

***'well thank you David for that question': The Intonation, Pragmatics and Structure of Q&A Sessions in Public Discourses***

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This paper describes the analysis of the Q&A sessions of public speeches and presentations from the Hong Kong Corpus of Spoken English. These Q&A sessions are typically in marked contrast to the highly planned monologues that precede them and so require very different strategies from the speakers. This paper examines seven Q&A sessions from four perspectives, namely question types, pragmatics, rhetorical structures and intonation. Quantitative analyses of the data focus on the pragmatic functions and the question type of all the questions, the rhetorical structure of all the answers, and the tone choices of all the questions. Qualitative analysis of excerpts of the Q&A sessions focuses on the pragmatics, structure and intonation in order to illustrate the ways in which discourse participants manage face and negotiate meaning. Finally, the implications of the findings for learning and teaching will be discussed.

In the English Department of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University a research team has spent the last eight years compiling the Hong Kong Corpus of Spoken English (HKCSE). The HKCSE is a 2-million-word corpus that has been transcribed orthographically and fifty percent of it has also been transcribed prosodically. The HKCSE is made up of four sub-corpora—conversations, academic discourses, business discourses and public discourses.

'well thank you David for that question'

This paper focuses on the sub-corpus of public discourses that consists of discourses such as political speeches, public presentations, forum discussions, television and radio interviews, and so on. A common feature of a public speech or presentation is the Q&A session and it is this form of public discourse that this paper examines. Indeed, Q&A sessions are not only a common feature. They are an expected feature after a presentation and the absence of a Q&A session is thus marked. In other words, it is unusual or unexpected not to have a Q&A session in these discourse contexts.

This important point can be illustrated with a recent experience of the writer. In October 2003 the writer attended a formal public lecture by Professor Michael Halliday at a university in Hong Kong. Professor Halliday was introduced by the Dean of the Education Faculty which is hosting his year-long visit. The Dean stated both in his introduction to Professor Halliday and again in his formal 'thank-you' at the end of Professor Halliday's lecture that there would not be a Q&A session, but that Professor Halliday would be present at the cocktail reception immediately following the lecture to informally answer any questions. The fact that the Dean felt obliged to twice make this announcement underlines my point that such is the expectation that a public presentation, such as a formal public lecture, will be followed by a Q&A session and that the absence of a conventional Q&A session is perceived as marked and therefore requires an explanation, and in this case given twice by the Dean. This incident supports the notion that Q&A sessions are an integral part of most public presentations.

Compared to the highly planned monologues that precede them, Q&A sessions stand in marked contrast to them, and as a result require very different strategies from the speakers. The preceding presentations are typically highly planned, frequently written either in full or in note form, and are thus very much under the control of the presenter in terms of both structure and content. Q&A sessions, on the other hand, are typically unrehearsed and unplanned in terms of the exact content and structure, and require the speaker to depart from his or her script/notes and engage in a more spontaneous dialogue with questioners who may range from the

supportive to the hostile.

This paper examines these sessions from four perspectives to highlight the characteristics of Q&A sessions in public discourses, and these are question types, rhetorical structures, pragmatic functions, and discourse intonation. The implications of the findings for English language learning and teaching will be discussed.

## DATA COLLECTION

The data examined in this study are seven public discourses that total 112 minutes; they are the Q&A sessions of seven public speeches and presentations that last for 204 minutes in total. Table 1 describes the seven discourses in terms of event and date, speaker and the duration of the Q&A sessions.

**TABLE 1**  
**Seven Q&A Sessions in Public Speeches and Presentations**

Code	Event and Date	Speaker	Q&A Session (Duration of Recording)
P047	Credit Suisse First Boston Asian Investment Conference, 25 March 2003	Donald Tsang, Chief Secretary of Administration, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government (HKSARG)	2 min (18 min)
P048	Joint Chambers Luncheon, 10 January 2003	Tung Chee Hwa, Chief Executive, HKSARG	17 min (44 min)
P053	Report on Securities and Futures Market Regulatory Structure, 21 March 2003	Alan Cameron, Raymond Chien, Peter Clake	40 min (57 min)
P054	2002 Asian Venture Forum, 14 November 2002	Antony Leung, Secretary for Finance, HKSARG	5 min (20 min)

'well thank you David for that question'

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P066	SARS Update, 25 April 2003	7 speakers, Department of Microbiology, University of Hong Kong ; 3 speakers, Faculty of Medicine, Chinese University of Hong Kong; Dr Leung Pak Yin, Department of Health, HKSARG	26 min
P069	British Chamber of Commerce Luncheon, 23 January 2003	Antony Leung, Secretary for Finance, HKSARG	10 min (27 min)
P139	Hong Kong General Chamber of Commerce Luncheon, 'Health Care Cooperation', 3 June 2003	Lee Shiu Hung and Brian O'Connor	12 min

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## PRAGMATIC FUNCTIONS OF QUESTIONS

Sixty-one questions are found in the data, and Webber's (2002) typology was adopted to classify the questions. Webber's (2002) typology consists of five pragmatic functions of questions:

- Type 1a: information eliciting (facts)
- Type 1b: information eliciting (opinions)
- Type 2: criticism or attack
- Type 3: suggestions
- Type 4: comments
- Type 5: more than one pragmatic function

Examination of the 61 questions (Table 2) shows that most of the questions (38 out of 61) are eliciting information in the form of either facts (type 1a) (N=28) or opinions (type 1b) (N=10). There are two examples of a questioner performing the pragmatic function of making suggestions (type 3), one example of criticizing/attacking the speaker (type 2), and no occurrences of

giving comments (type 4). There are twenty cases of combining pragmatic functions in the questions. The most common form is combining criticism/attack and comments (9 tokens), followed by combining eliciting facts and comments (8 tokens). Apart from these, there are single occurrences of criticism/attack combined with elicitation of facts, criticism/attack combined with suggestions, and comments combined with elicitation of opinions. Whether this mixing of pragmatic functions serves to mitigate the face threat of criticizing/attacking the presenter is something to be investigated in future studies.

**TABLE 2**  
**Pragmatic Functions of Questions**  
 (Adapted from Webber, 2002, pp. 230-231)

Pragmatic Functions	Number of Token
1 information eliciting	(38)
a facts	28
b opinions	10
2 criticism or attack	1
3 suggestions	2
4 comments	0
5 combined functions	(20)
1a + 2	1
2 + 3	1
2 + 4	9
1a + 4	8
1b + 4	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>61</b>

## TYPES OF QUESTIONS

Table 3 shows the types of question asked, and that is, whether it is a wh-question, a yes/no question or a “declarative-mood” question (Brazil, 1997, p. 99). A wh- question includes questions with the interrogative pronouns *what*, *where*, *when*, *who*, *which*, *why*, etc. A “declarative-mood” question refers to a declarative having “interrogative implications” (Brazil, 1997, p. 99).

'well thank you David for that question'

**TABLE 3**  
**Pragmatic Functions and Types of Questions**

Pragmatic Functions	Number of Token	Types of Questions		
		<i>wh-question</i>	<i>yes/no</i>	<i>declarative- mood</i>
1 information eliciting	(38)			
a facts	28	18	6	4
b opinions	10	7	0	3
2 criticism or attack	1	1	0	0
3 suggestions	2	0	0	2
4 comments	0	0	0	0
5 combined functions	(20)			
1a + 2	1	1	0	0
2 + 3	1	1	0	0
2 + 4	9	7	0	2
1a + 4	8	7	0	1
1b + 4	1	1	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>43 (70%)</b>	<b>6 (10%)</b>	<b>12 (20%)</b>

Table 3 shows that 70% of the questions are wh-questions, 20% declarative-mood questions and 10% yes/no questions. The relatively low occurrence of yes/no questions underscores a general finding, and that is, neither questioners nor presenters are brief and to the point. Questioners typically contextualize their questions by referring to or commenting on sections of the presentations, while presenters very rarely give brief answers but often recycle parts of the earlier presentation. Given these behaviors, the use of yes/no questions and yes/no answers are uncommon in these data.

The findings show that most of the wh-questions are for eliciting facts and opinions (25 out of 43), followed by eliciting facts combined with comments (7 out of 43), and criticism/attack combined with comments (7 out of 43). As for yes/no questions, they are asked exclusively for eliciting information (6 out of 6). In the case of declarative-mood questions, 7 out of 12 questions are for eliciting facts and opinions.

## **RHETORICAL STRUCTURE OF ANSWERS**

The ways in which speakers structure discourse information can be accounted for by the use and perception of messages in communication, clarity and topics in conversation, social relations orientation and self orientation (see, for example, Gudykunst, 1998; Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988; Hall, 1977; Hofstede, 1983), and the notions of face and politeness (Brown & Levinson, 1987). In this study, all of the 61 questions are also examined in terms of their rhetorical structure, namely inductive, deductive (Scollon & Scollon, 1995) and bald-on-record (Brown & Levinson, 1987). According to Scollon and Scollon (1995, p. 84), “the inductive rhetorical strategy” works by “presenting the evidence one has first, and progressively leading the listener (or reader) to the conclusion one would like him or her to accept”, and ‘the deductive rhetorical strategy’ is employed to show the listener or reader “how one has arrived at a foregone conclusion” or an idea that is taken for granted. In this study, an answer that is structured inductively is characterised by delayed introduction of the answer in the discourse; conversely, a deductive answer has the answer to the question early at the beginning of the response. Discourse information structure, whether deductive or inductive, is believed to be a realisation of the degree of directness or indirectness in interpersonal communication. A bald-on-record answer is one that is stripped of any redressive action; in other words, an answer without use of any politeness linguistic devices (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Table 4 shows the three rhetorical strategies employed by the presenters in response to questions that perform different pragmatic functions (also see Table 3). Table 4 also shows three pragmatic functions of answers, namely answering the question, evading answering the question, and disagreeing with the questioner.

The presenters rarely answer baldly on record (N=2) which links back to an earlier point that Q&A sessions are not noted for their brevity in terms of either the questions or the answers. With regard to inductive and deductive structures, it has been observed that when answering questions, the presenters

'well thank you David for that question'

tend to use a deductive rhetorical strategy (54.1%) more frequently than an inductive one (42.6%). Interestingly, the pragmatic functions of the answer given – answering the question, evading the question or disagreeing with the questioner – seem to be partly linked to the rhetorical strategy employed. So, for instance, answering the question is mostly done deductively, while evading the question is typically done inductively. The exceptions are when the presenters decline to answer because it is not within their brief. This accounts for all of the deductive examples in the data.

**TABLE 4**  
**Rhetorical Structure of Answers and Function of Answer**

Rhetorical Structure	Function of Answer		
	answer question	evade answering question	disagree with questioner
deductive (33) 54.1%	(26) 1a (16) 1b (5) 1a + 4 (5)	(6) 1a (4) 1b (2)	(1) 1a + 4 (1)
inductive (26) 42.6%	(14) 1a (5) 1b (2) 3 (1) 1a + 4 (1) 1b + 4 (1) 2 + 4 (4)	(11) 1a (2) 1a + 2 (1) 1b (1) 2 (1) 2 + 3 (1) 2 + 4 (5)	(1) 3 (1)
bald on record (2) 3.3%	(2) 1a (1) 1a + 4 (1)		
TOTAL (61) 100%	42	17	2

What is also interesting is that a connection appears to exist between the pragmatic function of the question posed and the discourse rhetorical strategy adopted for the answer; for instance, the majority of 'type 1a' questions (i.e. an information question eliciting facts) with or without comments (type 4) are primarily organized by means of the deductive structure (26 out of 36). In



addition to this, two such questions are answered baldly-on-record, and therefore directly. On the other hand, questions which criticize/attack (type 2) the presenter, whether or not combined with another pragmatic function, are all answered inductively (12 out of 12); in other words, indirectly.

Another finding is that 'type 1a' questions (i.e. an information question eliciting facts) with or without a comment (type 4) tend to be answered by the presenters (30 out of 36), whether disagree or otherwise. However, questions which criticize/attack the presenters (type 2), occurring on their own or combined with another pragmatic function, are mostly evaded (8 out of 12).

## **DISCOURSE INTONATION**

### **Prosodic Transcription of the Public Discourses**

To date, fifty percent of the Hong Kong Corpus of Spoken English (HKCSE), and that is, 100 hours or approximately one million words of spoken English data, have been prosodically transcribed. The amount of prosodically transcribed data is large, compared to similar corpora, for example, the Spoken English Corpus (SEC) that was compiled during 1984-87 and amounts to 52,637 words, or 339 minutes of recording time (Leech, 1996, p. ix). The value of prosodically transcribed spoken corpora as a research resource has been discussed (for example, Cheng & Warren 2003; Chun, 2002; Couper-Kuhlen & Selting 1996; Leech 1996; Pierrehumbert & Hirschberg 1990; Svartvik 1990; Svartvik & Quirk 1980).

Regarding the HKCSE, the discourse intonation system developed by Brazil (1985, 1997) was chosen to prosodically transcribe the data because the primary concern of the research team is to analyse the corpus data in terms of discursal, pragmatic and intercultural communication phenomena. Brazil's system of discourse intonation is especially useful for those seeking to explore the data in terms of the communicative value of intonation.

In the prosodic transcription system developed by Brazil (1997), speakers

'well thank you David for that question'

can select from four independent systems: prominence, tone, key and termination within a tone unit (Table 5). In discourse intonation, a tone unit is taken to mean a stretch of speech with one tonic segment comprising at least a tonic syllable, but which may extend from an "on" (first prominent syllable) to the "toni" (final prominent syllable) (Hewings, 1990, p. 136). Each of the independent systems is a source of "local meaning" (Brazil, 1997, p. xi) by which Brazil seeks to underline that these are moment by moment judgements made by speakers based on their assessment of the current state of understanding operating between the participants. In other words, Brazil's system eschews the notions that intonation conveys fixed attitudinal meanings or is associated with particular grammatical structures. It also needs to be borne in mind that intonation alone, let alone one particular choice within the four systems, is not the sole conveyor of discourse meaning. When looking at intonation, the researcher at the same time has to be mindful of all of the other possible contributing factors such as discourse structure and pragmatic functions, as discussed in previous sections, in the ongoing negotiation of meaning between discourse participants.

**TABLE 5**  
**Intonation Choices Available to Speakers**  
**(Adapted from Hewings & Cauldwell, 1997, p. vii)**

System	Choice
Prominence	prominent/non-prominent syllables
Tone	rise-fall, fall, rise, fall-rise, level
Key	high, mid, low
Termination	high, mid, low

These four systems are then represented typographically in the data using the following transcription conventions:

Tone unit     // ... //  
Prominence    UPPER CASE LETTERS  
Tone            ↘↗ (fall rise); ↗ (rise); ↘ (fall); ↗↘ (rise fall); → (level)

Key	high – above the line
	mid – on the line
	low – below the line
Termination	high – above the line and underlined
	mid – written on the line and underlined
	low - written below the line and underlined

(Brazil, 1997)

*Prominence*

Brazil (1997) states that prominence is used as a means of distinguishing those words which are situationally informative. Importantly, in his conceptual framework, the assigning of prominence is not fixed on the basis of grammar or word-accent/stress; it is a choice made by the speaker in context.

*Tone*

In discourse intonation a particular communicative value is associated with each of the five possible tones. A tone is the pitch movement that begins at the tonic syllable (i.e., the last prominent syllable in a tone unit) and denoted in the transcripts by an arrow(s) at the start of the tone unit. Any spoken discourse proceeds on the basis of a considerable amount of shared knowledge between discourse participants (Brazil, 1985, p. 109), and it is for the speaker to decide moment-by-moment whether what he is saying is shared or not. Speakers, according to Brazil, basically have a choice between fall-rise/rise tones and fall/rise-fall tones. Brazil (1997, pp. 68-70) calls the former the referring tones and the latter the proclaiming tones. When a speaker chooses the referring tones, he effectively indicates that this part of the discourse will not enlarge the common ground assumed to exist between the participants. Choice of the proclaiming tones, on the other hand, shows that the area of speaker-hearer convergence is about to be enlarged. There is a fifth tone, the level tone, in Brazil's system which is associated with tone units which precede an encoding pause or otherwise 'truncated' tone units (1997, p. 146).

'well thank you David for that question'

### *Key and Termination*

The last two systems concern pitch level choices available to speakers and are best looked at in combination. According to Brazil (1997, pp. 40-66) speakers can choose from a three tier system (high, mid and low which are written above, on or below the line in transcriptions respectively) in terms of the relative "key" at the "on" of a tone unit which is the first prominent syllable in a tone unit. The choice of key is made on the first prominent syllable and whether the speaker selects high, mid or low will affect the meaning of what is said. High key selection has contrastive value, mid key has additive value and the selection of low key has equative value, and that is, with the meaning "as to be expected" (Brazil, 1985, pp. 75-84).

The speaker also chooses pitch level again at the end of the tonic segment on the tonic syllable (i.e., the last prominent syllable in the tone unit which is underlined in the transcripts) and Brazil (1997, p. 11) terms this system "termination". Again, this is a three-tier system of high, mid and low and when transcribed they are written above, on or below the line respectively. By means of this choice, the speaker can seek to constrain the next speaker to respond if he or she selects high or mid termination and, due to the seeming preference for "pitch concord" (Brazil, 1985, p. 86) found in spoken discourse across turn boundaries, the next speaker frequently "echoes" the termination choice of the previous speaker in her/his choice of key. If the speaker chooses low termination, no attempt to elicit a response is made by the current speaker and thus leaving the next speaker to initiate a new topic or for the discourse to come to a close.

### **Intonation Choices of Questioners**

The description of the analysis of discourse intonation in the data begins with quantitative analysis of tone choices and key and termination choices, followed by qualitative analysis of two examples drawn from two of the seven Q&A sessions. To begin with, Table 6 shows the tone choices made by

the questioners. The findings confirm the claim made by Brazil (1997) and others (see, for example, Roach, 2000; Beyssade et al., 2003) that question types do not have fixed tones associated with them. It is worth pointing out that no occurrence of the rise-fall tone has been observed in the data, which has confirmed Brazil's claim that in spoken English, the rise-fall tone is very rare (Brazil, 1997, p. 86).

**TABLE 6**  
**Tone Choice of Questioners**

	Rise	Fall-rise	Fall	Level	Inaudible
wh-question	2	2	26	9	4
yes/no question	0	1	3	2	0
declarative-mood question	1	0	9	1	1
TOTAL	3	3	38	12	5

With regard to the use of wh-questions, while there is clearly a strong tendency for questioners to select the fall tone when asking such questions, there are examples of questioners making other tone choices. Of the 39 audible tones, 26 (66.7%) are the fall tone, 9 (23.1%) are level tone, and 2 (5.1%) are each of the rise and the fall-rise tones respectively. Therefore, the choice of tone is quite mixed and does not conform to the widely held belief that such questions are realized through the rising-falling intonation (Celice-Murcia et al., 1996, p. 186). Regarding the six yes/no questions, none was said in a rise tone, which is different from the belief that such questions tend to be realized through the rising intonation (Celice-Murcia et al., 1996, pp. 186-87). In fact, among the six tones, three are said with the fall tone, two the level tone, and one the fall-rise tone. Similarly, the tone choice in declarative-mood questions, which is mainly fall tone, does not fit the general belief that such questions tend to follow the pattern of rising intonation (Celice-Murcia et al., 1996, pp. 186-87).

In questions, termination choices (i.e., the pitch choice on the final prominent syllable/word of the question) are linked to question types (Brazil, 1997) in that the local meaning of selecting high or mid termination varies

'well thank you David for that question'

according to the functional value of what is being said and can be briefly summarized based on three broad scenarios. In the case of yes/no questions, the choice of high termination carries the meaning that adjudication is invited from the hearer while mid termination seeks concurrence (Brazil, 1997, pp. 54-55). In wh-questions, high termination carries the meaning that "an improbable answer is expected" and mid termination is a "straightforward request for information" (Brazil, 1997, p. 56); while in declaratives, the choice of high termination denotes the meaning "this will surprise you" and mid-termination the meaning "this will not surprise you" (Brazil, 1997, p. 58).

In the data examined, it is found that the termination choice was invariably mid-termination and is matched by the choice of mid key by the presenters, and that is, the pitch choice on the first prominent syllable/word in the answer. This matching phenomenon is termed "pitch concord" by Brazil. Also the choice of mid-termination by questioners carries the communicative value of "straightforward request for information", according to Brazil, which, given the discourse context, is perhaps to be expected. Given the context of these questions in discourses, it is not surprising that we find no low termination question which would carry the communicative value of no response. Similarly, in these Q&A sessions the absence of high termination that seeks to constrain the hearer to respond is unnecessary in such an institutionalised discourse context. Thus mid-termination on the questions and the expected mid-key at the start of the response meets expectations of participant behaviour in Q&A sessions.

## **QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF TWO EXAMPLES**

The following describes the analysis of two examples taken from the data in order to illustrate the way in which discursal, pragmatic and intonational features interact. The first example is taken from the Asian Investment Conference and the presenter Donald Tsang is the Chief Secretary of



'well thank you David for that question'

*like, hear, comment and Donald*). It is also interesting to note those aspects which the speaker sees as new information to the hearer and the fall tone is used in these cases, namely *this morning we've heard, Mandell, dollarization, and I'd like to hear your comment*.

The transcription below is part of Donald Tsang's answer to the question *I'd like to hear your comment Sir Donald*.

#### *Orthographic Transcription*

'I personally believe that there would be a very good (inaudible) and discussion of possibilities but I think we have a reliable instrument at hand and would not wish easily er to think about change (.) but not do not but but not to say that I do not respect fully the views of Professor Mandell'

#### *Prosodic Transcription*

LIEVE VE  
// → I personally // → be // → that there WOULD be a // → ry good  
(inaudible) and // → disCUSSion // → of POssiBilities // → but i think WE have a  
reLlable INstrument at hand // → and WOULD not WISH // ↘ EAsily // → //  
ER  
NOT  
↘ to THINK about CHANGE // (.) // u but do // do NOT // u but // → but  
PECT  
NOT to say that i do not res // → FULLy the VIEWS of // ↘ of proFESsor  
dell //  
MAN

The answer is handled inductively after a preamble. Below is the rhetorical structure analysis of Donald Tsang's utterance:

(preamble) *I personally believe that there would would be a very good (inaudible) and discussion of possibilities (his own view and position) but I think we have a reliable instrument at hand and would not wish easily to think about change (implying disagreement with Professor Mandell's view) but not do no not but but not to say that I do not respect fully the views of Professor Mandell*



In terms of intonation, the analysis will focus on Donald Tsang's choice of key and termination. It needs to be borne in mind that the official Hong Kong Government position is absolute and unwavering commitment to the current currency system, that is, completely against dollarization. The presenter selects high contrastive key on *believe* and *very* when he says that he believes there could be a very good discussion about changing the current arrangements. This has the communicative value of against expectations. Presumably it is against expectations as one might expect him to be dismissive of alternative policies. He then proceeds to give his view on the issue, with hedges *I think*, *would not wish*, that he thinks the current arrangement is reliable and does not want to *easily* consider changing it and so implies dollarization is not an option. Having implicitly criticized the earlier presenter, he now mitigates this by giving face to Professor Mandell through "giving deference" (a form of negative pragmatic politeness in Brown and Levinson's terms). Again, it can be observed that the use of high key/termination on *not* and *respect* is to emphasize to the audience the meaning of going "against the polarity expectations" (Brazil, 1997, p. 48). Given his rejection of the Professor's idea, he still fully respects the views of the man.

The second example is taken from another public discourse at which Anthony Leung, the former Secretary for Finance of the Hong Kong SARG, addressed members of various chambers of commerce based in Hong Kong. During the Q&A session, a question comes from the floor from David Palmer from the Construction Industry Group of the British Chamber.

### **Example 2 – A Question in Q&A Session (P069)**

#### *Orthographic Transcription*

'David Pamler from the construction industry group of the British Chamber (.) you will no doubt be aware of the of p p p public private partnership the construction industry group in Hong Kong with many other interested groups have been trying to er disucss with the government for some time now the er way to take this initiative forward with respect to

'well thank you David for that question'

capital works projects in Hong Kong but to date frankly we have not been able to find a way could you please er discuss this and explain to us if we will be able to go forward in that direction in the near future'

*Prosodic Transcription*

STRUCT

// ↗ DAvid PALmer // → FROM the // → con ion industry group // u of the //  
↘ british CHAMber // (.) // → you WILL // ↘ NO doubt be aWARE of the of //  
PU  
↘ P p P // → blic PRIVate // ↘ PARTnership // ↘ THE // → conSTRUction industry  
WITH  
group // → in hong KONG many Other // ↘ inTERESted groups HAVE been trying  
TO // ↘ er discuss with the GOvernment for some TIME now // → THE er WAY to TAKE  
this initiative FORward // → with resPECT to CApital works PROjects in hong KONG //  
DATE  
→ but to // ↘ FRANKly we have not been Able to find a WAY // → could you  
PLEASE er // → disCUSS THIS and // ↘ exPLAIN to us if we WILL be Able to go  
forward in that DIrection // ↘ in the near FUture//

This question is an example of combining two pragmatic functions: comment (type 4) and criticism/attack (type 2). The questioner talks about a Hong Kong Government initiative that he and others in the construction sector have tried to work within but to no avail. The questioner criticises the HKSARG for a lack of leadership and asks the presenter (Anthony Leung) to explain whether the Government is finally going to take the initiative forward. The questioner's choice of contrastive high key on *public* is interesting as it serves to emphasize that while the proposed partnership is government (public) and private, the government has been inactive. Later contrastive key is chosen on *date* (in *but to date*) which again conveys the sense of against expectations as one might have expected actions to have been taken by now.

Below the first part of Anthony Leung's answer is described and analyzed:

*Orthographic Transcription*

'well thank you David for that question in a way giving me the opportunity

to stress to you how important I see this topic'

*Prosodic Transcription*

THANK  
// → well            you DAvid for // → THAT question // → in a WAY giving me the  
OPporTUnity to // ↘ STRESS to YOU // ↘ how im            tant // ↘ i see this TOpic //

At the start of his answer, Anthony Leung uses a not uncommon tactic, and that is, thanking the questioner. This strategy suggests that what looks like a criticism is actually a welcome enquiry and while it might not succeed in achieving this effect, it at least projects the image of a presenter who is cool under fire.

Prominence, which shows that the information is situationally important, is found in words such as *David*, *that* (question), *way*, *opportunity*, *you*, *important* and *topic*. Regarding the choice of key, using high key on the word *thanks* has the communicative value that the 'thanks' is against expectations given the critical nature of the question. High termination is noted for the word 'important'. The presenter claims to be grateful to be given the opportunity of showing how *important* this topic is to him; and again, high termination on this word carries the meaning that this might come as a surprise, as well it might if the questioner's accusation of government inactivity is accurate.

Having used these intonational strategies, the presenter Anthony Leung then answers the question by way of an inductive strategy in which a whole lot of vaguely related topics are covered.

*Orthographic Transcription*

'we don't have a fixed formula we don't have a way that we are somehow kind of determined to go one form or another but we're determined to push to push in this direction so any ideas that you may have um please give it to us'

'well thank you David for that question'

### *Prosodic Transcription*

#### DON'T

// → we have a // → FIXED FORMula // u we DON'T have // ∽ a WAY that  
WE are // → SOMEhow // → kind of deTERmined to go // → one form or aNOther //  
ANY  
u but we're // ∽ deTERmined to PUSH to PUSH in this diRECtion // u so // → ideas  
that you MAY have // → UM // → PLEASE GIVE it to us //

Finally, the presenter admits that the government doesn't have a strategy to move things along and chooses high termination on *don't*. This indicates that this may come as a surprise which is, given the criticism made by the questioner, probably not the case. Again contrastive high key is observed on *any* in *any ideas* which makes the presenter sound quite desperate for any kind of input to help the government out of its inertia. Regarding tone, when the presenter says that the government is determined to push and push in that direction, he uses the fall tone which has the sense that this is new information which might be closer to the case.

In his response, the presenter Anthony Leung can be seen to be trying to make the best of an ultimately unsatisfactory response. He begins by thanking the speaker for raising the topic; he provides vaguely related information; and then while finally admitting that the government *don't have a way that we are somehow determined to go* asks the questioner to come to their aid. While this might seem ineffectual in some respects, the cumulative effect is to dissipate the criticism and try to appear open to ideas from outside of government circles.

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TEACHING**

This paper has described the quantitative and qualitative analyses of questions and answers found in the Q&A sessions of 121 minutes of naturally occurring public speeches in Hong Kong in terms of pragmatic functions,

question types, rhetorical strategies, and discourse intonation. The system in which the data have been prosodically transcribed (Brazil, 1997) has been described. The main purpose of the paper is to show the various ways—semantic, discourse, pragmatic and intonational—in which naturally occurring discourses can be analyzed and described. The findings should make important linguistic and pedagogical implications for English language teaching and learning.

The use of English language corpora such as the Hong Kong Corpus of Spoken English (HKCSE) as a potential resource for learning and teaching has yet to be fully tapped, but language corpora can clearly make important and useful pedagogical contributions to English language learning and teaching. Corpora, such as the public discourse sub-corpus examined in this study, provide useful reference for what is said and how they are said which in most English language textbooks are based on the intuitive notions of the authors.

There are easily accessible corpora of the English language which have 10%-15% of spoken English, for example, the 450-million-word Bank of English (Sinclair, 1987), the 100-million-word British National Corpus (BNC) (Aston & Burnard, 1998), the 100-million-word American National Corpus (ANC) (Fillmore et al., 1998), the 5-million-word Longman Spoken and Written English (LSWE) Corpus (Biber et al., 1998). In recently years, English language corpora that consist of solely spoken texts have been compiled; for example, the Cambridge and Nottingham Corpus of Discourse in English (CANCODE) is a collection of 5 million words of spoken English recorded between 1995 and 2000 (see, for example, Carter & McCarthy, 1997) and the Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English (MCASE) (Simpson et al., 2002) housed in the English Language Institute (ELI) at the University of Michigan consists of approximately 1.7 million words of academic speech from across the university.

When discussing the role of culture in English language teaching in Asian contexts, McKay (2002, 2003) describes and illustrates both linguistic and pedagogical dimensions of culture. The linguistic dimension is comprised of

'well thank you David for that question'

the teaching of semantics, pragmatics and discourse; and the pedagogical dimension includes the development of language materials and the choice of teaching methodology. The findings relating to the question types, rhetorical structures and pragmatic functions observed in a specialised intercultural corpus of Q&A sessions in the context of Hong Kong public arena have supported and illuminated in very useful ways the linguistic dimensions of culture in English language learning and teaching (McKay, 2002, 2003).

In addition to these, this paper has also introduced and described discourse intonation as an additional important level of linguistic dimension of culture in English language teaching. The learning and teaching of discourse intonation has yet to find its way into mainstream English language learning and teaching materials (Chun, 2002, p. 199), but where it has been introduced (see, for example, Cauldwell, 2002), examples drawn from real instances of language use can serve as useful reference to think about and discuss, and even as models for learners to replicate. This paper has shown that intonation is a set of choices and this fact needs to be made clear to learners. Activities that illustrate the choices available and the effects those choices can have on local meaning are an obvious way to proceed. For example, Bradford (1988) encourages learners to experiment with different intonational choices and to discuss their effect on the meaning potential of utterances. Such activities supported with examples taken from a corpus of spoken data would be a useful addition for the language learner.

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'well thank you David for that question'

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