

A Discourse Analysis of Two Verba Dicendi in Spoken Mandarin



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Introduction

- A verbum dicendi means a “declaratory word” in Latin.
- In linguistics, verba dicendi are typically verbs of speech such as “say”, “talk”, “speak”, and “utter”.



Mandarin Verba Dicendi

- In Mandarin, these so-called “speaking words” typically include 說 “say” and 講 “talk” in the sense of 說話 or 講話, i.e., “speak”.
- 請你說/講清楚一點。
Please speak more clearly.



Interchangeability

- 說 and 講 may not be used interchangeably in certain contexts.
- 剛剛你提到說應該開放這種改裝車。
Just now you mentioned that the ban on this type of modified car should be lifted.
- 可以講價。
You can bargain.



Discourse Data

- Mandarin Conversational Dialogue Corpus at the Institute of Linguistics, Academia Sinica, Taiwan
- 8 dialogues, 16 speakers, approximately 400 minutes of interlocution



Tokens of 説 and 講 in Corpus

136,000 characters (100%)	
説 tokens 1,098 (0.8%)	講 tokens 551 (0.4%)



Discourse Uses of 説 and 講

説 tokens 1,098 (100%)		講 tokens 551 (100%)	
“Speaking” 55 (5%)	“Non-speaking” 1043 (95%)	“Speaking” 541 (98%)	“Non-speaking” 10 (2%)



“Speaking” 說 (5%)

- 他說他已經做好執政準備。
He said that he had already prepared (himself) to govern.



“Non-speaking” 說 (95%)

- 我聽說海軍陸戰隊現在也開始招收。
I heard that the Marines now have also started to recruit.
- 對我父親來說
To my father
(from my father's perspective)



“Speaking” 講 (98%)

- 你可不可以講比較清楚一點？
Can you speak more clearly?



“Non-speaking” 講 (2%)

- 老師在講解一些東西。
The teacher is explaining some things.
- 可以講價。
You can bargain.
- The words “explain” and “bargain” do not represent the stereotypical meaning of “speak”.



Broader Meaning of Speaking

- 你可不可以講比較清楚一點？
Can you speak/explain more clearly?
- 有人講電話。
Someone talked on the phone.
- 你要講哪一個主題？
Which topic are you going to talk about (discuss/lecture)?



Embedded Clause Marker 說

- 剛剛你提到說應該開放這種改裝車。
Just now you mentioned that the ban on this type of modified car should be lifted.
- 那時候我才覺得說人真的是要知福惜福。
Only then did I feel that people really have to count their blessings.



講 + Marker 說

“Speaking” 講 541 (100%)	
講 490 (91%)	講 + 說 51 (9%)



講 + Marker 說

- 他媽媽跟他講說最好不要買。
His mother told him that it's best not to buy.
- 我的一個好朋友剛剛講說三個死於癌症。
A good friend of mine just now said that three died of cancer.



Connective 說

- 很多人會誤解那個印象說改車都是拿去飆車。

Many people would misunderstand (and get) the impression that modified cars are all used for speeding.

- 他也有目標說以後要做捷運。

He also has a goal to build a mass rapid transit system in the future.



Discourse Grammar

- In the absence of textual cues in spoken discourse, speakers often use 說 to mark embedded clauses to prevent misinterpretations by listeners.
- In rapid speech, speakers use connective 說 to achieve discourse coherence despite “deviant” sentence structures.



Concluding Remarks

- This study adds to the existing literature on corpus-based discourse analysis of spontaneous conversations.
- It is hoped that the analysis of the verba dicendi 說 and 講 will aid in teaching natural conversations in Mandarin.