Introduction

Topic: The three special word order features in Cantonese

Nature of the project:

A research is conducted to analysis special word order features in Cantonese compared to Standard Modern Chinese. Through observation during daily life, these features arouse our interest to further analysis. With referencing the finding of Mu(2012), we found the basic direction of forming categories that reflect the differences. As Yuan(2001) argues that it is the generality results in the poor awareness among local people, we designed a questionnaire to test the awareness of this phenomenon among local people and apply the result to our analysis.

Major question:

(1) What is the main kinds of word order features in Cantonese?
(2) Have local and Cantonese-users noticed this phenomenon of different word order features clearly and categorized them correctly?

Experiment objects:

The persons who can speak Cantonese and Mandarin, at least knowing the syntax of these two.

Scope and Goal:

Our project focuses on the word order, syntax in Cantonese.With the materials such as a survey, newspaper, and videos, we analyze this topic not only from the perspective of oral, but also written. To analyze the special word order features, we make a comparison to both English and classic Chinese. English analogy would help them to understand the phenomenon, while coming back to Cantonese as one kind of Chinese itself, understanding classic Chinese would facilitate the comprehension of their own language. As for the goal, we hope local people can learn further about their language.

Value:

While local people concentrate more on Hong Kong-style English (also called Konglish), we suppose it is the proper time to remind them of turning back to their mother tongue and its traits.

Key words:

Cantonese, word order, Classic Chinese, Mandarin(Standard Modern Chinese),Syantax

Divisions of Labour

LI Chaoyu: Introduction, data and method, questionnaire template, data collection and analysis

Yang Mengmeng: Qualitative Methodology 1: Newspaper, Magazines and Forums; the post-positioned indirect object; DEC-related applications

Meng Qinghan: Video reviews, The post-positioned adverbial clauses analysis, The post-positioned attribute analysis

Data and Method

1. Quantitative Methodology: A questionnaire

The questionnaire is oriented to figure out the answers to the major questions, especially whether local people have noticed the special word order in Cantonese and master relevant knowledge to explain what they are. The questionnaire will be conducted online and offline. In order to be convenient, we choose City University of Hong Kong, Festival Walk, and two metro stations as the ideal places to fulfill our criteria for the study objects and universality of the samples.

It contains several multiple-choice questions related to the project and personal informative collection. The sample questions are attached in the appendix.

2. Qualitative Methodology 1: Newspaper, Magazines and Forums

One of the qualitative methods is to analyze the daily-used Cantonese in written form with the primary materials such as newspaper, magazines, and forums online.. The grammatical structure will be shown in the tree diagrams for comparison between the target language and Standard Modern Chinese.

Source: Apple Daily and Discuss HK

3. Qualitative Methodology 2: Videos and live news

In order to be prone to the reality that oral Cantonese is used, we select the videos and the live news which enjoy high popularity as our materials. We integrated and classified the sentences with different word order from sources. With the accessibility to related materials, we analysis the meaning, structure, constitution, and related syntax phenomenon.

Source: Cold War II

Finding and Analysis

1. Analysis of the result of questionnaire

For this survey, we have collected 280 response from our random-assigned samples who have the knowledge about syntax in Standard Modern Chinese and Cantonese. According to the statistic, 85.7% of them agree on the idea that the special syntax does exist in Cantonese. This primarily proves that Cantonese-users have already noticed this linguistic phenomenon. As for the exact kind of word order, 88.6%, which is the highest accuracy of this quiz, know about the post-positioned indirect object clauses and can translate the example into Standard Modern Chinese. Additionally, apart from the post-positioned indirect object, the majority of them are less aware of the other word order. Although 65.7% think that the adjectives should be positioned in front of the noun phrases, the accuracy of that related question decreases to 14.3% ,which could be understood that the local may not have a clear grammatic structure of Cantonese. Also, most of them consider the post-positioned adverbial clauses as a normal sentence order while only 17% reply that adverbials should not be followed by verbs. Besides, we interviewed part of the sample who had chosen all the right answers individually. They indicate that proper systematic classical Chinese training may help them understand the order clearly and do this quiz correctly. To sum up, actually, the Cantonese-users are not so familiar with their own language from the perspective of syntax.

2. Three special word order features in Cantonese

(1) The post-positioned adverbial clauses

Shown from the data of the questionnaire, most of the local people can not distinguish the post-positioned adverbial clauses. While chatting with our local friends, we found that their linguistic habit that adverbials could be post-positioned to verbs may lead to little awareness of this phenomenon. However, almost adverbials should be followed by verbs in Cantonese, as well as in Mandarin. So it is quite special from the perspective of syntax. The example can be obtained as follows.

(Cantonese) (他) 編好晒全部代號。

(Mandarin) (他) 完全編好全部代號。

(Free Translation) He has coded all the names.

Source: *Cold War II*

In the above sentence, the meaning of "晒" is equivalent to "完全" in Mandarin, connoting "totally" in English. In the Cantonese, the adverb "totally" which should be placed ahead of the verb "code" according to Standard Modern Chinese, now is positioned behind the verb, resulting in the post-positioned adverbial clauses.

Then we use a hierarchical organization to analysis the constitutions of sentences visually.
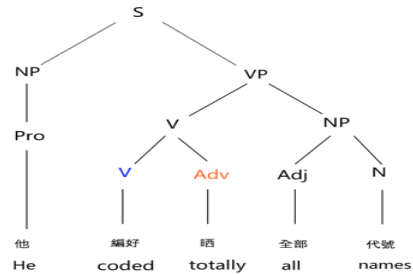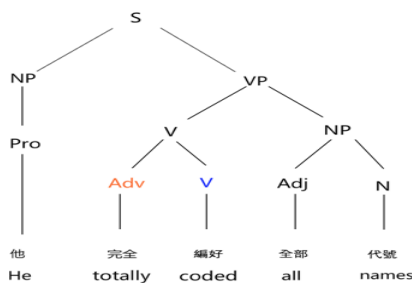

Another example is a comparative sentence.

(Cantonese)高過冰點

(Mandarin)比冰點高

(Free Translation) higher than the freezing point

Source:*高過冰點+超乾燥都落雪？背後原理話你知, Apple Daily*

In this case, the adjective is followed by the adverbial phrase in Cantonese, while in Mandarin, the adverbial phrase is followed by the adjective. This could be an example of post-positioned adverbial clauses.
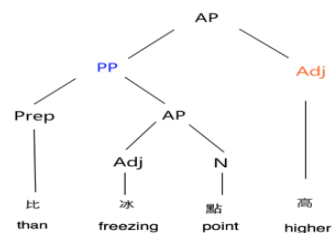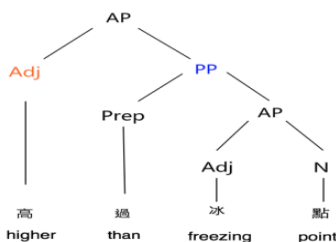
Similarity can be found in classic Chinese. For example, "青，取之於藍", which means "The dye is extracted from the indigo", the

adverbial "於藍"(from the indigo) is positioned behind the verb "取"(extract).

(2) The post-positioned attributive

The data we collected shows the contrast that although many people realize that the adjective should be positioned ahead of the noun, when it comes to the Cantonese for daily use, most of them fail to realize this phenomenon. The reason may be the generality and the lack of the master of related classic Chinese. Below shows the examples.

(Cantonese)(10歲男童） 亂溝嘢飲

(Mandarin) (10歲男童） 亂兌喝的東西

(Free Translation) (A 10-year-old boy) randomly blended drinking things.

Source：*10歲男童也玩「競飲」亂溝野飲阿媽激到喊, apply daily*

In the above sentences, the meaning of "野" in Cantonese can be translated into Mandarin "東西", which means "things". And both "飲" "喝的" mean "drinking". In the Cantonese, the attributive "drinking" which should be positioned ahead of the object "things" according to Standard Modern Chinese, is now positioned behind the object, engendering the phenomenon of the post-positioned attributive.

Then we use a hierarchical organization to analysis the constitutions of sentences visually.
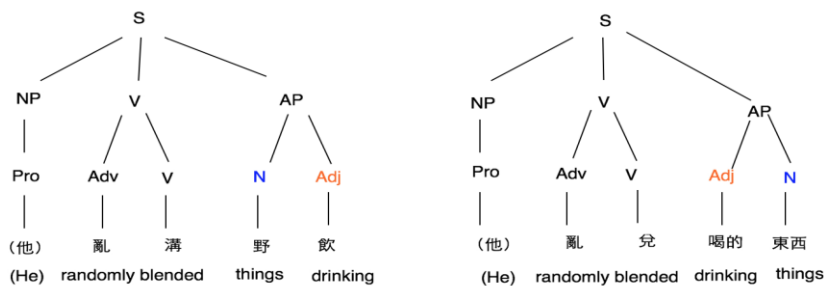
Similarity can be found in classic Chinese. For example,"居廟堂之高，則憂其民（《岳陽樓記》）".In the above sentence, the attributive "高"(tall) is positioned behind the noun "廟堂"(building). The normal word order is that "居高廟堂，則憂其民"(Living in the tall building, I would worry about my people).

## (3) The post-positioned indirect object

Analyzing the data, we find that this kind of usage is the most easy-clarified. Although there is little proof of this usage in Mandarin and Classic Chinese, it is a general law which we will explain better below. For Hong Kong is an international place and English is one of the official languages here, the local people may acquire this knowledge from English learning or inherent language sense to some extent. It could be the reason why those who has little knowledge about Classic Chinese can work out the relevant question in the quiz. There is an example.

(Cantonese) 我同事話佢可以租間房俾我

(Mandarin) 我同事說他可以為我租間房

(Free Translation) My colleague says that he could rent a house to me.

Source: *香港討論區*
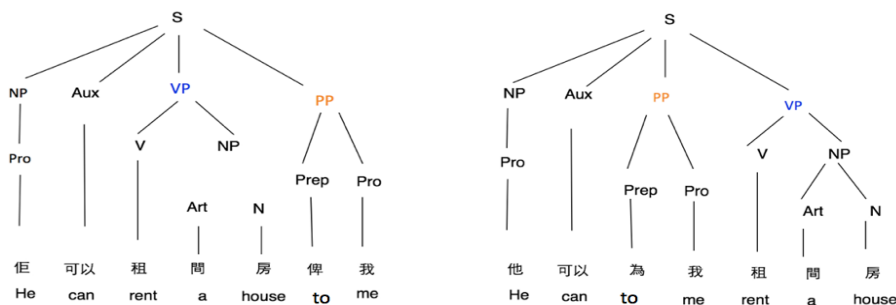
In the above sentences, both "俾" **in Cantonese and** "給" in Mandarin work similar function as "to". "A house" is the direct object while "me" is the indirect object. In Cantonese, the direct object always appears ahead of indirect object, which contrasts the order of Standard ModernChinese.

The post-positioned indirect object is not original in classic Chinese, but an objective law of generality, because we can also find the same usage in English (Yuan,2001). To understand this phenomenon, we make an analogy with English. For example, in terms of the word "offer" which can connect double objects, there are two forms of the grammar. One is "offer sb. sth." and the other is "offer sth. to sb.". The former one is similar to the word order in Standard Modern Chinese, while the latter one can be the form of Cantonese grammar.

DEC-related applications:

For the applications, there could be two parts. One is for language translation and the other one is to help Cantonese speakers avoid some mistakes when writing.

As Zhang (1998) says, "It[Translation] happens among dialects within a single language. "Cantonese can also be translated to Mandarin. However, "Cantonese and Mandarin are linguistically more complicated and computationally more challenging", which makes the translation rather difficult (Zhang, 1998). The correction of word order would make the translation more accurate and make people easier to understand. Through programming and the technology of big data, the machine translation can make the simple sentences translated, which could be a development of Cantonese translation.

  As the questionnaire analysis shows, even though the majority of people realize that there are differences between Cantonese and Mandarin, they may not fully understand it. Thus, it could help them not only realize the phenomenon but also put it into practice. As Wan said, some usage in spoken dialect could be right, but when it comes to the written language, it could be wrong. Since the syntax of the standard written language is closer to Mandarin, this can help them avoid using the sentences with odd word order in written language. When they can understand what they use in the daily life, they will try to reform the sentences in a more proper way when writing.

Reference:

1. The Grammar Mistakes Caused By Cantonese
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Applendix

*由於本次問卷的研究對象是基本掌握普通話與廣東話的中文使用者，所以問卷採用中文作為使用語言。

您好，我們是香港城市大學人文與社會科學院正在學習語言學的學生。我們的課題是研究粵語中的語序，研究問題是香港人是否注意到了粵語的特殊的語序；如果注意到了，是否能清楚地指出哪裡特殊。填寫調查問卷只需 5 分鐘，您的回覆完全匿名處理。
如果您對調查問卷有任何問題，請傳送電子郵件給我們chaoyuli2-c@my.cityu.edu.hk
非常感謝您的合作，祝您擁有美好的一天！

(1)您的母語是

　A 粵語

　B普通話

　C兩者皆不是

(2)您是否能掌握粵語和普通話兩種語言

　A 是

　B 否

(3)您是否發現了粵語中獨特的語序？

　A 是

　B 否

C什麼是倒裝句

(4)定語(adj.)是否應該放在名詞(n.)前面

A 是

B 否

C什麼是定語，名詞

(5)狀語(adv.)是否應該放在動詞(v.)前面

A 是

B 否

C什麼是狀語，動詞

(6)"食多啲"，"唔該晒你"，"畀埋佢"，"我行先" 是否是正常的語序？

A 狀語後置

B 定語後置

C間接賓語後置

D 是正常語序

(7)以下哪個句子是"畀件衫我"的標準的普通話意譯

A "给一件衣服我"

B "给我一件衣服"

C我唔知wor

(8)以下哪句話沒有使用定語後置

A "我今日買左d好新鮮嘅椰青"

B "男人話信得過，豬乸會上樹"

C "今日d叉燒真係肥得滯"

D 呢題我又唔知wor

> **Group 10: A**
> This project is pretty good. Word-order is a very important but tough topic in the field of linguistics. It's brave of you to give an attempt at tackling the word-order issues in Cantonese.
> The project has shown that you have grasped several research methods and much basic linguistic knowledge. By the careful observation and analysis, people may be aware of more characteristics of Cantonese language. The application part is also meaningful and practical.
> Just one point --- some questions of the survey might be too professional for ordinary people since they don't possess particular linguistic knowledge. It's not their duty to clearly know the structure of certain language.