

**Face-to-face versus virtual communication:  
A comparison of occurrences of Cantonese SFPs**

ZHANG, Ling (zhangl@eduhk.hk)

LAW, Ching Ching (s1128199@s.eduhk.hk)

The Education University of Hong Kong

After the outbreak of COVID-19, virtual communication through Zoom or other online platforms has been an increasingly important substitute when face-to-face (f2f) communication is not applicable. Little linguistic research has been done to investigate the differences of speech through these two modes. This study is a pilot investigation into this new topic. Twenty young speakers of Hong Kong Cantonese were recruited to join this empirical study, with a half of the participants (five male and five female speakers) completed the narrative tasks through f2f mode while the other half participants (five male and five female speakers) through Zoom meeting. The narrative data of two picture description tasks, including a short one of a family scene and a long one of “frog story” (Mayer, 1969) were analyzed, with a focus on the comparison of the occurrences of Cantonese sentence-final particles (SFPs) in f2f and virtual modes. Our data analyses identified several important features of these narrative tasks. Firstly, in general there is a significantly higher percentage of SFPs in f2f mode compared with virtual mode. Secondly, female speakers tend to use SFPs slightly more than male speakers. Thirdly, different subcategories of SFPs exhibit different degrees of variations in f2f and virtual modes: SFPs of Tone 1 are only slightly ( $p = 0.289$ ) more frequent in f2f mode compared with virtual mode; however, SFPs of Tone 3 are significantly ( $p = 0.001$ ) more frequent in f2f mode than virtual mode. The indications of these patterns, especially the reasons for the lower rates of SFPs in virtual mode will be discussed in this study.

**Reference:**

Mayer, M. (1969). Frog, where are you? New York: Dial Press.