed in the movies, was not different from that suggested by O'Melia (1954) and Cowles (1965). In the example below, Speaker A cannot go home because of her bad-tempered mother, and Speaker B invites Speaker A to stay at his home for a few days. Speaker A replies that it is not good to bother Speaker B and his family. The particle *bo3* at the end of A's utterance "I feel sorry to bother you" explains a different viewpoint from the hearer's and emphasizes the speaker's sense of reluctance:

Example 8 (Twin 1939)

A: 不 過 攞 倒 你 哋 唔 好 意 思 囉!
 bat1 gwo3 gaau2 dou2 nei5 dei6 m4 hou2 ji3 si3 bo3
 but trouble ASP 2PL NEG good meaningful SFP
 "I feel embarrassed to bother you."
 B: 唉, 有 咩 問 題 咁。
 aail, jau5 mel man6 tai4 aa1
 INJ, have what problem SFP
 "Don't mention it."

3.2.2 Contrast

The second feature of *bo3*, "contrast" (showing an element of contrast, showing disagreement or different points of view), was not mentioned by O'Melia (1954) or Cowles (1965). In fact, this function occurred quite frequently during the 1940s. Let us look at the following first example. The hearer thinks that buying a diamond ring and proposing marriage to a girl is not very difficult, so long as one works hard and saves money. But the speaker disagrees and says that the girl requires him to buy five carats of diamonds, not ordinary glass stones, and so such demand is not affordable by common people. The particle *bo3* in the example shows contrast to the other party's views and also expresses disagreement.

Example 9 (Scatterbrain 1951)

五 卡 鑽 石 嚟 囉, 你 估 玻 璃 頭 呀?
 ng5 kaa1 zyun3 sek6 lai4 bo3 nei5 gu2 bol lei1 tau4 aa4
 Five carat diamonds SFP SFP 2SG guess glass head SFP
 "Contrary to what you think, they're five-carat diamonds. Do you think they are just glass?"

The *bo3* in Example 10 below also shows contrast and different points of view. In this example, the speaker's friend persuades him to do opium deals to earn money, but the speaker responds by saying that they should not commit crimes for money, which is contrary to his friend's suggestion.

Example 10 (Roar 1941)

不 過 我 哋 唔 能 夠 爲 咗 自 己 去 做 啲
 bat1 gwo3 ngo5 dei6 m4 nang4 gau3 wai6 zo2 zi6 gei2 heoi3 zou6 di1
 but 1PL NEG AUX for ASP self go do DET
 犯 法 嘢 囉。
 faan6 faat3 je5 bo3
 illegal stuff SFP
 "(contrary to your view) But we cannot do anything illegal in order to serve our own interests."

3.2.3 Short Summary

Regarding the frequency of occurrence, *bo3* in the 1940s appeared more frequently than *wo3*. The two main functions of *bo3* in this period were shown in our data: (1) Emphasis and (2) Contrast. The "emphasis" function was addressed in previous studies (O'Melia 1954, Cowles 1965), but the "contrast" function was not. The two functions of *bo3* had a common characteristic, that is, explaining different viewpoints from the addressee's. The "contrast" function later became the sole function of *bo3* in the 1990s (Leung 2010). Therefore, the areas of use of the particle *bo3* became narrower than those of *bo3* in mid 20th century. It is worthy to look into the expansion of the areas of use of *wo3* and the increasingly narrower areas of use of *bo3*.

4. The Use of *bo3* and *wo3* in the 1970s

The language examples of this period of time mainly come from the seven Cantonese movies of the 1970s (section 2.2). This section focuses on the usages of the particles *wo3* and *bo3* in that period, beginning with *wo3* for further discussion.

4.1 The Use of *wo3*

In the 1970s, the analysis of the functions of *wo3* in the language sample obtained from the movies shows that it performed the following functions: (1) Realization, (2) Reminder, (3) Hearsay, (4) Contrast. Therefore, compared with the 1940s, *wo3* in the 1970s had one more function, that is contrast. One point worth noticing is that by the 1970s, *wo3* had already developed into a particle with a considerable frequency of occurrence (110 times in total) and with broader usages, but there was no particular discussion of this particle by the researchers of the Cantonese language in that period, for example Cheung (1972) and Lau (1975). As the four functions have been discussed above, in the following discussion only one example is illustrated for each of these functions.

4.1.1 Realization

The example below illustrates the first function of *wo3*, “realization”. The context is that someone has placed a bomb in a theatre as blackmail. The staff of the theatre are discussing how to deal with the situation. Some of them think that they should call the police, but others think that they should pay the blackmailers. The following utterance is by one of the staff members, who at first thinks that they should call the police but then changes his mind after a while as he realizes that if the news of the blackmail is spread, it will affect the business of the theatre and in turn affect his income.

Example 11 (Private 1976)

係	唔	報	咗	警	重	有	人	嚟	睇	戲	嘅	?
hai6	wo3	bou3	zo2	ging2	zung6	jau5	jan4	lai4	tai2	hei3	ge2	
COP	SFP	report	ASP	police	again	have	person	come	see	film	SFP	

“Oh, yes! Would anyone come to watch movies anymore if this was reported to the police?”

4.1.2 Reminder

The second feature of *wo3* in the 1970s is “reminder”, that is, it serves to remind the hearer of something that the speaker is concerned about. The speaker wants to draw the hearer’s attention to the information. In Example 12, the context is dog racing gambling. The speaker suggests the hearer place a bet of forty thousand dollars on dog number one, reminding the hearer to go for an off-course betting as they can earn much more.

Example 12 (Games 1974)

我	哋	買	四	萬	銀	落	一	號	嗰	處	買
ngo5	dei6	maai5	sei3	maan6	ngan4	lok6	jat1	hou6	go2	cyu3	maai5
1PL		buy	forty	thousand	dollar	in	one	number	DEM		buy

外圍 𩚑!
ngo5 wai4 wo3
off-course betting SFP
“We can stake forty thousand dollars on No.1, remember for off-course betting!”

4.1.3 Hearsay

The third function of *wo3* is “hearsay”, as it serves to indicate that a third person’s speech is being quoted. If both the speaker and hearer know from the context who the third person is, then the clause “he said” can be removed, and the addition of the particle *wo3* to the end of the quoted speech forms a reported speech. In Example 13, Speaker A says C once said that he saw Speaker B in a hotel, but Speaker B responds that this was not the reality.

Example 13 (House 1968)

- A : 阿 啓 佢 話 喺 呢 度 酒 店 見 到 你 啗 !
 aa3 kai2 keoi5 waa6 hai2 lei1 dou6 zau2 dim3 gin3 dou2 nei5 wo3
 Ah-Kai 3SG say COP here hotel see ASP 2SG SFP
 “Ah-Kai said he saw you in the hotel here.”
- B : 我 都 冇 出 過 街 !
 ngo5 dou1 mou5 ceot1 gwo3 gaail
 1SG ADV NEG go ASP street
 “I haven’t gone outside ever.”

4.1.4 Contrast

The fourth function of *wo3* is to show an element of “contrast”, that is, it serves to show that the speaker’s view is contrary to the addressee’s view. In Example 14, Speaker A and Speaker B are partners in a dancing competition. During a dance practice, they quarrel as they do not cooperate well. Speaker B thinks that he is dancing well, but Speaker A does not agree and blames him for his bad performance. The SFP *wo3* in the third turn of A functions to highlight the different viewpoint, showing the contrastive relationship with A’s willingness, to align A’s dancing with that of her partner on the one hand, and the way the partner is dancing on the other, which makes it impossible for A to align with B.

Example 14 (Modern 1970)

- A : 喂 你 點 跳 㗎 ?
 wai3 nei5 dim2 tiu3 gaa3
 INJ 2SG how dance SFP
 “How come you dance in this way?”
- B : 而 家 我 跳 得 唔 好 咩 ?
 ji4 gaal ngo5 tiu3 dak1 m4 hou2 me1
 now 1SG dance COM NEG good SFP
 “Aren’t I doing quite well?”
- A : 夾 我 至 得 咁 嘛 !
 gaap6 ngo5 zi3 dak1 aa1 maa3
 match 1SG ADV COM SFP SFP
 “You’re not matching mine.”
- B : 你 唔 夾 我 咋 嘛 !
 nei5 m4 gaap6 ngo5 zaa3 maa3
 2SG NEG match 1SG SFP SFP
 “You should match my steps”
- A : 你 懶 叻, 你 喺 度 亂 咁 跳, 我
 nei5 laan2 lek1 nei5 hai2 dou6 lyun6 gam1 tiu3 ngo5
 2SG pretend clever 2SG COP here recklessly ADV dance 1SG
 點 夾 你 啗 !
 dim2 gaap6 nei5 wo3
 how match 2SG SFP
 “Don’t pretend to be clever. (Contrary to your view) You dance without following any patterns, how can I match with you?!”
- B : 欸, 你 攞 掂 佢 啊 !
 aai2, nei5 gaau2 dim6 keoi5 aa3
 INJ, 2SG make well 3SG SFP
 “You sort it out yourself then.”

4.1.5 Short Summary

In summary, the main functions of the particle *wo3* in this period of time were: (1) Realization, (2) Reminder, (3) Hearsay, and (4) Contrast. By the 1970s, *wo3* had broadened its usage and developed one more function than in the 1940s, namely “showing contrast”, and these four functions of *wo3* basically remained the same in the 1990s (Leung 2010). Moreover, in terms of frequency of occurrence; its appearance was 99 times in the language samples of 1940s but was increased to 110 times in the language samples of 1970s.

4.2 The Use of *bo3*

For the usage of *bo3* in the 1970s, two points are needed to be mentioned. The first point to note is its frequency of occurrence. In the language samples obtained from the Cantonese movies of the 1940s, *bo3* appeared 215 times, but after thirty years, in the 1970s, it only appeared 90 times, a frequency less than that of *wo3* in the same period, which appeared 110 times. The second point to note is its usage. As the language samples are analyzed, it is found that the characteristics of *bo3* in this period of time were the same as those in 1940s, (1) emphasis and (2) contrast. This shows that in a period of three decades, the particle *bo3* did not undergo any major changes. As the two basic functions of *bo3* have been discussed above in 3.2, here only one example is illustrated for each of these functions.

4.2.1 Emphasis

The following is an example of how *bo3* performed the “emphasis” function. The dialogue takes place in a tea house, where a customer complains that the tea is so dark. The waiter says that he will find another colleague to serve the customer, but the customer is irritated. The customer emphasizes the fact that he comes to the tea house to be served and reminds the waiter that the tea house should provide good service to him. In this example, the particle *bo3* also conveys the idea that “the reality is contrary to what you thought”, that is, it was not up to the waiter to decide how he should serve.

Example 15 (Romance 1968)

Customer :	喂	喂	喂	喂，	你	落	幾	多	茶	葉
	wai3	wai3	wai3	wai3	nei5	lok6	gei2	do1	caa4	jip6
	INJ	INJ	INJ	INJ	2SG	put	how	much	tealeaf	
	㗎？	咁	溶	嘅？						
	gaa3	gam1	jung4	ge2						
	SFP	DET	concentrated	SFP						
	“Hey, how much tea leaves did you put in the pot? The tea is so dark!”									
Waiter :	世伯，	我	知	道	你	係	唔	歡	喜	
	sai3	baak3	ngo5	zi1	dou3	nei5	hai6	m4	fun1	hei2
	uncle		1SG	know	2SG	COP	NEG		like	
	我，	我	搵	過	第個	伙計	嚟	招呼		
	ngo5	ngo5	wan2	gwo3	dai6	go3	fo2	gei3	lai4	ziu1
	1S,	1SG	find	ASP	another	waiter	come		serve	fu1
	你	啦！								
	nei5	laa1								
	2SG	SFP								
	“Uncle, I know you don’t like me, I ask find another waiter to serve you.”									
Customer :	混帳，	我	嚟	幫	襯	你	囉，	我		
	wan6	zoeng3,	ngo5	lai4	bong1	can3	nei5	bo3	ngo5	
	nonsense		1SG	come	patron		2SG	SFP	1SG	
	鍾	意	邊個	就	邊個，	係	唔	係	你	
	zung1	ji3	bin1	go3	zau6	bin1	go3	hai6	m4	hai4
	like		who	ADV	who	COP	NEG	COP	2SG	
	唔	喜歡	招呼	我	咁，	叫	你	部長		
	m4	hei2	fun1	ziu1	fu1	ngo5	aa1	giu3	nei5	bou6
	NEG	like	serve	1SG	SFP	call	2SG	department head	zoeng2	
	嚟，	重	唔	叫	部長	嚟？				
	lai4	zung6	m4	giu3	bou6	zoeng2	lai4			
	Come	ADV	NEG	call	department head	come				
	“Nonsense! I am your customer. Don’t you like serving me? Ask your boss to come here! Why don’t you ask your boss?”									

4.2.2 Contrast

The second function of *bo3* in this period of time was “showing contrast”. In Example 16, the dialogue happens in an office. Speaker A says it is not appropriate for him to criticize his boss, however, Speaker B expresses his disagreement with Speaker B’s way of doing things. The particle *bo3* at the end of Speaker A’s utterance has the function of putting forward a different viewpoint, highlighting the fact that the two persons hold different

viewpoints.

Example 16 (House 1968)

- A : 雖 然 就 下 屬 唔 應 該 批 評 上 司 ,
 seoil jin4 zau6 haa6 suk6 m4 jing1 goi1 pail ping4 soeng6 sil
 although ADV subordinate NEG AUX criticize boss
 不 過 我 認 爲 你 噉 樣 唔 係 咁
 bat1 gwo3 ngo5 jing6 wai4 nei5 gam2 joeng2 m4 hai6 gam3
 but 1SG think 2SG DEM NEG COP DET
 公 道 囉 。
 gung1 dou6 bo3
 fair SFP
 “Though it is not appropriate for a subordinate to comment on his boss, I think you are not very fair.”
- B : 點 呢 ?
 dim2 ne1
 then SFP
 “In what way?”

4.2.3 Short Summary

In summary, the main functions of *bo3* in the 1940s were (1) Emphasis and (2) Contrast and in the 1970s were not much different from those. However, it is clear that the frequency of occurrence had been decreasing when the movies data of the two periods are compared. According to the findings of the researches on Cantonese in that period, the particle *bo3* performed the functions of providing opinion, emphasizing, and reminding the hearer to take something into special consideration (Cheung 1972, 2007, Lau 1975, Kwok 1984). These findings are in line with what is shown by our analysis of the language samples obtained from the movies in the 1970s. However, the “contrast” function, which is the main function of *bo3* in present-day Cantonese, was not specifically mentioned in these studies.

5. Major Findings

In this section, the two SFPs will be analyzed in terms of “frequency of occurrence” and “usages”. By observing the increase and decrease in the frequency of the usage, it is discovered that while the usage of one prospers, the other declines. This may be one of the reasons why the researchers of Cantonese always link the two particles together. The amount of the SFPs *bo3* and *wo3* in each of the time periods are listed in the following table.

Insert Table 5 Here

Observing from the above table, the appearance of *wo3* was apparently less than that of *bo3* in the 1940s, then in the 1970s *wo3* was more frequently heard and became much more common than *bo3*. The appearance of *bo3* was apparently more than that of *wo3* in the 1940s and it began to show a decrease in the 1970s. Based on Leung’s observations (2010), in the corpus of the 1990s the particle *bo3* was rarely heard in conversations, and was seen almost exclusively in the company of other particles, such as *gaa3*, *laa3*, *tim1* and *zaa3*, forming SFP-clusters. In this sense, its independent existence has become unnecessary. Since its functions in daily life have been replaced by *wo3*, it is becoming an SFP with a low frequency of occurrence and its future appearance in the system of Hong Kong Cantonese SFPs seems controversial

In terms of their meanings and functions, *wo3* and *bo3* were distinctly separate; they were two different particles with different functions. In the 1940s, the main functions of *wo3* were (1) Realization, (2) Reminder, (3) Hearsay. The newly developed “realization” and “reminder” functions of *wo3* originally belonged to *bo3*, and this was the early sign of merging of these two particles. As the 1970s was reached, the development of *wo3* has enabled it to generally “show contrast”, which was also originally a function of *bo3*. Consequently, the SFP *wo3* in this period had acquired an additional function. Beginning from the 1970s, the “contrast” function has been shared by *wo3* and *bo3* up to the present time. These four basic features of *wo3* remained the same in the 1990s, and by this time *wo3* could also be used at the end of imperative and exclamatory sentences (Leung 2010). Whether *wo3* will acquire an imperative tone-of-voice or an exclamatory tone-of-voice in future is too early to draw a conclusion. In another words, it is shown that the functions of *wo3* have been expanding but *bo3* seems to have been contracting. Following the expansion of the functions of *wo3*, its earlier “hearsay” function has now been shared by another particle *wo5*. Since *wo3* can still be used to express “hearsay” in some cases, many people believe that *wo3* and *wo5* are interchangeable although *wo3* is much more versatile than *wo5*. As a matter of fact,

there are differences between the two (Leung 2009). As for the particle *bo3*, its functions in the 1940s were: (1) Emphasis, and (2) Contrast. In the 1990s, *bo3* had only one major characteristic that is to show “contrast”. In short, the functions of *bo3* have continuously decreased in the past 60 years.

Finally, the historical development of the functions of *wo3* and *bo3* in different periods of time can be summarized as follows:

Insert Table 6 Here

6. Conclusions

As a SFP indicating mood and tone-of-voice, the SFP *wo3* is used very frequently in modern Cantonese. Some researches have shown that this particle is used to show “realization and reminder” (Rao 1983, Kwok 1984, Ouyang 1990, Deng 1991, Leung 1992, Fang 2003). However, Leung (2010) argues that the meanings of the particle *wo3* in the late 20th century are broader than “realization and reminder” as suggested by past researches. By observing the increase and decrease in the frequency of use of the SFPs in the second half of last century, and comparing the corpus of the two periods in the 20th century (1940s, 1970s), it is found that the frequency of use of these two SFPs is inversely proportional to each other. While the usage of one prospers, the other declines. In terms of their meanings and functions, *wo3* and *bo3* were distinctly separate. In the 1940s, the main features of *wo3* were (1) Realization, (2) Reminder, and (3) Hearsay. The newly developed “realization” and “reminder” functions of *wo3* originally belonged to *bo3*, and this was the early sign of merging of these two particles. As the 1970s was reached, the development of *wo3* enabled it to generally “show contrast”, which was also originally a feature of *bo3*. Beginning from the 1970s, the “contrast” function has been shared by *wo3* and *bo3* up to the present time. These four basic functions of *wo3* remained the same in the 1990s, and by this period of time *wo3* could also be used at the end of imperative and exclamatory sentences. As for the particle *bo3*, in the 1940s, its functions were narrowed to the following two: (1) Emphasis, and (2) Contrast. There were no major changes in the usage of *bo3* in the 1970s. In the 1990s, *bo3* mainly possessed a “contrast” function in short negative sentences and was often used with other particles to form particle clusters.

References

English

- Cowles, R. T. (1965). *The Cantonese Speaker's Dictionary*. The University of Hong Kong.
- Kwok, H. (1984). *Sentence Particles in Cantonese*. Hong Kong: Centre of Asian Studies, University of Hong Kong.
- Lau, S. (1975). *Advanced Cantonese*. Hong Kong: The Government Printer.
- Leung, W. M. (2009). A Study of the Cantonese Hearsay Particle *wo* from a Phonetic Perspective. *International Journal of Linguistics*, 1(1), pp1-14.
- Leung, W. M. (2010). On the Identity and Uses of Cantonese Sentence-final Particles in the Late 20th Century: The Case of *wo* and *bo*. *Asian Social Science*, 6(1), pp13-23.
- Leung, W.-M. (2010). *On the Synchrony and Diachrony of Sentence-Final Particles: The Case of WO in Cantonese*. Germany: Lambert Academic Publishing AG & Co. KG.
- Luke, K. K. (1990). *Utterance Particles in Cantonese Conversation*. Amsterdam ; Benjamins.
- Matthews, S. & Yip, V. (1994). *Cantonese: A Comprehensive Grammar*. London and New York: Routledge.
- O'Melia, T. A. (1954). *First Year Cantonese*. Hong Kong Catholic Truth Society.
- Wu, W. L. (2009). Sentence-final particles in Hong Kong Cantonese: Are they tonal or intonational?, in the *Proceedings of the 10th Annual Conference of the International Speech Communication Association* (Interspeech 2009), Brighton, UK, pp2291-2294.

Chinese

- Cheung, H. N. 張洪年: <<香港粵語語法的研究>>. 香港: 香港中文大學, 1972 年.
- Cheung, H. N. 張洪年: <<香港粵語語法的研究>> (增補版). 香港: 香港中文大學, 2007 年.
- Deng, S. J. 鄧少君: <廣州方言常見的語氣詞>, 載<<方言>>. 1991 年第 2 期.
- Fang, X. Y. 方小燕: <<廣州方言句末語氣助詞>>. 廣州: 暨南大學出版社, 2003 年.
- Leung, C. S. 梁仲森: <<香港粵語語助詞的研究>>. 香港: 香港理工大學, 哲學碩士論文, 1992 年.
- Li, X. K. 李新魁等: <<廣州方言研究>>. 廣州: 廣東人民出版社, 1995 年.

Linguistics Society of Hong Kong 香港語言學學會粵語拼音字表編寫小組: <<粵語拼音字表>> (第二版). 香港: 香港語言學學會, 2002 年.

Ouyang, J. Y. 歐陽覺亞: <廣州話的語氣助詞>, 載<<王力先生紀念論文集>>. 北京商務印書, 1990 年.

Rao, B. C. 饒秉才等: <<廣州話方言詞典>>. 香港: 商務印書館, 1981 年.

List of abbreviations

ADV	Adverb
ASP	Aspect
AUX	Auxiliary
CL	Classifier
COM	Complement marker
COP	Copula
DEM	Demonstrative
DET	Determiner
INJ	Interjection
INT	Intensifier
NEG	Negative
PL	Plural
SFP	Sentence-final Particle
SG	Singular
DM	Discourse Marker

Tables

Table 1. Level of Naturalness

	<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>One person</i>	<i>Two people or more</i>
1.	• Topic free • No preparation	Self-talking	Daily conversation
2.	• Topic-restricted • No preparation	Talking about self-experience	Forum, discussion
3.	• Topic-restricted • No text preparation	Oral examination	On-site interview
4.	• Topic-restricted • Text preparation needed • Not reading from scripts	monologue	Drama, <i>Movie</i>
5.	• Topic-restricted • Text preparation needed • Reading from scripts	News broadcasting	Group speech contest, Conversations in textbooks

Table 2. Movies from the 1940s

<i>Year</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Main Role</i>	<i>Producer</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Duration (mins)</i>
1939	Twin sisters of the South (南國姊妹花)	NG Chor-Fan WU Tip-ying	WU Tip-ying	Romance and ethics	85
1941	Roar of the People (民族的吼聲)	CHEUNG Ying WONG Ang	Tai-kun	Anti-war promotion	85
1947	New white golden dragon (新白金龍)	SIT Kok-Sin CHENG Mang-ha	Great China	Love comedy	85
1947	You are a nice lady, but why (卿本佳人)	TSE Tin CHENG Mang-ha	Hongkong	Satire comedy	77
1949	The night mourning of Pak Fu-yung (夜吊白芙蓉)	HO Fei-fan FONG Yim-fun	Tai-nam	Romance	86
1951	The scatterbrain (失魂魚)	TANG Kei-chan Chun Siu Lay	World-wide	Comedy	90
1952	A couple in love (恩恩愛愛)	HO Fei-fan FONG Yim-fun	Tai-shing	Romance	102

Table 3. Movies from the 1970s

<i>Year</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Main Role</i>	<i>Producer</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Duration (mins)</i>
1968	A house filled with happiness (歡樂滿華堂)	NAM Hung CHOW Tsu	Hing-fat	Comedy	95
1968	Romance across the miles (明月千里寄相思)	WU Junli Wu Fung	Kin-shing	Tragedy	85
1970	I'll get you one day (總有一天捉到你)	Connie CHAN Kenneth TSANG	Miramar	Crime	86
1970	The young girl dares not come home (我永遠懷念你)	Connie CHAN SIT Kar-yin	Fok-hing	Romance	90
1970	Modern school life (學府新潮)	TANG Kwong-wing LEE Si-kei	Kowloon	Ethics	102
1974	Games gamblers play (鬼馬雙星)	The Hui Brothers	Golden Harvest	Comedy	109
1976	The private eyes (半斤八兩)	The Hui Brothers	Golden Harvest	Comedy	94

Table 4. Abbreviations of the Source Materials

<i>Year</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Abbreviation</i>
1939	Twin sisters of the South	Twin
1941	Roar of the People	Roar
1947	New white golden dragon	New
1947	You are a nice lady, but why	You
1949	The night mourning of Pak Fu-yung	Pak Fu-yung
1951	The scatterbrain	Scatterbrain
1952	A couple in love	Couple
1968	A house filled with happiness	House
1968	Romance across the miles	Romance
1970	I'll get you one day	Get you
1970	The young girl dares not come home	Young
1970	Modern school life	Modern
1974	Games gamblers play	Games
1976	The private eyes	Private

Table 5. Frequency of occurrence of *bo3* and *wo3*

<i>Time Periods</i>	<i>Source of Corpus</i>	<i>Time</i>	<i>bo3</i>	<i>wo3</i>	<i>Total</i>
1940s	Cantonese Movies	10 Hours	215 (68.5%)	99 (31.5%)	314
1970s	Cantonese Movies	10 Hours	90 (45%)	110 (55%)	200

Table 6. Functions of *wo3* and *bo3* in different periods of time

<i>Time</i>	<i>Functions of wo3</i>	<i>Functions of bo3</i>
1940s	(1) realization, (2) reminder, (3) hearsay	(1) emphasis, (2) contrast
1970s	(1) realization, (2) reminder, (3) hearsay, (4) contrast (and at the end of an imperative sentence)	(1) emphasis, (2) contrast
1990s	(1) realization, (2) reminder, (3) hearsay, (4) contrast (and at the end of an imperative or an exclamatory sentence, mirative shift -> extension)	(1) contrast