



# A Study on the Underlying Causes Behind the Declining Trend of Chinese Male's Authority in Families: A Socio-functional Perspective

## — Taking a Chinese Dialect Episode: *Go! The Whole Family* as an Example

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### Abstract

Males have had greatest authorities in Chinese families since ancient times. However, it can be sensed that their authorities in families are declining in recent decades. Then such questions arise: first, are there any concrete evidences that can show us that Chinese male's authority in families is declining? Second, what are the underlying causes behind this declining trend? In this article, based on Halliday's systemic-functional grammar, esp. the idea about the construction of interpersonal meaning through mood structure, and Bakhtin's dialogue theory, we did quantitative and qualitative analyses of the data selected from a Chinese dialect episode: *Go! The Whole Family*. The study reveals that the declining of the Chinese male's authority in the family has become a publicly recognized convention, and this declining trend is not simply a social phenomenon, rather, it also reflects the universal human nature, that is, the pursuit of equality and humanism.

**Keywords:** Chinese Male's authority; Declining; Underlying Causes; Universal Human Nature; Mood Structure; Dialogue Theory

### 1. Introduction

Males had occupied a dominant position in traditional China. "In traditional Chinese family, the father was in the center position, wives and offsprings were his accessories." (Sun, 2013:98) "The father in China was an important signifier, and in status-ranked traditional Chinese family, the father was in the center"(Xu, 2007:8). However, in today's China, especially for Chinese middle-aged people, that male's authority in families seems to be a thing of the past, "the concept that 'males should work and earn money to support the whole family and females just stay at home taking care of children' is gradually subverted" (Ma, 2013:17), and this phenomenon is still increasing in China's urban areas.

Male's authority is a small fraction of Chinese family. Previous studies on Chinese family mainly focus on the following themes: (1) The changes of Chinese family, including its organizations, structures and functions, for example, Gao (2005:139-143) pointed out, "the size of Chinese family is decreasing while its types are becoming diversified" ; (2) The spirits of Chinese ancestors and psychological status of Chinese families (e.g.Hsu,1971); (3) Economic factors and their relationships with the personalities of family members, for instance, Goel, He & Karri (2011) discussed the situations of firm performance in Chinese family-owned firms, which showed the family members' personalities in family-owned businesses; (4) The relations and problems between family members, such as parent-children, husband-wife (marriages), mother-in-law and daughter-in-law and so on. Among them, male's authority was discussed together with father's authority. Zuo (2012) discussed the male's authority and father's authority and their combing effects on wives' rights and marital relations. Wang (2014:1) pointed out "the mechanism of male's authority is changing, from partial teamwork to complete cooperation." On the other hand, In terms of children's issues, there were also a large number of studies, e.g. early childhood research (e.g. Tan, Camras, Deng, Zhang , & Lu, 2012), the influence of Chinese one-child family status on disorders (Hua, Jin, Gu, Liu, Zhang, & Wu, 2014), family factors in Internet addiction among Chinese youth (Li, Eric & Matthew, 2014).

In fact, the male's authority belongs to the last class. What differentiates this research from previous studies lies in the perspective and methodology. Besides analysis sociologically, this study also discusses from the linguistic point of view. Based on Halliday's systemic-functional grammar, esp. the idea about the construction of interpersonal meaning

through mood structure, and Bakhtin's dialogue theory, this study does quantitative and qualitative analyses of the data collected from a Chinese dialect episode: *Go! The Whole Family*. The study finds that first, Chinese males are gradually losing their dominant authorities in families and giving way to females, and second, the underlying cause behind the declining trend of the male's authority in families is the result of human's universal nature.

## 2. Perspective and Methodology

### 2.1 Perspective

Socio-functional perspective is adopted in this study. It involves two theories. One is Halliday's systemic-functional grammar, esp. the idea about the construction of interpersonal meaning through mood structure, and the other is Bakhtin's dialogue theory.

Mood element consists of mood structure and residue structure. In this study, we just concern with mood structure rather than residue structure. What's more, because "A free major clause is either indicative or imperative in mood; if indicative, it is either declarative or interrogative" (Halliday, 2008:72). Since the imperative is the mood for exchanging goods and services (Halliday, 2008:138), while we are discussing the exchange of information, therefore, we choose declarative and interrogative as our two variables.

Bakhtin argued that "the essence of language is dialogue, and so is life and thought"(1988:47). "Dialogism is a special form in which different consciousnesses interact with each other" ( Tan, 2005:7 ) . "To man in the state of nature there is little that is more uncomfortable than another man's silence" (Jespersen, 2010:8). Actually, even in mono-dialogues or potential dialogues, there are different voices responding to each other. In this study, we discuss the "different voices" in dialogues or dialogisms— interior dialogue (double voice) and micro-dialogue (monologue).

By using the two theories, we aim to discover how mood structure contributes to the construction of authorities in families and to further demonstrate that there are causes which underlie the construction of reality, which is, in turn, constructed by language, just as Halliday stated, "Language is functioning simply as a mean towards achieving what are essentially non-linguistic ends."(1994:70).

### 2.2 Methodology

#### 2.2.1 Methods

Quantitative and qualitative methods are being employed in this study. By using quantitative method, we do a statistical analysis of the data such as the times that wives refuse their husbands, the distribution of refusal times, the univariate analysis of variance, etc. With qualitative method, we describe, explain and interpret the implications behind these quantitative data.

#### 2.2.2 Data

All the discourse data used in this study are chosen from a Chinese family sitcom *Go! The Whole Family*. This sitcom describes the everyday lives of Yan's family (Yan is their surname), who live in Changsha, a Chinese urban city. It is a big family in which aged parents and their four sons and daughter-in-laws live together. The four sons with varied characters take up different kinds of jobs, and their respective wives are from all over the country. It should be noted that we choose the second son as our sample because he can mostly represent the situations of Chinese male's authority in urban areas (middle-aged one with a son who is attending the primary school, and has a relatively stable job of average salary). On the other hand, Changsha is a second-tier central city of China and its economic development is comparatively at the same pace with most other China's cities. Namely, the sample we choose takes economic and region factors into consideration. What's more, this sitcom has 166 sets in all, with each one lasts for about 20 minutes.

## 3. Quantitative analysis

### 3.1 A statistical analysis of the data

Based on the data, we do a comparative study on the dialogues between two pairs of husbands and wives: the father and the mother; their second son and his wife. We divide all the 144 sets into 9 samples with each containing 16 sets (here 144 sets rather than 166 sets because from the 145<sup>th</sup> set, the second son divorced with his wife, and we only consider the dialogues between husbands and wives). We divide 144 sets into 9 strata, each stratum contains 16 sets. However, their dialogues are not evenly distributed in every set, therefore, in every strata (16 sets), we randomly select and accumulate 10 minutes' dialogues between the second son and his wife, and another 10 minutes' dialogues between the father and the mother, and then separately make a statistical analysis about the times when wives refute their husbands, both in declaratives and interrogatives. The following are our statistical results:

Table 1. The Refusal Times of the Wives

Refuted types Role	Declarative	Declarative	Interrogative	Interrogative
	→ Father	Son	Father	Son
stratum(1)	8	27	1	11
stratum (2)	10	30	3	7
stratum (3)	9	30	2	5
stratum (4)	7	22	1	7
stratum (5)	6	20	1	8

<b>stratum (6)</b>	6	18	2	7
<b>stratum (7)</b>	9	21	1	6
<b>stratum (8)</b>	6	19	1	5
<b>stratum (9)</b>	7	25	2	5
<b>Sum</b>	68	212	14	61

Based on the above source data, we draw the following two figures:

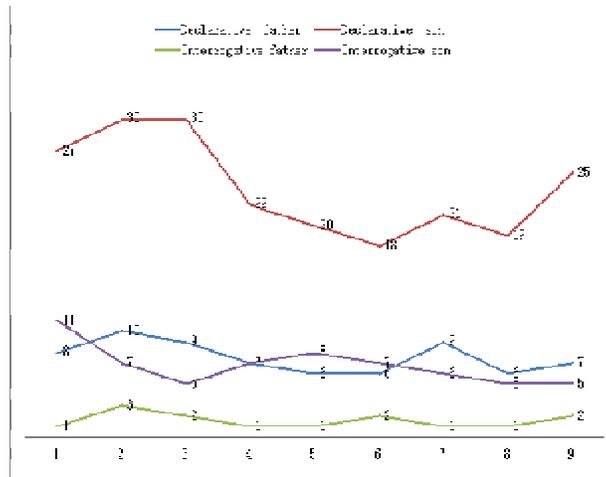


Figure 1. Distribution of Refusal Times

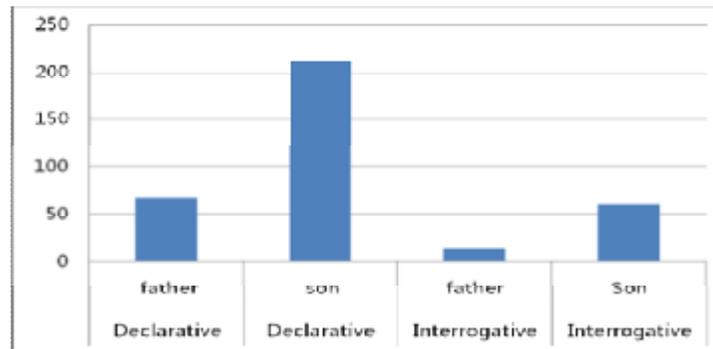


Figure 2. Sum of Refusal Times

Figure 1 shows some data about the distribution of refusal times. As can be seen from the chart, the times that the son was refused by his wife in declaratives (we termed as “declarative son”) were the highest among all types. (nearly more than 20 times in each stratum). The refusal times in “interrogative father” were the least (around merely twice in each stratum).

“Declarative son” started at a very high level, with 27 times of refusal, while “declarative father” only accounted for 8 at the beginning. Later “declarative son” had an increase and peaked at 30 times before it decreased sharply. Interestingly, “declarative father” also had the similar contour with “declarative son”, with some rises and falls except for the less total times, and despite some fluctuations, both of the “declarative son” and “declarative father” saw an upward trend in refusal times. In terms of the interrogative types, we can see that the times of “interrogative son” were much more than “interrogative father” in all the strata. Also, both of them experienced some fluctuations, they showed an increase in the end.

Figure 2 gives information about the distribution of refusal times. According to the graph, the number of “son declarative” contributed the most, with as high as around 210 times, while “father interrogative” made up the least, with only approximately 20 times. The times of “father declarative” matched with those of “son interrogative”(about 60 times). As for the declarative types, the gap between “declarative son” and “declarative father” was the biggest, and as to the interrogative types, the “son interrogative” and “father interrogative” also had a big gap.

Overall, no matter in declarative types and interrogative types, the differences between father and son were huge. On the other hand, they both show upward trends, which means that the refusal situation will continue to extend.

Then why do these differences exist? What do these differences mean? These we will further discuss later. Here, in the following, we will do the univariate analysis of variance first.

### 3.2 The univariate analysis of variance

There are two independent factors in Table 1: indicative and role. Just as with any analysis of variance procedure, we need:

- (1) a test of the main effect for indicative
- (2) a test of the main effect for role, and
- (3) a test for the interaction between indicative and role

And we propose three null hypotheses:

(1) For indicative,  $H_0: \mu_{\text{declarative}} = \mu_{\text{interrogative}}$

(2) For role,  $H_0: \mu_{\text{father}} = \mu_{\text{son}}$

(3) For interaction between indicative and role

$H_0: \mu_{\text{declarative} \times \text{father}} = \mu_{\text{declarative} \times \text{son}} = \mu_{\text{interrogative} \times \text{father}} = \mu_{\text{interrogative} \times \text{son}}$

The following are the results produced with SPSS 17.0

Table 2. The Univariate Analysis of Variance  
Between-Subjects

Factors		N
Indicative	Declarative	18
	Interrogative	18
Role	Father	18
	Son	18

#### Descriptive Statistics

Dependent Variable :times

Indicative	Role	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Declarative	Father	7.56	1.509	9
	Son	23.56	4.613	9
	Total	15.56	8.880	18
Interrogative	Father	1.56	.726	9
	Son	6.78	1.922	9
	Total	4.17	3.034	18
Total	Father	4.56	3.294	18
	Son	15.17	9.288	18
	Total	9.86	8.725	36

#### Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Dependent Variable: times

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	2442.083 <sup>a</sup>	3	814.028	117.220	.000
Intercept	3500.694	1	3500.694	504.100	.000
Indicative	1167.361	1	1167.361	168.100	.000
Role	1013.361	1	1013.361	145.924	.000
Indicative * role	261.361	1	261.361	37.636	.000
Error	222.222	32	6.944		
Total	6165.000	36			
Corrected Total	2664.306	35			

a. R Squared = .917 (Adjusted R Squared = .909)

Based on the above results, we see that

(1) For indicative,  $H_1: \bar{X}_{\text{declarative}} \neq \bar{X}_{\text{interrogative}}$

(2) For role,  $H_1: \bar{X}_{\text{father}} \neq \bar{X}_{\text{son}}$

(3) For interaction between indicative and role

$H_1: \bar{X}_{\text{declarative} \times \text{father}} \neq \bar{X}_{\text{declarative} \times \text{son}} \neq \bar{X}_{\text{interrogative} \times \text{father}} \neq \bar{X}_{\text{interrogative} \times \text{son}}$

Thus, there is a significant difference between Chinese middle-aged couples and aged couples in terms of the frequencies of their wives' refusal times, wives' refusal times in aged couples are much less than those of middle-aged couples ( $p < .05$ ). There is a main effect of indicative on refusal times ( $p = .000, p < .05$ ). There is a main effect of roles ( $p = .000, p < .05$ ). There is an interaction effect between indicative and roles on refusal times ( $p = .000, p < .05$ ).

From the above quantitative analysis, it can be seen that in terms of the times that the wife refuses the husband's information, situations between aged couple and middle-aged couple are quite different. What are the reasons behind this phenomenon? In the next section, we will answer this question from the functional perspective.

#### 4. The analysis of data: the functional perspective

##### 4.1 Declaratives

"The dialogue is a common phenomenon of human life. With language, people interact with each other by asking and answering questions, greeting and refuting, asserting and negating." (Zhang, 2000:91). The following are some examples of refusal in declaratives:

Data A:

S: The second son W: the son's wife

(1) S: 你看这个桂花，一天到晚就知道偷懒不做事，真是的。

You see, this lazy Gui Hua idles away all the day without working, she is really...

(2) W: 你也真是的，你不随她去，我只是说我们家菜馆歇业不做事，你可以让她在里来帮忙做事嘛。

You are really...you shouldn't care about what she does. Although she doesn't need to work in our restaurant because of the close-down, you still can ask her to help us at home.

(3) S: 你讲得对，还是你比我清白些。

You are right. You are more shrewd than me, indeed.

(4) W:

我再清白也没有你们家里人清白。从我们家菜馆开张起，年年过年家里的年夜饭都是在我们家菜馆做，材料人工都是我们出...今年再也别想落在我们身上了

No matter how shrewd I am, your family members are much more shrewd than me. You see, we have been responsible for every New Year's Eve dinner since the opening of our restaurant, and the materials and money are all on our part...This year we are no longer responsible for it

(5) S: 对，今年就落在他们身上

Yes, this year let others to responsible for it.

( the 18<sup>th</sup> set, 00:01':04'' )

In line (1), S offers the information, that is, Gui Hua is lazy, because she doesn't work all the day. However, W refuses to accept this information by saying that "You are really...you shouldn't care about what she does" The mood structure of this refusal sentence is the following:

Table 3. The Mood Structure of Line (2) in Data A

You	are	really
Subject	Finite	Mood adjunct
Mood		

"Really" is a mood adjunct of intensity. It belongs to the category of counter-expectancy, that is, S's words exceed W's expectancy. In responding to this, W refutes S. In terms of speech roles, it is quite normal for one speech role to refute the other speech role. However, when we add social roles to speech roles, things are totally different. The above social roles are the husband and the wife in the context of Chinese culture, therefore, there are some new interpersonal meanings. It is the wife who refutes the husband, which is forbidden in the past in China. "Language has the function of negotiation or exchange between the addresser and the addressee, and the function of expressing the addresser's stance, opinion, judgement, etc." (Li, 2002:82). W's (the wife) refusal of S represents her stances and opinions. W doesn't need to obey S on family matters, instead, W obeys or respects his wife's views on family matters. S is in an equal status with W rather than in a dominant position. This can be further seen in the following examples:

Table 4. The Mood Structure of Line (2) in Data A

You	shouldn't	care	about	what	she	does	
Subject	Finite			Complement	Subject	Finite	Predicator
		Predicator	Adjunct				
				Residue	Mood		Residue
Mood					Complement		
			Residue				

There are two mood structures in this sentence. In one mood structure (the higher level), the subject is “you”, and the finite is “shouldn’t”. “The finite circumscribes the Subject and it brings the proposition down to earth so that it is something that can be argued about” (Li, 2006:91). What is argued by W is “you” (S); in the other mood structure, what is argued by W is “she” (Gui Hua). W argues twice on S’s propositions (“*She* doesn’t need to work and *You* still can...”). The more the wife argues, the more conversation rights the wife enjoys, and the higher status she enjoys, too.

Just like line (2) is the refusal of line (1), line (4) is the refusal of line (3). S gives the information that W is more shrewd than himself. And again W refuses S’s information, saying their family members are much more shrewd than herself and giving more information evidences.

From line (1) to line (4), we can see that every time S gives information, W will refuse it and add something related with her own statements. On the other hand, in S’s responses to W’s refusals, we find that S always accepts W’s information (line (3) and line(5)).

S’s acceptances and W’s refusals are not only the intentions of individuals. For “Meaning is more than a matter of intentions of individual’s speakers, it is also a matter of convention that is accepted across language users”(Henriette, 1998:9). The family is an important unit in the Chinese society. The above dialogue is a sample of whole Chinese society. S and W are two social entities, and their dialogues occur under specific social contexts. “The voices of the speaker and the backgrounds of the listener show the existences of two or more social entities. “When and where it happens is not purely physical phenomenon but the history and the society” (Todorov, 2001:229).

What’s more, that Chinese male’s authority declines in the family is more than a unique social phenomenon. It represents humans’ nature: equality and humanism. The wife as a female enjoys more rights in the conversation and the husband as a male enjoys less. This trend of balancing development between males and females in China is a miniature of the universal human nature. “In the past, the family structure is a pyramid with the father in the highest position, but now it is a plane structure in which the father, the mother and offsprings are at the same level.”(Sun, 2013:98). “Families are prisons of humanity”(Xu, 2007:5); and in today’s China, as we can see from the above dialogues, “freedom and equality are the basic rights of modern people.” (Ma, 2013:5)

We are keeping on talking about “declining” of the male’s authority. Then how do we know that the male’s authority declines? How does it decline? And to what degree does it decline? Differences exist in contrast. Thus we should analyze the dialogues between the father and the mother, and then compare it with the dialogues between the second son and his wife to see whether there is a declining of the male’s authority or not and the specific declining processes of the male’s authority. The following is a dialogue between the father and the mother

## Data B

F: Father M: Mother

(1) F: 我们家天乐(老人的孙子)到底是长大了, 学习好自觉

Tian Le (their grandson) has grown up. You see, he studies so hard.

(2)M: 那是的, 那是的, 明显要比他爸爸小时候表现好得多。

Yes, yes. He is obviously much more excellent than his father when his father was young.

(3)F: 你看天乐长胡子了呢

You see there are some beards on his face.

(4)M: 长大了, 长大了

Ah, he grows up, and no longer a child anymore.

(5)F:

一个人呐, 从小孩子带到这么大不容易啊, 特别是看到他这个成长, 就想起我们年轻的时候, 不容易啊。

It is not easy for a person to grow from a baby into a man. His growing reminds me of my youth. It’s really not easy.

(6)M: 是的呢, 是的呢, 带崽不容易, 如今带孙也不容易。

Yes, indeed. To nurture a son is not easy, neither does a grandson.

(the 31th set, 00:00':54'')

Table 5. The Mood Structure of Line (2) in Data B

yes, yes	he	is	obviously	much	more excellent than his father when...
Mood Adjunct	Subject	Finite	Comment Adjunct	Mood Adjunct	Complement
Mood			Residue	Mood	Residue

“Yes” here is an affirmation to a statement. Namely, “yes” is a mood adjunct, and “obviously” is a comment adjunct. Both mood adjunct and comment adjunct are interpersonal adjuncts. They together express the interpersonal meanings. “Yes” means the acceptance of the above information. In the whole dialogue, M says “yes” for many times to affirm F’s information. In fact, M not only affirms F’s information, she also adds some more to strengthen F’s information. F expresses the information that their grandson behaved well. M affirms that “he is obviously much more excellent than his father...”, here “much” is a mood adjunct of high intensity, together with the comment adjunct “obviously”, it shows M also thinks highly of their grandson. This acceptance can be further seen in line (3). F gives another piece of information that his grandson grows some beard, and in line (4), M accepts the information by saying that their grandson has grown up. Line (5) and line (6) are in the same situation.

Comparing with the dialogues between the son and the wife, the dialogues between the father and the mother is quite marked. The mother nearly accepts all what the father says, which means the father represents the authority in the family. What he says must be obeyed. However, the father and the mother are not only isolated individuals, they also belong to their communities. “The most individual speech is socially conditioned: an individual is never completely isolated from his surroundings, and in every utterance there is a social element (Jespersen, 2010:15).”

The father represents authorities in the family. Then, here comes the question: doesn’t the mother refuse at all? In fact, the mother does refuse, but not that much as her daughter-in-law does:

Data C:

F: father M: mother

(1)F: 儿子们都是你一个个惯坏的

Sons were all spoiled by you

(2)M: 怎么是我惯坏的, 是你把他们骂得生气了吧。

How could you say it was me that spoil them? It was you that blamed them and then they got complaints.

(3)F: 我骂他们, 我只是说让他们吃饭要交钱, 我哪里骂了他?

I blamed them? I just said that they should pay for the dinner. How could you say that I blamed them?

(4)M: 吃几餐饭还要儿女交钱, 他们怎么会没有意见

They just had several dinners at our home but were required to pay. How couldn’t they have any complaints?

(the 97<sup>th</sup> set, 00:06:59-00:07:55)

Line (2) and line(4) are evidently M’s refusal of F’s information. However, what we must pay attention to are the contents of their dialogues. In line (2), M says that F shouldn’t blame their sons, and in line (4), M insists that F shouldn’t ask their sons to pay for the meals. All of these refusals show the mother’s love for their sons. In other words, if not necessary, the mother will not refuse the father’s information, and when the mother does refuse the information given by the father, it must relate with some emotional factors.

“Oral speech doesn’t belong to individuals, it belongs to a social group (social context). Any motives, any self-awareness are methods that interact with social codes. This can be viewed as the socialization of individual behaviors.” (Todorov 2001:215) It is the social codes under today’s Chinese social context that the mother dares to refute the father, but the mother’s refusal times are quite less, which proves the mother and father are deeply influenced by their past social codes: it is the virtue of females to obey her husbands. However, here we must notice the emotional factors, which are the universal human nature.

#### 4.2 Interrogatives

“Language in its essence is a human activity, an effort on the part of one individual to be understood by, or at least comes into relation with, another individual” (Jespersen, 2010:3). The relation we are dealing with is that of the husband and the wife in the family context. “The most fundamental types of speech roles that we may eventually be able to recognize are just two: (1)giving and (2)demanding. Giving means ‘inviting to receive’, and demanding means ‘inviting to give’” (Halliday, 2008:107). In interrogatives, it is mostly “inviting to give”, and that the listener refuses to give is what we concern.

- S: the second son      W: the second son's wife  
 (1)S:你这句话什么意思?  
 What do you mean?  
 (2)W:你自己一个这么大的脑袋, 你自己不知道想吗?  
 You have such a big head. Can't you think it by yourself?  
 (the 3<sup>rd</sup> set ,00:00':12'')

Table 6. The Mood Structure of Line (2) in the 3<sup>rd</sup> set

You	have	such		a big head
Subject	Finite (present tense)	Predicator	Conjunctive adjunct	Complement
Mood		Residue		
can't	you	think	it	by yourself
Finite	Subject	Predicator	Complement	Adjunct
Mood		Residue		

In line (1), S asks W for the information. However, W doesn't provide it (line(2)). W could have provided the information to S, by saying something like "I mean...", but W just doesn't do it. The mood structure is divided into subjects "you" and the finite "have", which have nothing to do with S's demanding information. Moreover, in the beginning, it is S that requests for W's information, however, W doesn't provide the information, and W's negative response "Can't you think it by yourself" is actually a question expecting S answers with "yes".

In the last century, in China, wives were required to obey their husbands in nearly every aspect of life. Males dominated in families. It was impossible for wives to refute their husbands. When the husbands asked for information, it was the obligation of their wives to provide it if they knew. "Women were defined as the reproduction tool, which was social bases of their positions as accessories." (Zhou,1999:34) Then how is the situation of aged couples? In what situation will the aged wife refuse her husband? The following is an example:

- F: father M:mother  
 (1)F:婆婆子,你说我们是不是太好讲话了?  
 Dear, do you think we are too kind to them?  
 (2)M:哎哟,鼻子一堵,脑袋又痛,还总是讲话干什么,休息下休息下。  
 Ah, your nose is still blocked. You still have a headache. Why do you keep on talking? Just have a good rest.  
 (the 81<sup>st</sup> set, 00:00':40'')

This marked information also has something to do with the emotions of the mother. Generally, the mother will provide the information demanded by the father. But in the above discourse, M didn't provide the missing information, instead, she answered with something that seems unrelated: the old father's health. Therefore, we cannot regard the aged-mother's refusal as a symbol of their status enhanced and their husbands' authorities declined. The refusal is emotional and represents the human's universal nature.

#### 4.3 New findings--he who holds the major part of the dialogue holds the authority

In the process of collecting data, we found a new phenomenon, that is: he who most holds the dialogue holds the authority. In dialogues between husbands and wives, it doesn't matter who starts the dialogue, what it matters is who can hold the dialogue most. And the one who holds the dialogue usually represents the authority in the family. The following is an example:

- (1)S: 老婆, 西装送到干洗店洗去了。  
 Honey, I have sent my suits to dry cleaner.  
 (2)W: 什么? 送到干洗店去了? 你未必那套西装还准备穿?  
 What? Send it to dry cleaner? Could it be said that you will wear that suits again?  
 (3)S: 当然要穿嘛, 不穿的话送到干洗店做什么?  
 Of course. Why should I send it to the dry cleaner if I don't wear?  
 (4)W: 那这个问题就有点不对头  
 This is abnormal.  
 (5)S: 洗一件西装有什么不对头?  
 Abnormal? To wash a suits?  
 (6)W: 当然不对头嘛。这件衣服自你买起只穿过一两回, 对吧?  
 Yes, quite abnormal. You only wore this suit for once or twice since you bought it, didn't you?  
 (7)S: 嗯, 对啊。  
 Yes, I did.

(8)W: 这件衣服你每次穿的时候都会说, 我不穿这件, 对吧?

Every time you wore this suit, you said "I won't wear this", didn't you?

(9) S: 对.

Yes, I did.

(10)W: 那怎么还拿出去洗? 你自己说。

Then why you sent it to the dry cleaner? Give me an explanation!

(the 3<sup>rd</sup> set, 00:01':10'')

S starts the dialogue by a declarative: he gives the information that he sent his suits to the dry cleaner. From line (1) to line (3), it is S who holds the dialogue. Line (4) and line (5) act as transitions. From line (6), W begins to hold the dialogue. And in the following lines, it is W who holds the dialogue. She begins to ask for information through a series of tag questions. Tag questions themselves contain strong mood. Here is its mood structure:

Table 7. The Mood Structure of Line (6) in the 3<sup>rd</sup> set, 00:01':10''

You	only	wore		this suit	for once or twice	didn't	you
Subject	Mood adjunct	Finite (past tense)	Predicator	Complement	Adjunct	Finite	Subject
Mood			Residue			Mood	

"Only" is a mood adjunct of intensity. W emphasizes that S hardly wears this suit, which is in contrast with the fact that S wears this suit. The use of "only" makes the contrast prominent. The mood tag "didn't you" is to confirm his statements. This negative form "didn't you" is actually a question expecting S answering "yes". All of these are symbols of W's control on conversations. Conversational rights are mirrors of status. Obviously, W controls most of the turn-takings. Therefore, we can see that W's status is enhanced and S's authority declines.

### 5. The analysis of data: the social perspective

In this part, based on Bakhtin's dialogue theory, we will deal with other dialogue forms—interior dialogue (double voice) and micro-dialogue (monologue).

#### 5.1 The phenomenon of double-voice

According to Bakhtin's dialogue theory, even the monologue is dialogic. Different from the pure dialogues (conversations between different people), monologue is a kind of micro-dialogue. In monologue, double-voice arguments are very common, that is, within a monologue there are two kinds of voices which conflict with each other. This phenomenon reflects the contradictory elements in a person. The following is an example:

我还有1000元钱呐, 不能够放在柜子里的衣服口袋里。放在口袋里啊, 心巧会以为我藏了私房钱。放在哪里呢? 放在抽屉里面, 这样就都看得见, 这样就没有误会了。

I have 1000 yuan, but I cannot put it in my pocket of the clothes in the wardrobe. If I put it in my pocket, my wife (Xin Qiao) will think that I have private savings. Then where shall I put it? Put it in the drawer, and my wife can see it and she will not misunderstand me.

(the 20<sup>th</sup> set, 00:00':47'')

In the above discourse, there are two different voices, that is: I and the others. Because this is a piece of monologue of the second son, then the other voice is from his wife. We transform the monologue into a dialogic form to show how the two voices conflict with each other:

S: I have 1000 yuan.

W: What? 1000 yuan is a big money.

S: But you didn't know that I have such a big money.

W: You should have told me about it.

S: Because I didn't tell you, I cannot put it in pocket of the clothes in that wardrobe.

W: If I found that money in your pocket, then you are done.

S: I put it in the drawer, and you can see it.

W: The money in the drawer is not your private savings, then you are safe.

S: Yes, you would not misunderstand me, either.

"Others co-exist with me, and only through the interactions between others and me, the meanings of the world can be decoded and finally be shown in others' eyes. I, as an isolated person, cannot judge whether this world is good or not,

whether the things worth doing or not, and even cannot have the awareness of world.” (Ling, 2000:179) The above dialogue contains two voices, with one voice strong and the other weak. The two voices in the above imagined dialogue reveal social aspects of life. S and W are two people who enjoy equal status, and every time S speaks, W may refute him or answer with some command tone. But for the past centuries, wives were prohibited to speak to their husbands in that tone. This change reflects the declining of the male’s authority and the enhancement of equality between males and females in China.

The meanings of the declining of the male’s authority are more than equality. It demonstrates the universal human nature, the mental power and the humanism. “Free and equal communications requires us to break the binary oppositions (subject vs object), because this binary oppositions are based on selves and in this equal communications, subject A and subject B are no longer in a relation of “he(or her)” and “me”, but in a “you” and “me” relation. This dialogue exists between two equal subjects, which is the unit of flesh and soul.” (Liu, 2001:108). Therefore, double voices within a person in the above dialogic discourse not only reflect China’s social reality that the male’s authority declines, but also the humanism spirits.

### 5.2 Inner different voices

Inner different voices are not in the dialogues between two or more people. They are different voices in one person. Within that person, a thought is “either affirmed or repudiated” (Bakhtin 1988: 80)..

哎呀，是她呀，她怎么跟着我爸爸不松手呀。第一次跟踪，就被我捉到现场了，看我这一回，守株待兔。

Ah, it’s her! Why does she hold my father’s hands so tightly? It was my first time to tail after you and I caught evidences! Wait and see, this time I will show you how smart I am!

(the 42th set, 00:02’ 08’)

There are at least three voices in this monologue: “She is just the bad woman” “my father really does something bad” “how smart I am! Because the first time I tail after them, I caught them!”. These three voices are not isolated, they interact with each other. According to Bakhtin, an idea does not reside in one person’s head, but only comes alive in a dialogic relationship with other ideas through embodiment in the voice of another. The result of the interactions of these three voices is “I am smart”, because “you did bad things and I found it out”. “Internal speaker is absolutely the products of social relations. Not only external expressions, but also internal expressions are within the realm of socialization (Todorov, 2001:220)”. There are several social relations within these internal dialogues: Husbands should respect their wives and are forbidden to develop love affairs outside. In the above data, the son misunderstands his father (he thought his father had a love affair outside), he shoulders the responsibility of defending his mother’s rights, therefore, he tails after his father. Actually being loyal to the wife not only means the males’ authority declines or females’ status are enhanced, what is behind is the universal human nature: humanity.

### 5.3 Potential dialogues

For Bakhtin, utterances are dialogues by providing or anticipating answers, and to send messages to the world in fact presupposes message-receivers and their possible reactions. The data we choose are from an episode, and here is a potential dialogue between the protagonist and the audiences:

(The middle-aged father gives his son money to get information from his mom, and then he can buy the sliding plate.)

这个鬼崽子，就把滑板买回来了。证明这个情报已经到手了，买得好。

Ah, look at my naughty son! He bought the sliding plate back. That shows he has got the information. Yep, he deserved to buy such a sliding plate.

(the 23<sup>rd</sup> set; 00:00’:08’)

This is an imaged dialogue between the middle-aged son (protagonist) and the audiences. We reconstruct the potential dialogues as the following:

S: I give my son money to get the information

A: Are you sure your son will help you to get the information?

S: Yes. Because I asked him to get the information first and then he could buy the sliding plate home, and now he came back with a sliding plate.

A: But actually he didn’t help you to get the information.

Instead of demanding information from his wife personally, the protagonist (the husband) asks his son to get the information from the wife, which shows that males are not the dominant ones on family matters. Males need to respect their wives, and both of them have their own privacies, on the other hand, the voices of the audiences also mirror the social relations in China. The audiences’ attitudes toward the protagonist (the second son) are objective. The audiences

may think it as quite normal. And if we put this phenomenon in China's social context, the audiences may think that the male's acts are quite shameful, for males have and must have the rights to know the information.

## 6. Conclusions

"Life is dialogue. Life means participating in dialogue, raising questions, listening, answering and agreeing.(Todorov, 2001: 309)". Therefore, we choose and analyze some dialogues from the Chinese family sitcom *Go! The Whole Family* to show one aspect of life in China today: the declining of the male's authority. According to Halliday, mood structure can express interpersonal meanings. In that sitcom, wives' refusals are quite meaningful in revealing the wife and husband's relations. Therefore, we first did statistical analysis on refusal times of two pairs of husbands and wives(the father and the mother; their second son and his wife) in declaratives and interrogatives. Then, we analyzed the mood structure of the wives' refusal forms to reveal their interpersonal meanings in specific dialogue data. Hence revealing how the male's authority declines in the present-day China. We analyzed the dialogues of common people. "The more commonplace a person is, the more will his language bear the stamp of the community in which he lives: the more unique his nature, the more peculiarly his own will be the coloring of his language"(Jespersen, 2010:168). Moreover, as language is a social public convention, therefore, we can reveal the social reality through languages. Henriëtte (1998:11) proposed a constitute rule that "X(symbols) stands for Y(meaning) in context C, and it does so by some public convention", that is to say, "Language plays a crucial role in the construction of social facts. Meaning that is conveyed by some marks, scribbles or noises consists in part in the intention on the part of the speaker or writer to produce some understanding in the hearer" (Henriëtte,1998:8) After all, "Culture is all kinds of discourses which is saved by the memory of the collectivity" (Henriëtte,1998:172) .And based on Bakhtin's dialogue theory, we discussed the phenomenon of double voice, inner different voices and potential dialogues from that sitcom. By doing these, we show why the males' authority declines in China, which can be accounted for by not only social conventions but also philosophical reasons, i.e., the universal human nature, as "language is deeply entangled in the spiritual evolution of mankind, it accompanies the latter at every stage of its local advance or retreat, and the state of culture at any time is also recognizable in it" (Von Humboldt, 2008:24). In Chinese families, wives enjoy more rights in dialogues and can refute their husbands under today's social context. All these deeply demonstrate the universal humanism of the whole human beings. This we call the globalization of humanity. "The bringing-forth of language is an inner need of human beings, not merely an external necessity for maintaining communal intercourse, but a thing lying in their own nature, indispensable for the development of their mental powers" (Von Humboldt ,2008:27).

Apart from the above theoretical contributions, this paper is also practically meaningful. For applied linguistics and language teaching, for example, associating society studies with linguistic studies is helpful to foster students' critical thinking skills. As Hajhosseiny (2012:1358) pointed out that nowadays "interest has been largely directed towards enhancing student's reasoning, however dialogic approaches have also been suggested as a means to develop critical thinking, and to facilitate student's participation in their learning". With those critical thinking skills, students expand their outlook and they will probe into the manifolds of languages, and the relationships between languages and other disciplines. For language teachers, through interdisciplinary studies, they establish some "models", that is, to study the connections (common parts between different disciplines) under certain culture models, which is beneficial for students of certain cultural backgrounds to learn language well.

Although we have done a lot of work, there are still a lot of limitations in this research. Firstly, in terms of interpersonal meanings, we only take the mood structure in declaratives and interrogative into consideration. Other factors like modality and modulation, mood operators, key and so on are also very important in expressing interpersonal meanings. Secondly, in terms of the wives' refusal times, there are still many other variables, like the characteristics of wives, namely, the character of the wives may affect the refusal times, if she were an introvert type, then the results may be different. On the other hand, the way we get the data of refusal times are based on our intuitions, which may not be that objective, and to some degree, too ideal. Thirdly, we discussed the declining of male's authority in the family context and didn't discuss it in the working environment (although more and more women occupied important position). All these will be dealt with in the future studies. All in all, this study provides us with a very unique perspective to inquire into what led to the declining trend of Chinese male's authority in families.

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