

A variation analysis of grammaticalization of the Chinese discourse marker “*ranhou*”

Teresa Shen, Providence University
Victoria Rau, National Chung Cheng University

This study aims to investigate the uses of *ranhou* “*then*” in Mandarin Chinese. A preliminary examination of the current use of *ranhou* in Taiwan reveals three phonological variants in speech: the full form [ranhou] and two phonologically reduced forms-- [ran'ou] and [na'ou]. These phonological reduced variants of *ranhou* indicate the function of *ranhou* might be changing. Our research examined the effect of 6 internal factors and 2 external factors on the uses of different phonological forms of *rahou* in spoken discourse. The internal factor groups consist of temporal use, causal use, resumptive use, additive use, turn-taking and verbal filler use of “*ranhou*”, while the external factor groups consist of age and gender. All the collected data were tape recorded from three TV programs in Taiwan, transcribed, and coded for the VARBRUL program for statistical analysis.

The results show that younger people tend to use the phonologically reduced forms of *ranhou* more than do older people. Males prefer to use the phonologically reduced forms more than do females. The causal use, resumptive use, and additive use of *ranhou* tend to favor the phonological reduced forms [ran'ou] and [na'ou]. The temporal use, turn-taking use and verbal filler use of *ranhou* favor the full phonological forms [ranhou]. This semantic change of “*ranhou*” is observed to be shifting from a temporal proposition to non-temporal proposition and to discourse expression. In other words, the function of *ranhou* is changing from a conjunction to a discourse marker. This study illustrates that *ranhou* is undergoing grammaticalization.