Discourse markers Cantonese 噉 gam2 and English so

The English discourse marker so and its Cantonese counterpart 噉 gam2 are important linguistic expressions that we hear all the time in day-to-day conversation. As a discourse marker, so can be used to communicate the meaning of “for this reason” or “therefore,” specifying an inferential relation between two segments, or to introduce a new topic to the discourse. Cantonese 噉 gam2 is equivalent to so, both in its semantic meaning and pragmatic function in discourse. Additionally, 噉 gam2 shows politeness when used to preface a question, request or assertion, especially in public situations where the participants do not know each other well. The study of this specific expression illuminates the greater purpose and role of discourse markers in general.

This study looks at the similarities and differences in the usage of these two discourse markers. The transfer of 噉 gam2 in bilingual Cantonese-English speakers, comparing data with the occurrences of so in Hong Kong English. Corpus data from Cantonese television and radio talk shows supported existing literature on the usage of 噉 gam2.

Guest: 我 之前 好 肥 嘎，肥過 宜家 三 十 幾 磅 度 啦。噉 自己
Ngo zi-cin ho fei ga , fei gwo ji-gaa saam-sap gei bong dou laa . gam zi-gei
I before very fat PRT, fat more now thirty something pounds around PRT. So myself
“I used to be very fat, around thirty or so pounds heavier than now. So I

就 有 刻 意 去 減 肥 啦。噉 我 最 多 都 係 食 嘢 少 啲 啦。
zau mou haak-ji heoi gaam-fei lo . gam ngo zeoi-do dou hai sik je siu di aa .
then NEG purposely go lose weight PRT. So I most PRT is eat things less PRT PRT.
“didn’t purposely try to lose weight. At most, I eat less things,

噉 因 為 我 一 有 壓 力， 就 會 踹 蹦 聲 就 瘦 嘎 喲。
gam jan-wai ngo jat jau aat-lik , zau wui baang-baang seng zau sau gaa-laa .
So because I once have pressure, then will baang baang sound then skinny PRT

“so because once I’m under pressure, I’ll immediately become skinnier.

因 為 我 以 前 喻 英 國 讀 書 嘉嘛，噉 呢 就 好 悠 閒。
Jan-wai ngo ji-cin hai jing-gwok duk-syu gaa maa , gam le zau hou jau-haan.
Because I before at England study PRT , so PRT then very leisurely.
“That’s because I was still studying in England, so I had a relaxing time.”