Hao in spoken Chinese discourse: relevance and coherence

Yu-Fang Wang [a,*], Pi-Hua Tsai [b]

[a] *Graduate Institute of Teaching Chinese as a second language, National Kaohsiung Normal University, Koahsiung 802, Taiwan, ROC*
[b] *English Department, National Chengchi University, Taipei 116, Taiwan, ROC*

Abstract

This study aimed to provide a unified description of the lexeme *hao*, in which its polyfunctionality is accounted for in terms of an abstract basic meaning that interacts in various ways with the different levels of discourse in which *hao* can function. The corpus contained two sets of data: naturally occurring daily conversations (totaling 120′55″) and radio interviews and call-ins (120′32″ in total). The daily conversations are less formal and less planned than the radio interviews and call-ins. They were taped via audio cassettes and transcribed into intonation units, i.e., sequences of words combined under a single unified intonation contour, usually preceded by a pause. The theoretical and analytical framework adopted in this study was drawn from the work of M.A.K. Halliday [An Introduction to Functional Grammar, Edward Arnold, London, 1994], a tripartite model consisting of ideational, textual, and interactional levels. Acting as a loose talk marker, *hao* is mainly used to contribute to the relevance of utterances. Specifically, in addition to functioning as an adjective or a degree adverb at the ideational level, it can be used as a marker of closure or transition at the textual level and as a marker of agreement or concession at the interactional level. Put differently, as a predicative adjective, *hao* can be used in a declarative sentence to express a speaker's positive attitude towards something, i.e., to indicate that something is "good." Then it develops into a discourse marker, which construes a world that has no reference in the described situation,

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +886 7 7172930.
  E-mail address: yfwang@nknucc.nknu.edu.tw (Y.-F. Wang).

but only to the speaker's world of belief about coherence, especially about correlations between situations.
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1. Introduction

The Chinese lexeme *hao* has several meanings. Traditionally, *hao* is an adjective, glossed as 'good,' 'fine,' 'nice,' 'okay,' 'all right,' 'yes,' etc. It can also be used as a degree adverb, similar to English *very*. In addition, it can act as a discourse marker [1] in spoken discourse. As a discourse marker, *hao* can occur in different positions and indeed has different syntactic functions. A number of different uses of *hao* fall into this category and are, thus, relevant to our discussion. The following list gives relevant examples.

(1) (V and R are commenting on the performance of an actress in a film. R thinks that the actress plays every role assigned to her very well.)

V: .. Ni   hui   juede, [2]_
       You   will   feel

   .. ta   kelian,_
      she   poor

   .. keneng   shi   yinwei   ta   yanji   **hao**   ba.\
      probably   COP   because   her   performance   good   PRT

R: .. Dui   ah,_
      Right   PRT

   .. ranhou,_
      then

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[1] The term "discourse markers" refers to a group of minor linguistic elements at the word level having the following properties: they are predominantly associated with spoken language; their function is to express pragmatic aspects of communication, for example, by marking a propositional attitude, or by signaling intratextual or interpersonal relations; and they do not contribute to the propositional content of the utterances in which they occur (Anderson, 1998).

[2] The abbreviations used in the interliner translation are as follows: ADV = adverb, CL = classifier, COP = copula, CRS = current relevant state marker, DC = directional complement, EXP = experiential aspect marker, INT = intensifier, IRJ = interjection, NEG = negation, NOM = nominalizer, PFV = perfective aspect marker, PREP = preposition, PRT = clause final particle, Q = final question marker, TOP = topic marker, and GEN = genitive marker.

```
.. wo   juede   ta,_
   I     feel    she

.. tamen   meige   jiaose      ah,_
   they    each    character   PRT

.. dou   yan    de   hen   hao    ah./  (Adjective)
   all   play   DE   very  good   PRT
```
V: 'You probably think that because her acting skill is very good, the char-
   acter she plays in the film is pathetic.'
R: 'Right, I think that she can perform very well in every role she plays.'

(2) (Staying outside on a winter day, J and E feel very cold.)

```
J: .. Wo    hao    leng    oh.\        (Adverb)
      I      very   cold    PRT

E: ..^bu    yao    jiang   la,_
      NEG    will   speak   PRT

   .. wo    ye     hen     leng    ne.\
      I      too    very    cold    PRT
```
J: 'I feel very cold.'
E: 'Don't say that.   I feel cold, too.'

(3) (E tells her recipient that it is very boring to live in the place they are
     talking about.)

```
E: .. Zai    na     bian    shenghuo  hao    wuqu,_   (Adverb)
      In     that   place   life       very   boring

   ..^tai    wuqu    le.\
     very    boring  PRT
```
E: 'It's boring to live there, too monotonous.'

(4) (E tells her recipient that she has asked her younger sister to give her a ride on
     her motorcycle.)

```
E: .. Wo    yijing    gen    wo      mei        jianghao.\ (Resultative
                                                            Complement)

             I         with   my      younger    speak-
             already                  sister     finished
```

..Zheyang	ta,_			
in this way	she			

..ta	caineng	zai	women	ah.\
she	could	ride	us	PRT

E:I've told my younger sister so that she could give us a ride.'

(5)	(Before the excerpt, C and her recipient talk about their career plans. Finding that it is very late at night, i.e., 11:00 p.m., she would like to end the conversation.)

C:...(2.2) Ai.	zemo	shiyong	womende	yisheng,_
alas	how	use	our	life

...(1.4) hen	bu	rongyi	la.\	
very	NEG	easy	PRT	

→ .. **Hao**	la,_
Okay	PRT

..Xiuhui,_
Xiuhui

..ni	qu	shuijiao,_
you	go	sleep

..shiyidian	yijing	gou	wan	le.\
eleven	already	enough	late	PRT

C:'Alas, how to make good use of our lives is not easy to figure out. Okay, Xiuhui, now it's getting very late.   It's time for sleep.'

The above examples illustrate the large variety of syntactic and pragmatic functions that can be realized by *hao*. In (1) to (3), it functions as an adjective and adverb, respectively, while in (4) it is used as a resultative complement, which may come from the adjective *hao*. These uses have a long history and are fairly straightforward. For instance, the adverb *hao* is derived from the adjective *hao*, which means 'healthy, sound, sensible.' However, in (5), we see that when a speaker wants to close the current conversation, she will use *hao* 'okay' [3] as a move to end the conversation or change the topic. This move is typically realized by means of an item like '*hao*, ' which occupies the entire move, as indicated by the arrow in (5). Syntax has little to do with *hao* in (5), since *hao* in this case makes no syntactic predication. Nor does

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[3] *Hao* has the basic function of agreeing with the previous utterances in the same way that *okay* does (for a discussion of *okay,* see Condon, 2001; Beach, 1993; Heisler, 1996).

semantics have much to do with this item when it is not used with its literal meaning; i.e., it has no propositional content. For this reason, *hao* commonly occurs just before a topic change or at the end of a conversation. Such an item is not included in traditional linguistic categories, for it displays a range of other, less adverbial and more particle-like uses that are much more frequent in spoken Chinese discourse. In particular, it is largely restricted to spoken language, due to its largely interactional functions. Certain items or the so-called discourse markers, such as *hao*, create problems for sentence based grammars but are of great interest in a study of discourse sequences since their functions have largely to do with the organization of connected discourse and with the interpretation of functional categories of speech acts. A discourse marker, according to Fraser (1990), is a pragmatic marker which provides a commentary on the following utterance; that is, it leads off an utterance and indicates how the speaker intends its basic message to relate to the prior discourse. Hence, discourse markers signal a sequential discourse relationship.

Over the past decade, there have been several studies on the lexeme *hao* 'good' (e.g., Lü, 1980; Miracle, 1989, 1991; Wang, 2001); nonetheless, the meaning of *hao* has not been extensively examined. According to Lü (1980), *hao* expresses several kinds of moods. When used alone, it resembles an interjection and serves as a marker of agreement, conclusion, or counterexpectation. Although his definition does capture the essence of the meaning of *hao*, it does not begin to explain the use of this lexical item in discourse. Looking at *hao* based on a spoken database, Miracle (1989, 1991) finds that *hao* not only (i) plays a role in the development and closure of commissive/requestive social actions, but also (ii) serves to make assertions and mark a transition to a new topic or social activity, (iii) marks the closure of telephone calls or other physical activity, and (iv) when used within a particular speaker's turn, functions as a marker of idea management signaling the completion of a prior topic or activity and a transition to another topic or activity, as summarized in Table 1. He further argues that the core function of closure can be seen to be directly related to the use of *hao* as a resultative complement conveying the idea of satisfactorily finishing something.

However, Miracle does not provide an account of how the various lexical, pragmatic and discourse functions of *hao* have come into being, though his study sheds new light on the interactional functions of *hao*. Different from Miracle's analysis

Table 1
Discourse use of *hao* (adapted from Miracle, 1991:56)

Aspect of discourse	Function (Marking)
Social action structure	Closure *s*-act (= social action) Closure physical act (*s*-act) Completion of subsidiary action
Turn structure	Appreciation of assertion
Idea structure	Completion of idea—transition
Information state	Completion of internal deliberation

of *hao* is Wang's (2001), who discusses how *hao*'s various lexical, grammatical and discourse functions have come into being, as well as the directionality of various changes. Wang maintains that the path of grammaticalization of *hao* is from a predicative adjective to both a discourse marker of agreement and a discourse marker of closure and transition. She suggests that it is through the conventionalization of implicature (Bybee, 1994) and ritualization (Haiman, 1994) that predicative *hao* has developed these discourse functions, though the position of the resultative complement *hao* in the grammaticalization path remains unclear.

Both Miracle's and Wang's studies are empirical in that they are based on the analysis of the linguistic features of *hao* in actual texts. Nevertheless, this issue requires further exploration and elaboration, which provided one major impetus for the present study. Based on Miracle's and Wang's research, this study paid attention to the occurrence of the linguistic item *hao* and at the same time collected numerical data about the types of constructions at a higher level of abstraction in which the item *hao* plays a role. The main purpose of the present study was to provide a unified description of the lexeme *hao*, in which its polyfunctionality is accounted for in terms of an abstract basic meaning that interacts in various ways with the different levels of discourse in which *hao* can function. We believe that relevance theory, proposed by Sperber and Wilson (1986, 1995), can account for all the uses of *hao* on the basis of a general cognitive theory of human communication.

Thus, in this paper, an attempt is made to investigate the polyfunctionality of the lexeme *hao* in Mandarin Chinese through the analysis of a synchronic database so as to account for *hao*'s meaning layering and to provide evidence for its tendency towards meaning abstractness. We start by giving an overview of the different meanings that are traditionally ascribed to *hao*. In Section 2, we go into the relevant details of the model proposed by Halliday (1994) and discuss the three levels of description that are required for a satisfactory account of such expressions. Section 3 introduces the data used in this study. Section 4 is devoted to a synchronic account of the functions of *hao* at different levels of discourse, while Section 5 attempts to account for the relations between these functions of *hao* based on the Principle of Relevance (Sperber and Wilson, 1986, 1995). Section 6 concludes the paper.

2. A three-level analysis of *hao*

Recently, discourse markers, an essential means by which speakers achieve coherence in a developing discourse, have attracted a lot of attention from researchers. Many studies (e.g., Schiffrin, 1987; Sweetser, 1990; Kroon, 1998; to mention but a few) have demonstrated that discourse markers play a role in signaling or maintaining discourse coherence and that discourse coherence obtains on various levels. In a number of the recently proposed synchronic and/or diachronic approaches to discourse markers and particles, the notion of 'linguistic domains' (or 'planes') plays a vital role. Various sets of domains have been claimed as being relevant. For

example, Sweetser (1990) holds that only an analysis which takes into account the existence of multiple domains of an utterance can possibly explain the pragmatically conditioned interpretations of conjunctions in the different domains. She accounts for the polyfunctionality of conjunctions such as *but* and *because* by claiming that they may apply to relations in three different domains, viz., the content domain (which covers relations in the 'real world'), the epistemic domain (which concerns various types of inferential relations), and the speech act domain (where relations between speech acts are situated).

Another proposal along a similar line is developed by Kroon (1998) in her study on Latin discourse particles. She distinguishes three domains or 'levels of discourse' that cover three different types of coherence relations that may be expressed by discourse particles: (i) a representational level, roughly corresponding to Sweetser's content domain, (ii) a presentational level, which is concerned with relations within monological stretches of text, and (iii) an interactional level of discourse, which concerns the relations between the constituent moves of a communicative exchange. Kroon developed her model primarily to account for the different functions of a number of allegedly synonymous discourse particles, which she has shown to differ from one another in terms of the discourse levels on which they primarily function. At the same time, moreover, her approach can also be used to account for the relations between the different functions of individual particles and to provide a more unified account of particles whose polyfunctionality has traditionally been dealt with in linguistics by means of simple lists of unconnected meanings. For example, Latin *sane* is used as a discourse particle that is traditionally associated in grammars of Latin with a number of seemingly unconnected functions, in addition to its use as a manner adverb with full lexical meaning ('in a healthy, sensible way'). Risselada (1998) proposes a more unified account, in which its various discourse functions are described on the basis of Kroon's three-stage analysis model, which distinguishes between a relatively abstract basic meaning ('positive evaluation'), the domains or discourse levels to which *sane* may pertain, and the discourse pragmatic properties of the utterances in which this particle

Table 2
Three-stage analysis of *sane* (adapted from Risselada, 1998, pp. 231–232)

(i) *Basic meaning*: 'positive evaluation'
(ii) *Discourse functions*:

    a. Representational: indicating positive evaluation of the speaker's description of (part of) a state of affairs
    b. Interactional: indicating agreement with a preceding interactional move

(iii) *actual uses*:

    a. Representational: intensifier
    b. Interactional: expressing agreement, compliance, consent with or acceptance of a preceding interactional move
        (limited) acceptance of a speech act that is attributed to an (imaginary) interlocutor in the first part of a paratactic concessive constellation

is used. Table 2 summarizes Risselada's analysis of *sane*. Special attention in his study is devoted to the proposed use of *sane* as a concessive marker. He argues that *sane* is not in itself a concessive marker, but is used in the first part of a paratactic concessive constellation to mark the speaker's (restricted) agreement with a speech act that is attributed to a real or imaginary interlocutor.

On the other hand, in her study on English discourse markers, Schiffrin (1987) distinguishes five separate planes, viz., the ideational structure, action structure, exchange structure, information state, and participation framework. She claims that her model is a model of discourse and also a model of coherence. In her view, discourse markers provide contextual coordinates of two kinds. First, they can be said to be deictic and to index utterances to preceding and/or following talk and to the speaker, the hearer, or both. Second, each marker can be said to be primarily associated with one of the five planes of talk, with either speaker or hearer, and with prior and/or subsequent discourse. However, in defining her discourse planes by means of broad and general terms, Schiffrin does not provide a systematic motivation for them, and the planes are found to sometimes overlap (for a discussion, see Huang, 1994).

The theoretical and analytical framework adopted in this study was drawn from the work of Halliday (1994), a tripartite model consisting of the ideational, textual, and interactional levels, parallel to the three-level approach proposed by Sweetser (1990) and Kroon (1998). [4] The stand that this study takes derives from Halliday and Hasan's (1976) and Halliday's (1994) view of language. A basic assumption in most of their work is that language is multifunctional and metafunctional, working in many ways at once. To be precise, language has a reflective/ideational function that serves to express logical and experiential meaning. Through this function, speakers embody in language their experiences with the phenomena of the world, including their reactions, cognitions, and perceptions. Language also has a textual function, which enables links to be made with the situation and cohesive texts to be constructed. This function is relevance to context: both the preceding (and following) text and the context of the situation. In addition to its ideational and textual functions, language serves an interactional (interpersonal) function. Speakers use language as a means of acting on others in their environment and setting up relationships between themselves and their addressees. In other words, the function which language serves in expressing 'content,' we will describe as textual (message-oriented); and the function involved in expressing social relations and personal attitudes, we will describe as interactional (the use of language to establish and maintain social relationships). From this perspective, speakers and writers are viewed as using language not only ideationally (i.e., representing thought and experience in a coherent way), but also textually (i.e., creating well-formed and appropriate texts) and in its interactional/interpersonal function (i.e., taking part in social interactions). In the present study, we applied this approach to the Mandarin

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[4] Halliday's three levels of discourse are compatible with the three components of discourse: the representational, presentational, and interactional levels, proposed by Kroon (1998).

expression *hao*, which is commonly taken to fulfill a number of quite divergent functions.

3. The data

For the present research, tape-recorded casual conversations and interactional texts related to radio interviews and call-ins were selected for two different sets of data for comparison. Hence, the corpus used in the study contained the two sets of data: naturally occurring daily conversations [5] (totaling 120′55″) and radio interviews and call-ins (120′32″ in total), the former being less formal and less planned than the latter. In order to see whether text type plays a role in the functions of *hao*, we looked at *hao* in the two sets of data. The discourses were taped via audio cassettes and transcribed into intonation units, i.e., sequences of words combined under a single unified intonation contour, usually preceded by a pause (for discussions, see Chafe, 1987; Cruttenden, 1989; Du Bois et al., 1993).

4. Discussion

The discourse marker *hao*, predominantly associated with spoken language, is often considered to function as a pragmatic indicator of communication, for instance, by marking propositional attitudes or illocutionary force, or by signaling textual or interpersonal relations. A number of different uses of *hao* fall into this category and are thus relevant to the present discussion. In the following subsections, we give examples from the corpus in which *hao* is used as a discourse marker at the textual level and also at the interactional level.

4.1. Hao as a closure/transition marker at the textual level of discourse

The basic meaning of *hao* can be captured by the concept of 'positive evaluation.' This meaning shows clear traces of the full lexical meaning of the degree adverb *hao* ('soundly; fairly'), from which the discourse marker *hao* has developed. At the textual level, the basic meaning of 'positive evaluation' results in a discourse function as 'intensifier,' indicating positive evaluation of the speaker's description of (part of) a state of affairs, as manifested in (6).

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[5] The parties to these conversations were diverse—students, colleagues, housewives, and the like—as were the situations—in a dormitory, at work, at home, and so on.

(6)   (B is telling A that once she and her friends ate many shrimp at a restaurant
       and would like to go there again. A expresses her extreme surprise. B says jok-
       ingly that when they go to the restaurant the next time, it would be fine to order
       shrimp only.)

	B:	..Tamen	shuo	tai	haochi,_			
		they	say	very	delicious			
		..hai	jiao	wo	zai	qu.\		
		even	ask	me	again	go		
	A:	..Ah?/						
		IRJ						
		..zhende	ma?/					
		really	PRT					
		.xiasiren	le.\					
		scary	PRT					
→	B:	..Xiaci	guang	chi	xia	jiu	**hao**	le,_
		next time	only	eat	shrimp	that	good	PRT
		..women,_						
		we						
→		..xiaci	guang	chi	xia	jiu	**hao**.\	(Conversation)
		next time	only	eat	shrimp	that	good	

       B: 'They said they're very delicious and asked me to go again.'
       A: 'Really? It's scary.'
       B: 'Next time when all of us go to the restaurant, it will be okay for us to
            just order shrimp.'

   The use of *hao* in (6) is local, in that a relationship is established between two
adjacent utterances. However, discourse markers can signal relations between larger
units of talk. Consider (7):

(7)   (L, a hostess in a radio program, describes the interior design of a restaurant.Then
       she begins to introduce the owner and asks him to tell the audience
       about the history of the restaurant.)

	L:	..Na.	zhengge	buzhi,_			
		that	whole	outlay			
		..gei	women	ganjue	shi	hen	wenxinde.\
		give	us	feeling	COP	very	warm

→   ...(1.1) **Hao**,_
                okay

..jieshaowan	tade	zhuanghuang	ne,_
finish introducing	its	decoration	PRT

..wo	dei	qing	zhe	jia	diande	laoban,_
I	have to	ask	this	CL	store	boss

..lai	shuoming	^kaidianshi,_
come	explain	history of running the store

..tamende	lishi.\	(Radio Talk)
their	history	

L: 'The whole layout is very warm and comfortable. Okay, after
      introducing its layout and decoration, I would like to ask
      the owner to tell us about its history, how he established the
      restaurant.'

In (7), the marker *hao* signals the relationship between two chunks of talk in the speaker's introduction of two aspects of a restaurant: its layout and its history. Each unit contains several utterances. Here, L uses *hao* to signal her desire to end the current topic or talk and bring up another topic. As *hao* expresses the meaning of goodness, it can be extended to the meaning of completeness, displaying a general state of readiness to move on to the next matter. This type of *hao* is often found in situations where the current speaker marks closure of the last topic and readiness to move on to the next one. Hence, *hao* functions to mark closure and satisfactory completion of the prior discourse. That is, *hao* serves as a bridge between two topics or between two stages of the talk. Consistent with both Condon's (1986) and Beach's (1993) argument that *okay* should be identified as a topic shift/transition, we observe that *hao* can be viewed as a linking device which is used by the current speaker to react to prior talk and at the same time present the next-positioned matter. It acts as a transition marker that not only brings closure to previous utterances but also transitions to new topics/activities.

4.2. Hao as an agreement/acceptance marker at the interactional level of discourse

A conversation can be viewed as a series of speech acts—greetings, inquiries, congratulations, comments, invitations, requests, refusals, accusations, denials,

promises, farewells, etc. To communicate expeditiously, interlocutors can give one another traffic directions using various devices. *Hao* is one such device. At the interactional level, speakers use *hao* to signal their positive evaluation of, and hence to express their agreement with, a preceding interactional move. Similar to English *okay* (Beach, 1993), *hao*, which is used to respond to a prior turn and also indicates a readiness to close the current exchange and/or move on to the next stage of the talk or the next topic of discussion, is a free-standing receipt marker employed by both the recipient and the current speaker. Depending on the nature of this preceding interactional move, *hao* signals agreement, compliance, acceptance, or concession. As we have seen *hao* in (6), this "good" to "acceptable" inference is utilized by the speaker to make a proposal or comment. On the other hand, *hao* as used by Y and as indicated by the arrows in (8) implies acceptability of the request made by C and W individually. This cooperation among the participants of a conversation and pragmatic inferencing lead to the emergence of *hao* as an agreement marker.

(8)   (C and W are invited to Y's house. Y hospitably serves them some soup. Both C and W say that they are stuffed.)

C: …(2.9) Wo,_
                I

      ..wo   yiding   chi   dao   zhe   wan,_
         I   must   eat   to   this   bowl

      ..buneng   zai   jia.\
         cannot   again   add

→ Y: ..**Hao**.\
            okay

   W: ..Wo   yeshi.\
            I   too

→ Y: ..**Hao**,_
            okay

         ..mei   guanxi.\   (Conversation)
            NEG   matter

   C: 'I-, When I finish this bowl, I won't eat any more.'
   Y: 'Okay.'
   W: 'Me, too.'
   Y: 'Okay, it doesn't matter.'

(9) is another example, showing how *hao* acts as a marker of acceptance of a request.

(9) (M asks W to buy a drink for him. W refuses him indirectly by suggesting that S buy it for him. S accepts by saying *hao* 'sure' and asks M to give her money to buy the drink.)

    M: ..Baituo,_
          please

       ..baituo,_
          please

       ..baituo./
          please

    W: (0) Zhujun,_
          Zhujun

..ni	bang	ta	mai	hao	le.\
you	help	him	buy	okay	PRT

→   S: **..Hao**   **ah,**_
        okay   PRT

→   **..hao**   **ah,**_
        okay   PRT

       ..qian   ah,_
        money   PRT

       ..qian   ah?\   (Conversation)
        money   PRT

    M: 'Please, please, please.'
    W: 'Zhujun, please buy a drink for him.'
    S: 'No problem'. 'Give me the money.'

Sometimes speakers will repeat *hao* to intensify their acceptability of suggestions or requests, as illustrated in (9). In (8) and (9), the actual function of *hao* is to signal direct and straightforward agreement or compliance with a preceding interactional move made by another speaker. Because of this usage, *hao* is occasionally used in answers to questions, but more often in the acceptance of requests, suggestions, offers, and invitations, as in (10):

(10)   (F, an English teacher in charge of language labs at a medical college, asks M,
        a salesman of videotapes about learning English, to recommend some
        interesting tapes.)

F: .. Yinwei   women   zhe   ge   xuexiao   shi   <E MedicalE>,_
       because   our   this   CL   school   COP   medical

M:..(1) Hmm.\
        hmm

F: ..(2) suoyi=,_
         therefore

    .. ruguo   ni   fangbian   dehua,_
       if   you   convenient in case

    .. nengbuneng = ?\
       A-not-A

M:..(0.7) Keyi.\
          okay

F: ..(2) nengbuneng   tui%–
         A-not-A   recom-

    .. jian%,_
       -mend

    .. ye   hen%–
       also   very

    .. <F hen   you   keneng   mai   la   F>.\
       very   have   possibility buy   PRT

    @ @ [Zhishi],_
        but

→   M:[**Hao**].\
       okay

F: ..(H) Ruguo xian   nenggou   kanyikan,_
         if   first can   have a look

    .. hui   geng%–
       will   more

    .. geng   baoxian   [yidian].\
       more   safe   a little

→   M: [**Hao**].\   (Conversation)
                                 okay

> F: 'Because our school is a medical (college),'
> M:'Hmm.'
> F: 'therefore, if you have time, can you = ?'
> M:'Okay.'
> F: 'Can you recommend (some)? We are likely to buy [but]—'
> M:'[Okay]'
> F: 'if you can let me see (them) first, it will be more sure (to buy them).'

Here *hao* is employed to express Speaker M's compliance with Speaker F's request. This most basic use of *hao* is to indicate that the speaker accepts a suggestion, request, offer, or information designed to help the speaker to achieve something. [6] In a general sense, *hao* signals that the speaker has accepted what the other person has said, and to show that he/she has nothing much left to say himself/herself. Put another way, *hao* in the above cases, the marking of an agreement/acceptance with the preceding discourse, indicates that no problem exists with closing the exchange or conversation.

In addition, like Latin *sane* (Risselada, 1998), a related use of *hao* is as a concession marker, which often co-occurs with other particles like *ma, la,* or *ba*, [7] to lengthen *hao*'s duration and hence to reinforce the speaker's depressed attitude towards a preceding interactional move. It shows that the speaker accepts the recipient's response superficially and reluctantly, as in (11).

(11)   (While A is videotaping a TV program, B asks A to stop videotaping because it wastes electricity.)

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[6] In addition to being used in declarative sentences to express speakers' subjective opinions, *hao* can also be used in A-not-A forms to ask for the other interlocutors' opinions, e.g.:

(1) | Ni | kan, | wo | zheyang | xie | hao-bu-hao? |
     | You | see | I | such | write | A-not-A |
     'Is it okay if I write in this way?'

(2) | Ni | sanshi | fenzhong | zai | dalai | hao-bu-hao? |
     | You | thirty | minutes | again | dail | A-not-A |
     Could you call again after thirty minutes?'

(3) | Buyao | zai | shuo | le, | hao-bu-hao? |
     | NEG | again | say | PRT | A-not-A |
     'Don't say that any more, all right?'

The function of *hao* here is to ask for advice (1), to seek consent (2), and to plead (3), respectively. In general, *hao* is used as a device to solicit agreement and/or alignment from the next speaker. *Hao-bu-hao* changes in meaning from "good" to "acceptable" and has the function of inquiring about the hearer's opinion. We thank Huei-ling Lai for pointing this out to us.

[7] The present study examines some discourse functions of *hao*, most of which are analyzed here without considering other elements, such as sentence-final particles. Therefore, further studies could analyze combinations of *hao* and some Chinese particles like *ma, la, ba,* and the like, in order to see how these particles relate to each other, or in what settings or specific activities they separately occur and, thus, what effects they have on participants' interpretation of the discourse.

| B: | (0) Buyao | lu | le | la,_ |
| | | don't | videotape | PFV | PRT |

| | (0) guandiao | la.\ |
| | | turn off | PRT |

| | ..langfei | dian.\ |
| | | waste | electricity |

| A: | (0) <H Weishemo H >?\ |
| | | why |

| | ..Wo | yao | lu.\ |
| | | I | want | videotape |

→ | B: | ..**Hao** | **ma**,_ |
| | | all right | PRT |

| | ..lu | lu | lu.\   (Conversation) |
| | | videotape | videotape | videotape |

B: 'Don't videotape. Turn it off immediately. It wastes
electricity.'
A: 'Why? I want to videotape.'
B: 'All right. Just keep videotaping!'

When A is videotaping a TV program, B suggests that she turn off the video recorder because it wastes electricity. But A refuses to accept B's suggestion and insists on recording. Then, B utters *Hao ma* 'All right' with a reluctant tone to express the wish to end the argument. *Hao* is employed by B here to signal his pseudo-agreement to get off troubling topic(s); in reality, he does not want A to videotape the TV program, as revealed by his utterance *lu lu lu* 'keep videotaping' with a reluctant tone. If the speaker does not want a confrontation, he may nevertheless accept confrontational remarks even though he does so reluctantly. Such a diminished sense of acceptance which does not involve any degree of positive evaluation might evolve from the use of *hao* as a marker of acceptance within the context in which it occurs. [8] Jefferson (1984) observes that "a massively recurrent device for moving out of a troubles-telling is entry into closings" (p. 191). He further holds that "acknowledgment tokens…can be accomplice[s] to topical shift. A recurrent phenomenon is the production of a token just prior to a shift…" (p. 216). (Pre-)closing signals such as *hao* may be regarded as a sub-variety of mitigating expressions used in conversation, that is, the desire to agree or appear to agree with the addressee, which leads to mechanisms for pretending to agree (Brown and Levinson, 1987, p. 113). Such

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[8] English *okay* can be also employed by the speaker to close down varying kinds of troubling topics/activities in conversation (Beach, 1993, p. 336).

expressions serve the twofold function of keeping the conversation going in a systematic manner while allowing the conversationalists to preserve either the reality or the appearance of cooperation.

Since the closing of the current conversation (topic) has to be agreed on by both parties or has to signify the end of the prior conversation or a transition to another speaker's turn, it is understandable that the agreement marker *hao* occurs frequently in the (pre-)closing of a conversation, as shown in (12).

(12)   (L, a hostess in a radio program, is interviewing G1, a teashop owner. G1 tells L that what their customers can do in the teashop in addition to drinking tea or juice.)

G1:   ..Dui.\
         right

       ..jiushi   lai   zhebian,_
         that is   come   here

       ..ruguo,_
         if

       ..ni   yuanyi   dehua,_
         you   willing   in case

       ..women keyi   pei   ni   yiqi   changge,_
         we   can   accompany   you   together   sing songs

       ..ranhou women   keyi   yiqi   kan   luyingdai,_
         then   we   can   together   watch   video tapes

       ..yiqi   ting   luyindai,_
         together listen to   audio tapes

       ..you   fenxiang   de   shijian.\
         have   sharing   DE   time

       ..ranhou you   xie   shu   keyi   bici   fenxiang.\
         then   have   some   books   can   each other   share

→   L: ..**Hao**,_
            okay

          ..namo,_
            then

          ..wo   xiang   ne,_
            I   think   PRT

          ..wo   xianzai jiu   dao   nage   jiaoluo   oh,_
            I   now   then   come   that   corner   PRT

> ..lai   fangwen   yixia   oh,_
>   come   interview a little   PRT
>
> ..naxie   nianqing pengyou   oh.\   (Radio talk)
>   those   young   friends   PRT

G1: 'Right, that is, we can accompany you to sing
     songs, watch videotapes,
     listen to tapes, etc., when you come here and would
     like to join us.'

L: 'Good. Now I would like to go to that corner to
     interview some young people.'

In (12), *hao* is used by L to signal a readiness to end or complete the current talk with G1, a teashop owner, and to interview the customers in the teashop. In addition, it is employed by L to take over the speech floor from G1. Thus, *hao* marks the completion of a talk and sets the stage for closing the current topic/talk. Because it is associated with finishing a topic, *hao* has come to be used when a conversation is drawing to a close.

Looking at how one utterance relates to another in a kind of pair relationship in English conversation, Davidson (1984); Pomerantz (1984); and Levinson (1983) all suggest that there is a systematic interactional preference for affiliative actions. They demonstrate that in interaction, acceptance or rejection of such actions as invitations, requests, offers, assessments, and the like are not generally of equal status. Acceptance/agreement occurs with much greater frequency than does rejection/disagreement. Furthermore, the former is usually done explicitly and without delay, whereas the latter is regularly delayed, muted, and/or accompanied by explanations. Thus, we can say that acceptance/agreement is preferred for invitations, requests, assessments, and offers, and that rejection/disagreement is dispreferred. Unlike the Mandarin contrastive markers *danshi*, *keshi*, and *buguo*, which signal marked, unexpected transition from one sequence to the next, especially disagreements (see Wang, 2002 for details), *hao* typically marks a significant structural boundary of the discourse, i.e., unmarked transitions where several levels of discourse coincide. To be precise, *hao* occurs at transitions to some mutually agreed on and mutually expected business at hand. Therefore, *hao* is frequently the first linguistic form used in interactions that are highly contextualized, such as the beginning of a new discourse after a break in a radio/TV program (i.e., in an institutional speech situation), as manifested in our radio data.

Thus far, we have observed that while *hao* is sometimes used to imply acceptance, at other times it is used to acknowledge that it is the speaker's turn or present obligation to take some verbal or nonverbal action, thereby releasing the other participant from any current obligation to continue his or her turn. Therefore, it usually appears at points in the discourse which represent boundaries or transition points with respect to interactional organization, similar to English *okay* (Condon, 1986, 2001; Beach, 1993; Heisler, 1996) or Latin *sane* (Risselada, 1998). To recapitulate,

when *hao* is used in an exchange, it marks agreement with a preceding discourse, meaning basically "I agree with what you are saying," no matter whether the speaker means it or not. By performing this action, the speaker indicates that he/she is willing to close the exchange, which is related to the preceding discourse. Subsequently he/she utters the agreement marker *hao*, thus opening the door to a new exchange and making linear progression of the conversation possible.

4.3. Hao in conversation vs. radio talk

Of the two text types in the database, the radio data are more formal than the conversation data. In radio talks, the speaker's turns are, in a sense, 'preallocated' rather than determined on a turn-by-turn basis, or 'locally allocated' to use Sacks et al.'s (1974) term. To be more specific, radio interviews and call-ins can be regarded as more institutionalized discourse types than casual daily conversations, because they appear to be more constrained by institutional role-distribution and turn pre-allocation, and less prone to spontaneous interventions (Ilie, 2001). In our radio talk data, *hao* is used by the anchorperson/host to initiate and manage such actions as closing, proceeding, and moving on to the next topic, including its use as a 'pre-closing device' to 'close down' a given interactant while also eliciting comments from the next (selected) speaker. Unlike casual conversations, radio interviews and call-ins take place in institutional settings, viz., a radio-studio. In the radio interviews in our data, it is the anchorpersons/hosts that have the institutional authority to control the talk, so it is up to them to mark a break in or the end of a talk. Since a radio interview is a time-limited speech event, the major discussion topics are pre-established, introduced and controlled by the anchorperson/host. Therefore, *hao* is used by the anchorperosn/host to indicate the end of a talk.

By contrast, casual conversation is locally managed; i.e., it operates on a turn-by-turn basis, organizing transitions from the current speaker to the next one. In general, casual conversation does not follow a pre-established direction, and its topics and subtopics have to be negotiated by the interactants as the talk progresses. Consequently, conversational topic shifts follow a more or less predetermined, but not exactly timed, topic schedule. In a similar way, *hao* in casual conversation is used predeterminedly by the speakers to indicate agreement and to negotiate an end to the current topic.

Because of the characteristics of the text types in our data, *hao* tends to function as a (pre-)closure/transition marker in the radio data, and as an agreement or concession marker in the conversation data. Our findings with respect to the two sets of data suggest that *hao*, akin to the English discourse marker *okay* [9] (Beach, 1993), is employed pivotally, in the midst of, and also at precise moments of transition by recipients and current speakers alike, across a variety of speech exchange systems (both casual and institutional), and not just in sequential environments, but also in situations involving movements from prior to next-positioned matters. In

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[9] Different from *hao*, *okay* has no specifiable literal meaning.

both of the two text types, owing to the ways in which participants rely on *hao* and thus design their talk so as to be responsive to prior talk and to also shape the next-positioned activity in specific ways, *hao* is uniquely used to enable interaction to unfold or to come to an end. To summarize, in the case of discourse *hao*, the unmarked behavior involves closing or opening some discourse structure; in response to a first pair-part, the unmarked behavior is the preferred second pair-part (Levinson, 1983; Pomerantz, 1984) or, in the case of a request for action, the requested action.

5. A relevance-theoretical account of *hao*

During the past decade, the study of discourse markers has become a growth industry in linguistics, with dozens of articles appearing yearly. In his discussion of what discourse markers are, Fraser (1999) states that the meaning of a discourse marker is procedural and sequential, not conceptual; i.e., it specifies how the segment it introduces is to be interpreted relative to the prior segment, subject to certain constraints (corresponding to what Sperber and Wilson (1986, 1995) call 'the principle of relevance'; for discussion, see below). Based on Sperber and Wilson's relevance theory, Blakemore (1987, 1992) argues that the procedural function of a discourse marker is to manipulate the conceptual representation of the utterance. Examining lexicalized items, including lexicalized expressions and speech formulae, Huang (2000) states that their functions are sequentially dependent and serve to signal relations between units of talk by virtue of their sequential position as initial or terminal brackets demarcating discourse units. He holds that turn beginnings and turn endings are especially important since they display relevance to what has preceded and provide projections and connections for following turns; i.e., a portion of the lexicon is sequentially sensitive. In line with these linguists' arguments, we find that *hao* in the data serves a discourse marker whose functions are sequentially sensitive, and that it is at the very heart of social collaboration in talk and interaction. The fundamental pragmatic principle we see at work is that of relevance, as proposed by Sperber and Wilson (1986, 1995), and the descriptive framework of our analysis of *hao* presented below is based on the relevance theory. We believe that the relevance-theoretical explanation offers a greater degree of generalization across seemingly disparate uses of *hao* based on a more general theory of human communication.

Sperber and Wilson use the principle of relevance to account for the process by which indirect meanings are encoded and decoded in context. They maintain that the interpretation of an utterance must be based on a general cognitive theory of information processing. To be precise, the hearer's aim in interpreting an utterance is to recover relevant information about the world at minimum processing cost; i.e., he/she will bring only the most accessible of his/her background beliefs to bear on the interpretation of an utterance. Additionally, the structure of a hearer's belief set is often determined by the speaker's use of certain grammatical devices that focus on particular subsets of his/her beliefs (for discussion see Blakemore, 1992). To summarize, what the speaker manipulates is the hearer's search for relevance. If the speaker

is aiming at optimal relevance, then he/she must make assumptions about the hearer's processing abilities and contextual resources, and these assumptions will be reflected in the form of his/her utterance. This means that the hearer is entitled to interpret every utterance based on the assumption that the speaker has tried to make the context as clear as possible so that the minimum necessary processing is required of the hearer. There will be a maximal effect, in cognitive terms, based on a minimal effort in terms of processing cost.

According to Sperber and Wilson, context is created through utterance interpretation. Every utterance comes with a guarantee of its own optimal relevance; that is, a speaker, by making an utterance, implies that it will be worthwhile for the hearer to process this utterance. The more information an individual can get out of an utterance, the more relevant it will be; and the greater the processing effort needed, the lower the relevance. In particular, during interaction, the speaker and hearer operate in a mutual cognitive environment. Put another way, each conversationalist holds a number of assumptions about what is manifest to the other speaker. The mutual cognitive environment is constantly negotiated and renegotiated throughout the conversation. Every utterance adds new assumptions to the shared, mutual cognitive environment, or makes old assumptions stronger and more manifest. For any utterance, the immediately preceding utterance has special significance because the next utterance will be interpreted based on the mutual cognitive environment established by this previous utterance. Therefore, utterances are always processed against the background of a relevant context consisting of the linguistic context and the assumed background assumptions of the addressee. Whenever the hearer recognizes an utterance as relevant within the context established by the immediately preceding utterance, he/she will perceive the discourse as being coherent. The relevant context is established as part of the utterance interpretation, and discourse coherence is the outcome of negotiating relevant backgrounds (Jucker, 1993). In addition, Blakemore (1987, 1992) assumes that discourse markers indicate exactly how the relevance of one proposition is dependent on the interpretation of another. Discourse markers are used as semantic constraints on relevance: they facilitate the hearer's processing by indicating the direction in which relevance is to be sought by virtue of the inferential connections they express (Blakemore, 1987, p. 141). Based on this proposition, we suggest that Mandarin *hao* is employed by speakers to enhance the relevance and coherence of utterances.

Consider the historical development of the predicative *hao* through the intensifier *hao* into the closure *hao*. Later it developed into the agreement/concession *hao*, which construes a world that has no reference in the described situation, but only to the speaker's world of belief about coherence, especially about correlations between situations. *Hao*'s bearing of an agreement meaning displays a semantic broadening: *hao* is used originally when we describe 'someone or something is good', and is then evolved into its broadened meaning of agreeing. The data studied here reveal that the discourse marker *hao* has distinct uses, but that these uses can all be related to its core meaning of 'positive evaluation.' At the textual level of discourse, *hao* can be seen as a signpost indicating an end or a switch in the background assumptions. Because of *hao*, the hearer can readjust the set of relevant background assumptions. At the interactional level, the use of *hao* can be described as a signal to the hearer to

provide a maximally relevant background for agreeing with the recipient's utterance. On the whole, *hao* can be seen as a signpost signaling to the hearer that the context created by the previous utterance—whether produced by the current speaker or the current hearer—is the most relevant one for the interpretation of the impending utterance. To sum up, the study finds that three main uses of *hao* can be distinguished. (1) It can act as a marker of closure and transition in a talk. *Hao* serves to signal its dual qualities: making a closure of the current topic/activity and simultaneously starting a new one. *Hao*'s transitional function may suggest that it can be used by the current speaker to make a topic shift, in ways having relevance to both prior and next-positioned matters. (2) It can be used as a marker of agreement, indicating the speaker's compliance, consent with, or acceptance of a preceding interactional move. *Hao* as an agreement marker indicates that there is no problem with closing the exchange, with respect to the preceding utterances, and that the participants may open a new exchange. (3) It can also function as a concession marker, conveying the speaker's restricted and limited acceptance of or agreement with a speech that is attributed to an interlocutor, which is an extension of *hao*'s function of agreement. In all these uses, *hao* is a kind of signpost, directing the way in which the ongoing talk can come to an end. Additionally, its use depends on the speaker's estimation of the hearer's background assumptions. Moreover, it is due to the evaluative nature of *hao* in terms of its meaning that it is exclusively used in expressive and/or speaker-oriented speech.

6. Conclusion

Acting as a discourse marker, *hao* is mainly used to enhance the relevance of utterances. It can be employed—by recipients and current speakers alike—in ways that are relevant to both prior and next-positioned matters. Specifically, in addition to functioning as an adjective or a degree adverb at the ideational level, it can be used as a marker of closure or transition at the textual level and as a marker of agreement or concession at the interactional level. Put differently, as a predicative adjective, *hao* can be used in a declarative sentence/utterance to express a speaker's positive attitude towards something, i.e., something is "good." From this function, the various uses of *hao* as a discourse marker have developed. First, *hao* with an evaluative meaning has developed into a discourse marker expressing completeness or conclusion, which construes a world that has no reference in the described situation, but only to the speaker's world of belief about coherence, especially about correlations between situations. Next, the interactional discourse function has developed from the textual function, and at the interactional level, its more specific use as a concession marker has developed from its more unmarked use in expressing interactional agreement. Carlson (1984, p. 27) notes that in many languages, a word that means 'accept' etymologically means 'find good.' Acceptability implies goodness, since what we actively accept is what we find to be good.

In this paper, we have first illustrated the traditional use of *hao* as an adjective, and then gone on to show its textual and interactional uses. In her analyses of seman-

tic and pragmatic change, Traugott (1982) suggests that many lexical and grammatical changes follow a diachronic path from propositional to textual to expressive meanings. In another work Traugott (1989) explains the shift as one from meanings grounded in more objective situations to others grounded in text-making, to others grounded in the speaker's attitude. Although we are not here probing into *hao* diachronically, the way in which the evaluative meaning of *hao* is replicated in text (as closure meaning) and in interaction (as agreement meaning) seems to reflect these different historical stages. In line with Schiffrin's analysis of English *then* (1992, p. 787), we suggest that the distribution of *hao* in the data reflects the speaker's cognitive capacity to take a set of conceptual meanings that are themselves tightly connected (i.e., there are inextricable links between the way speakers evaluate entities or events, the way they organize units in texts, and the way they draw inferences about consequences), and to linguistically realize those conceptual meanings in certain ways. Rather than distribute realizations of meanings at random among a variety of unrelated forms, speakers can combine their knowledge of the core meaning of a single expression (for example, their knowledge that *hao* means 'good') with their knowledge of richly informative, but tightly organized, texts and contexts to jointly constitute a communicative meaning. The unifying function of *hao* is to establish the coherence, and, thus, relevance of the following unit of talk to a prior unit of talk.

Acknowledgment

Appendix A

The discourse transcription symbols appearing in the examples provided in this paper are as follows:

Units

{carriage return}	Intonation unit
--	Truncated intonation unit
Space	Word
-	Truncated word
Speakers	
:	Speaker identity/turn start
[ ]	Speech overlap

Transitional continuity

.	Final
,	Continuing
?	Appeal

Terminal pitch direction

\	fall
/	Rise
_	Level

Accent and lengthening

^	Primary accent
=	Lengthening

Pause

…(N)	Long
…	Medium
…	Short
(0)	Latching

Vocal noises and laughter

(H)	Inhalation
(Hx)	Exhalation
%	Glottal stop
@	Laughter

Voice quality

<@	@>	Laugh quality
<Q	Q>	Quotation quality
<F	F>	Fast tempo
<A	A>	Gradually faster
<D	D>	Gradually slower
<H	H>	High pitch
<L	L>	Low pitch
<MRC	MRC>	Each word distinct and emphasized

Transcriber's perspective

((	))	Comment
<X	X>	Uncertain hearing
X		Indecipherable syllable

Special notations

<E	E>	Code switching from Mandarin to English
<T	T>	Code switching from Mandarin to Taiwanese

Appendix B

The Chinese versions of the examples cited in this paper are given below:

(1) V: .. 妳會覺得,_

          .. 她可憐,_

          .. 可能是因為她演技好吧.\

      R: .. 對啊,_

          .. 然後,_

          .. 我覺得他,_

          .. 他們每個角色啊,_

          .. 都演的很好啊./

(2) J: .. 我好冷哦.\

      E: .. ^不要講啦,_

          .. 我也很冷 ne.\

(3) E: .. 在那邊生活好無趣,_

          .. ^太無趣了.\

(4) E: .. 我已經跟我妹講好.\

          .. 這樣她,_

          .. 她才能載我們啊./

(5) C: …(2.2) 哎.怎麼使用我們的一生,_

          … (1.4) 很不容易啦.\

→   .. 好啦,_

          .. 秀惠,_

          .. 妳去睡覺,_

          .. 十一點已經夠晚了.\

(6) B: .. 他們說太好吃,_

          .. 還叫我再去.\

      A: .. 啊?/

          .. 真的嗎?/

          .. 嚇死人了.\

→ B: .. 下次光吃蝦就好了,_

          .. 我們,_

→   .. 下次光吃蝦就好.\

(7)　L: .. 那.整個佈置,_

　　　.. 給我們感覺是很溫馨的.\

→　　…(1.1) 好,_

　　　.. 介紹完它的裝潢設備呢,_

　　　.. 我得請這家店的老板,_

　　　.. 來說明^開店史,_

　　　.. 他們的歷史.\

(8)　C: …(2.9) 我,_

　　　.. 我一定吃到這碗,_

　　　.. 不能再加.\

→　Y: .. 好.\

　　W: …我也是 ey.\

→　Y: .. 好,_

　　　.. 沒關係.\

(9)　M: .. 拜託,_

　　　.. 拜託,_

　　　.. 拜託./

　 W: (0) 竹君,_

　　　.. 你幫他買好了.\

→　S: .. 好啊,_

→　　.. 好啊,_

　　　.. 錢啊?/

　　　.. 錢啊?/

(10)　F: … 因為我們這個學校是<E Medical E>.\

　　M: ...(1) Hmm.\

　　F : ...(2) 所以=,_

　　　… 如果你方便的話,_

　　　… 能不能=?/

　　M: ...(0.7) 可以.\

　　F: ...(2) 能不能推%--

      .. 薦%,_

      .. 也很% --

      .. <F 很有可能買啦 F>.\

      @@[只是],_

→ M: [好].\

    F : ...(H) 如果先能夠看一眼,_

      ... 會更%--

      ... 更保險[一點].\

→ M: [好].\

(11) G1: .. 對.\

      .. 就是來這邊,_

      .. 如果,_

      .. 你願意的話,_

      .. 我們可以陪你一起唱歌,_

      .. 然後我們可以一起看錄影帶,_

      .. 一起聽錄音帶,_

      .. 有分享的時間.\

      .. 然後有些書可以彼此分享.\

→ L: ... 好,_

      .. 那麼,_

      .. 我想呢,_

      .. 我現在就到那個角落哦,_

      .. 來=訪問一下哦,_

      .. 那些年青朋友哦.\

(12) B: (0) 不要錄了啦,_

    (0) 關掉啦.\

     .. 浪費電.\

   A: (0) <H 為什麼 H>?/

     .. 我要錄.\

  B: .. 好嘛,_

    .. 錄錄錄.\

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