Situational Characteristics and Register Variation:  
A Case Study of the Particle *suo* in Mandarin Chinese *

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This article explores register variation by investigating the linguistic function of the particle *suo* in Mandarin Chinese in different registers. The data for analysis included corpora collected from editorials, magazines, fiction and speeches as well as oral corpora constructed by Tseng (2004). The results of our research show that *suo* serves ideational, (non-)contextual, personal and esthetic functions in the communicative situation. It is claimed that a dichotomy between written and spoken registers cannot fully account for the distribution of *suo* across registers. Rather, it is the situational characteristics of a register, written or spoken, that determine the appropriateness of *suo*'s occurrence in a register. The findings support the view that textual relations are defined by the situational characteristics shared among written and spoken registers.

Key words: register variation, particle *suo*, linguistic function, situational characteristic

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